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Chapter 4 Reflection

Chapter 4 of the textbook looked into the origins of the environmentalist movements in Ecuador and displays a timeline of events and progressions throughout the duration of the chapter. The Author explains key driving organizations that got the wheel moving for the rest of the environmentalist organization to emerge and find their own place/ purpose in the overall environmentalist organizational scene. At this point in time Ecuador as a state was struggling and within a transitional phase of power from a military government to a democratic government. Under the military regime the core focus was on extraction of oil for exportation for hopes of overall economic and societal growth through the relief of national debt and using profits to build up infrastructure. However, this tactic was not received well by many and many looked for change. Even after democratic elections were set for the year 1978 the state did not get much stronger under the new governmental ideology. Each president inherited an overwhelming amount of debt which in effect did not give them much leeway to accomplish anything other than oil extraction, which again was not favored by the public. The author goes on to explain the emergence of two types of environmental activist groups that erected as a result of the harm that was being done to the beautiful Ecuadorian land, the two major organizational types that were prominent were the Ecodependents and the Ecoresisters. Each group had a major role in impacting the Ecuadorian environment in a positive way but also differ in terms of operations and agenda very much. With the ground work that each organization set it led the way for other groups to form, however these groups that formed following Natura and AE became more specialized groups fighting for a singular goal. As the country developed in terms of these environmental organizations there was a shift in 1989 in which the efforts of the organization transferred them to a level of recognizable development. More and more attention was being directed to the efforts and traction was being gained in terms of the organization's ultimate goals. The overall growth, as well as the rate of growth in the environmental sector of Ecuador is what caused the end of the Origins time period and the switches to the Neoliberal Boom due to the amount of organizations and the amount of funding that is about to put into them to achieve organizational agendas.

During the time period of the Origins of the environmentalist movement there were two major organizations at the fore front. The first to be established being Natura, this was a group of university educated scientist that had a true passion for nature and conserving it for future generations to appreciate and learn from, as well as for the overall well-being of the planet that we call home. The organization was officially registered as an NGO with the state in 1978 with its lead office being located in the country's capital, Quito. At the outset of the organization their primary goal was to reach the civilian population on a level that hasn't been approached before, to educate and inform them on the benefits and as well as how we are harming the environment around us, in order to foster new thinking and a civilian worker influence on the TOP. Additionally, at the outset of the organization the staff was volunteer or part-time based. Natura had a good reputation with most individuals that they encountered due to their willingness to cooperate in order to progress and get the job done. With this aspect of cooperation, for the greater good of progress within building up the country in terms of environmental protection and overall consciousness, Natura worked internally with the state and industry in order to change the current system in place. Natura focused on "nature conservation and

education, welcomed corporate sponsorships and sought compromise". As the company progressed and gained footing they started to receive some attention from transnational funders such as USAID. A few months after the startup of the organization they entered a contract with USAID to create an "Environmental Profile of Ecuador". In other words, USAID was aiding Natura by funding them to work on projects that benefitted both organization's agenda/purpose. Natura also completed the country's first debt-for-nature swap. Debt-for-nature swaps are an efficient way for the Ecuadorian government to be relieved of their debt and also is used as a great way to make funds available for conservation throughout the country. How these swaps work is that a transnational funder such as WWF purchases a portion of the country's debt for a discounted price. They then make those funds that they purchase available typically to a certain NGO, in this case being Natura. The funds are made available through bonds that are given to the transnational funder by the Ecuadorian government. The interest of the bond pays for Natura's current operations and the principle is placed into an endowment in which Natura can make funds available to other environmental organizations so that their project can successfully be operated while having a strong potential to leave a lasting impact on the community/environment. However, some may see the debt for nature swaps as a temporary fix that may also have various downsides to it, according to Sven Mawson of Stanford University, "Debt-for-nature swaps might not be a panacea, and they can only help alleviate some of a nation's debt, and protect some of its rainforests, but they are a huge step in the right direction. One of the few problems they face is that in almost all cases a local fund is set up, in local currency, which can quickly degrade due to inflation, until the huge fund that was 4 times the size of the debt cost is suddenly worth almost nothing." (Mawson). Which is an aspect that I did not think about when assessing the way these swaps worked. It is a good point to bring up especially in the global economy in the world you never know what could happen at any moment especially within a weak state. However, the swaps short term did work out for the best. In total, the three debt for nature swaps that Ecuador completed made around 10 million dollars available for conservation.

At the time Natura was the only real environmentalist organization in the country, but their continued success with the help of transnational funding inspired others to take action as well. In 1985 SODENA was founded in Quito as well. This organization supported a small grassroots startup organization called Accion Ecologica (AE). AE was a radical type of activist organization that did not enjoy cooperating with the state. The state in fact was their biggest enemy. AE focused on conflicts that involved any kind of intrusive extraction/development (mining, oil drilling, mangroves, deforestation) with their primary campaign and focus being on state led oil extraction. The vast majority of the organization is comprised of women otherwise known as "eco-chicas" to the Ecuadorian population. AE is a volunteer based organization that does not accept international funding unless it is for efforts to cease state led extractive development. More of an adversarial organization AE is the go to for local media outlets to obtain controversial quotes about the environment and what should be done. While Natura has powerful international funders, and carries out larger scale projects that conserve biodiversity AE focuses on the human-environmental interactions and is an organization that has a more ethical approach to the influences of the projects that they carry out. AE worked to educate communities on the harm that is being done and how to organize themselves to become vocalized actors in the prevention of the extractive development campaign. For example, AE's first project was called "Campaign Amazonia por la Vida (Amazon for Life) in which they focus on the protection of the Amazonian environment and the people within. AE had an active role in educating and organizing communities to put a stop to oil drilling in their area.

While much less visible in the overall Ecuadorian community AE had a strong impact on a personal level with the community members in which they work with. As a result of this they have a great reputation with the general public while they may not be setting out on major conservancy projects they are making an impact in the Ecuadorian community in a way that the people can back and it empowers them to have a voice to foster change. If I was an Ecuadorian citizen I would not favor the brashness of these organizations but I would appreciate the work they do to empower citizens to have a voice that can be heard. On the other hand, Natura is a paid staff that works together along with the ideologies of their foreign funders in efforts to conserve biodiversity. An example of the work this kind of organization would do is purchase a certain piece of land to establish a National Park in which the organization will train how to maintain and manage the area to ensure environmental protection. So for this reason I as an Ecuadorian citizen would admire the large scale work that is being done to save the eco system within the country and I would be extremely thankful that there are organizations and people out there that care enough about saving the environment that I live in that they spend millions of dollars to successfully operate such projects.

Works Cited:

Mawson, S. (n.d.). Debt-for-Nature Past and Future. Retrieved September 28, 2017, from https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297c/trade_environment/photo/hdebt.html