Political Ecology in Anti-Corruption Efforts and Practice

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Illegal Cattle Ranching in Guatemala’s Maya Biosphere

TARGETING NATURAL RESOURCE CORRUPTION
Harnessing knowledge, generating evidence, and supporting innovative policy and practice for more effective anti-corruption programming
Overview

• What is political ecology? How do political ecologists understand corruption?

• Narco-deforestation and corruption in Guatemala’s Maya Biosphere

• Understanding and implementing a political ecology approach in anti-corruption and natural resource management programs
What is political ecology?

Political ecology (PE) studies how politics, economics, and culture shape environmental change, and vice versa.

PE integrates ecological and social sciences with political economy.

PE focuses on how power relations impact the distribution of costs and benefits of environmental change and how inequality and unequal resource distribution drive conservation crime.

Source: Bryant and Bailey 1996, West 2016
How do political ecologists understand corruption?

Political ecology understands corruption as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain (transparency.org), but also as a system of governance that reproduces acute inequality and injustice through dispossession in ways that are often legal.

Examples of corruption in Guatemala’s Maya Biosphere Reserve:

- Traffickers paying bribes to law enforcement
- Impunity for environmental crimes
- Criminal organizations funding political parties
- Laws that criminalize ancestral land uses in protected areas
- Foreign and national elites misusing development and conservation funds for personal enrichment

Source: Jennifer Devine
Manmade Fires: 1998 - 2016

Reoccurrence of fire (number of times burned)
Narco-Cattle Ranching in the Maya Biosphere

“Narcos look for frontier area”

Source: prensalibre.com, anonymous
Narco-Cattle Ranching in the Maya Biosphere

Source: www.plazapublica.com.gt
Avionetas con cocaína entre pirámides mayas: cómo un paraíso arqueológico se convirtió en la más reciente ruta narco

En 2019, las autoridades encontraron 50 aviones abandonados y decomisaron 18.910 kilos de droga en la Reserva de la Biosfera en la zona del Petén, en Guatemala, en medio de ruinas milenarias

1 de Agosto de 2020

“Airplanes with cocaine in between Maya pyramids: how an archeological paradise turned into the most recent route of narcos”

Source: Infobae.com
# Understanding and Implementing a Political Ecology Approach

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<th>Understanding Corruption with Political Ecology</th>
<th>Implementing A Political Ecology Approach</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Integrate social and environment analysis</td>
<td>• Take nature seriously!</td>
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<td>• Build multi-disciplinary teams that integrate social and environmental sciences</td>
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<td>• Implement mixed methods approaches to understand socio-environmental change and clandestine activities</td>
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![Uaxactún, Guatemala](image)

Source: Jennifer Devine
86% of our deforested data points display evidence of cattle ranching.

Source: Devine et al. 2020
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| 2. Interrogate taken-for-granted and *de jure* definitions of corruption and illegality | • Define corruption through analysis not *a priori* as a term of reference  
• Analyze local meanings of corruption and conservation crime, especially among local resource users, using interview and oral history methods  
• Distinguish between legality and legitimacy |
“They burned down our houses and the sacks of corn we had, without explanation. We are not cattle ranchers, but agriculturalists”

---Maya Biosphere Evictee, interview
Narco-Cattle Ranching

Source: WCS
Understanding and Implementing a Political Ecology Approach

Understanding Corruption with Political Ecology

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<td>3. Seek alliances with local social movements</td>
<td>• Involve and compensate local representatives as project protagonists in all phases</td>
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<td>• Fund Indigenous and peasant land tenure and communal resource management</td>
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“Guatemala's Forest Guardians”
Source: Jessica Long
Manmade Fires: 1998 - 2016

Reoccurrence of fire (number of times burned)

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Consejo Nacional de Áreas Protegidas

Preparado para el Plan Maestro de la Reserva de Biosfera Maya en el Centro de Monitoreo y Evaluación de CONAP. El proceso de actualización del Plan Maestro de la RBB es conducido por WWF e Conservation Society -WCS- en coordinación con el CORNAP y partes interesadas. El financiamiento de la actualización ha sido proveído por el Programa de Desarrollo de Petén para la Conservación de la Reserva de la Biosfera Maya -PDPBMBM-, ejecutado por el Ministerio de Ambiente y Recursos Naturales -MARIN- con fondos provenientes del Convenio de Financiamiento No Rembolsable de Inversiones del Fondo para el Medio Ambiente Mundial (FAMAM) No. GRT/FM-11975-05.
Asocación de Comunidades Forestales de Petén
Association of Petén’s Forest Communities

“You are in the Maya Biosphere Reserve
Protected Area: Prohibited Activities”
Forest Guardians: Community Foresters

4 Mayo, 2016
Día del Bombero Forestal

Felicitas a los héroes del bosque
Guardarecursos y comunarios. Protegiendo y Conservando la Reserva de la Biosaera Maya.

Source: ACOFOP
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<td>4. Focus on extreme inequalities in land and resource distribution that often drive conservation crime</td>
<td>• Reconsider the definition of effective program outcomes when working with marginalized populations to reduce land tenure inequality and poverty</td>
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<td>• New indicators of project success in resource management</td>
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Village in the Maya Biosphere Reserve
Source: Jennifer Devine
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| 5. Analyze drivers of corruption and environmental crime at local, national, and global levels | • Conduct and map multi-scalar analysis of drivers of corruption and their links to environmental crime, starting with local level  
• Produce policy recommendations at national and global scales to address structural drivers of acute inequality |

Source: USAID, McSweeney et. al 2014, www.worldmeets.us
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