Case Study Title: Knowledge at the environment/development public policy-making interface in Ecuador

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1. What is/was the context and key challenge(s) in your K* case study?

Since the mid-1990s onwards competing multi-scalar environmental and economic interests have defined the boundaries of political debate over rural development policy-making and practice in the Intag cloud-forests of NW Ecuador. In support of the articulation of competing interests different K* processes have been initiated on both sides of this long-running socio-economic/ecological conflict.

2. Who are/were the players and why did/do they need to come together?

This reach of this initiative is local/national/global. The players include local community claim-makers, international copper mining company, municipal, regional and national policy-makers, national and international environmental NGOs, national and international universities, environmental lawyers and consultants, international donors and corporate social responsibility consultants. Collaboration and relationships have developed in response to the needs of the claim-making process which requires knowledge to substantiate claims and counter-claims between opposing parties, as each tries to determine the outcome of the policy-making and decision-making process over the approval or refusal of (internationally-owned) open-cast copper mining activities in the biodiversity-rich cloudforests of Intag.

3. How did/does K* play a role in the story, i.e. tools/techniques/approaches.

K* aimed to strengthen the ability of both sides of the conflict to influence the decision- and policy-making process and the eventual outcome on the ground for the local communities. K* approaches used strategic and timely information and knowledge workshops in the local communities on the key issues e.g. on open-cast mining and its economic benefits (CSR), as well as its drawbacks, on participatory planning, on land and environmental law, on human rights approaches, on sustainable local economic development etc.

K* tools included (bi-lingual) web-based journal of events as the conflict has unfolded written by local environmental NGO. K* used communication media e.g. radio, TV, film, and social media e.g. www has been used to draw on examples from other countries to support both sides in arguing for and against mining in Intag at the local level, and this case is used by international environmental NGOs in their global campaigns to influence policy-making.
K* approaches in this case include an annual municipal participatory planning process for all inhabitants of the county of Cotacachi in which Intag is situated where policies are defined and annual actions plans made for their implementation, supported by a parallel process of participatory budgeting by communities in the 3 areas within the county of which Intag is one. K* includes the Intag case as a study area for graduate students from US universities to research as well as work as international observers in the local communities organised by the local environmental NGO.

4. What was/is the intended impact/contribution of K* and, if you can, tell us whether K* had an impact and how.

As part of the political process, the intended contribution of K* was as an information-based campaign to mobilise pro-mining and pro-environment communities not only in the immediate vicinity of the copper deposits but also worldwide. The K* initiatives changed the local communities through ongoing environmental awareness-raising and CSR approaches, using and exchanging information in support of each side’s claims. The pro-environmental K* initiative had a significant impact on the local communities targeted by the national environmental NGO for its environmental communications. Environmental information was derived from local sources (“indigenous” knowledge) with knowledge of the local context, as well as EISs written by environmental consultants, and international university researchers as an ongoing process of creating local ownership of the anti-mining and pro-environmental narrative. The obstruction of the sharing of knowledge was also used as a deliberate strategy to delay decision-making.

5. What are the lessons from this example that others should know about/could be transferred, in general and particularly in a resource-limited context?

The Intag case is one of limited-resources in all senses except for the capacity of the local community to engage and mobilise around the knowledge that they also helped create as part of this competing claim-making process. The knowledge applied at the science-policy interface with regard to environment/development conflicts is highly contested and scientific knowledge production processes are not value-free in cases such as this. All policy-making conflicts between multi-scalar environmental, social and economic interests are highly political in nature. We need to explore how linking local to global K* practices can play a key role in the potential reconciliation of competing interests.

6. Any other observations..:
For the website of the local environmental NGO please see: http://www.decoin.org/