Setting the Stage: The Politics of Madagascar's Environmental Efforts

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Madagascar is one of the world's natural wonders. An island, existing in isolation for millenia, eighty percent of the flora and fauna are endemic. Yet this unique and valuable land has proven fragile. The bulk of the country's rainforests have already been destroyed causing significant erosion and a threat to water sources in arid regions. In response, there have been significant environmental conservation efforts undertaken by the Malagasy government with international funding and technical support. These environmental efforts in Madagascar have moved in the past two decades from a Yellowstone model, through the Integrated Conservation and Development Project (ICDP) approach, to more recent initiatives that are at the forefront of environmental innovation. These programs arise out of a long history of environmental efforts. The French colonial government created a forest service nearly a hundred years ago which oversaw forest and fire policy. Protected areas were established in 1927. These first reserves were wholly exclusionary with no local economic benefits, thus the local populations surrounding these protected areas viewed them as foreign and an additional facet of the colonial oppression, exploiting the protected resources whenever possible. The most recent trend in environmental thinking in Madagascar dates back to a catalytic 1985 international conference and the 1988 publication of the National Environmental Action Plan[21].

Key factors behind this conservation boom include the global renaissance of environmentalism, Madagascar's slow political re-opening after an isolationist and socialist decade, and the island's status as a top conservation priority for both the international community and the Malagasy government[21]. Madagascar hosts a unique, highly endemic collection of flora and fauna due to hundreds of millions of years of tectonic isolation. Biomes on this mini-continent range from tropical rainforests, to spiny deserts, to wooded savannas, to altimontane prairies. Fifteen hundred years of human occupation has dramatically altered this natural heritage, largely through landscape burning, which has resulted in deforestation and

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soil degradation. In recognition of this environmental catastrophe in progress, the international community has responded in force by supporting and guiding the Malagasy government in its conservation program. As a result, the 1990s have seen an acceleration in the creation of national parks and protected areas with the goal of establishing more than fifty in a fifteen year period.

Madagascar is also one of the world's poorest countries. With a population that is more than eighty percent agrarian, limiting resource use for environmental goals is economically devastating -- at least in the short term --to a significant percentage of the national population. The extreme nature of the looming environmental and economic imperatives is matched in few places on earth. Combined with a fragile new democracy, weak governance, rampant corruption, and a largely uncaptured peasantry[20], Madagascar's challenge is great.

Catapulted onto the world stage in the late 1980s as a hotspot for environmental conservation, Madagascar now is the host of major environmental efforts. However, these efforts, like previous ones, frequently have proven to be conflict ridden and politically charged. Diverse interest groups, including poor rural farmers, foreign environmental organizations, donors and competing local and national components of the Malagasy government, struggle to implement their separate visions of proper or realistic resource use. Sometimes these forces work together; sometimes they are diametrically opposed. This issue of the African Studies Quarterly addresses different aspects of such environmental politics in Madagascar, ranging from the lingering effects of colonial forestry and tenure legislation to the most recent policies for decentralized natural resource management. Although these topics may seem diverse, the global context of Madagascar's conservation politics unites their themes.

The resurgence of environmentalism in the 1980s moved beyond earlier concerns with industrial water and air pollution to global issues of climate change, deforestation, and soil degradation. Attention increasingly focused on developing countries. The first approach of policy makers and activists was to encourage the preservation of land and trees through the perpetuation of the Yellowstone model[1]. Named after the first national park of its kind, this model asserts that the key to conservation is to set aside large tracts of land as protected areas where people are neither allowed to live nor to utilize the area's natural resources. Instead, the land is to provide an alternative economic benefit by way of tourism. In this way, the appreciation of the land's beauty can serve local and national beneficiaries without resource consumption. This blueprint for environmental conservation has become the most common, leading to an increase in national parks and protected areas from a handful in the late 19th century to more than 8500 in the world today[2]. The largest increase in the number of these parks and protected areas over the past two decades has been in developing countries.

At first blush, the Yellowstone model seems promising. It promotes nature's diversity and its potential commercial values. This model allows for a universalization of ideas and ideals about how to protect the environment while promoting conservation as a norm. It also seeks to halt the destruction of key environmental resources, even those at a point of imminent loss. Yet, researchers have found flaws in the Yellowstone model. These flaws are most evident in the developing world. First, people often live where the park or protected area is created. It is therefore often necessary to relocate them to another part of the country. This displacement often has devastating economic consequences[3-8]. Second, the people who live in the surrounds

of the newly protected areas are most commonly farmers and herders, who rely on the land and its resources for their survival. Restricting their access invariably means economic hardship. As a result, local people tend not to willingly participate in conservation initiatives when posed with the Yellowstone model. Even when faced with legal restrictions, border patrols and arrest, local residents still tend to use the resources out of necessity as well as to defend their rights[22]. At this point not only are local livelihoods threatened, but the conservation agenda itself is unlikely to succeed. Third, planning is highly centralized. Professionals planners are empowered to make changes that primarily influence the rural population. Proponents of the Yellowstone model view anyone who lives in the periphery of the park and benefits economically in some way as a "beneficiary" of the park [2]. Thus, conservation is done to them, not by them. There is little if any participation in the planning process or management by the local community. Fourth, there is often a transfer in economic beneficiaries when the income generation of the land is shifted from resource-use to tourism. Typically, this shift is from rural to urban as tour operators are commonly urban elites. Finally, the model reflects the needs, values, and economic realities of the European and American experiences.

While the Yellowstone model is still the most popular model worldwide [1], many researchers and policy makers began seeking alternatives in the late 1980s. The challenge was to find a way to not only meet local economic needs, but to better them while still seeking conservation. The alternative usually involves the introduction of protected area resource use by local people but in a way that is managed and allows for sustainable resource use rather than extensive resource depletion. As a result, many countries have adopted a National Environmental Action Plan that marries economic development to conservation. These approaches involve greater local participation in the policy and management processes [2, 9-15]. Numerous different policy framework and project types have been designed to achieve this goal, e.g. CAMPFIRE[16] and community-based natural resource management (CBNRM)[17].

One of the most common has been the Integrated Conservation and Development Project (ICDP). ICDPs "attempt to ensure the conservation of biological diversity by reconciling the management of protected areas with the social and economic needs of local people"[14]. Local participation is encouraged while economic alternatives to resource exploitation are explored. Projects seek to promote local income-generating activities -- bee-keeping, common-pool fisheries, alternative agricultural methods, artisinal crafts for sale to tourists, micro-enterprise expansion, etc. -- that can substitute for the loss of land and lead to economic development.

Such an approach is highly politicized. First, the failure of income-generating efforts can foment discontent. This discontent can be focused on the government. For the plethora of fragile new democracies throughout the developing world this can lead to an erosion of institutional or leadership gains. Second, the allocation of benefits of income generated from land necessarily leads to multi-user demands. Since tourism generates hard currency--a scarce resource in much of the developing world--stakeholders appear at all levels and from all sectors of society[18]. Third, ICDPs are intentionally designed to involve multiple stakeholders. A variety of multi-lateral and bi-lateral donors provide funds to the government, international non-government organizations (INGO), and local non-government organizations (NGO) to promote different aspects of conservation and development for targeted regions, institutional development, and

policy establishment. These funds often come with conditionalities that affect other aspects of governance from tax collection to property rights. Again, in an environment of economic scarcity, such funds attract the interest of diverse parties.

This issue of ASQ seeks to explore the relationship between these political and environmental challenges. It brings together policymakers with scholars coming from such diverse disciplines as geography, anthropology, political science, law, sociology and biology, in the hope of shedding some light on, and, perhaps, lend suggestions to, this process as it is unfolding. In so doing, these authors address both the details of various efforts and actors and the broader picture.

Included in this issue are a collection of papers which illuminate different angles of the interplay between environmental change and politics in Madagascar. The papers address three general themes related to environmental land management: the factors which determine land and resource use, the importance of interest groups and politics in normative environmental change, and specific legal and project-based techniques to influence environmental management. Together, the papers show that environmental change is closely related to the interplay of political and economic interests, from the conservation-oriented politics of foreign donors to the livelihood interests of rural farmers. Before outlining the papers individually, let us look at these three unifying themes.

One, several of the papers describe factors which have shaped environmental resource use, outside of the realm of recent conservation efforts. Most dramatically, Bertrand reveals how the urban wood fuel market and land tenure concerns led to the dramatic aforestation of several highland regions. Similarily, Gezon and Freed, as well as Kull, describe the agro-ecological rationale behind rural landscape practices including agricultural expansion and grassland burning.

Two, the central role of interest groups and politics in environmental management is treated in all of the papers. Conservation as we know it is based, after all, largely on the normative views of foreign donor groups (and, before them, the colonial state). Implementing these norms is a political process that includes, at various times, negotiation, repression, conflict, and reconciliation. Most of the papers suggest a path to the future involving stake holder participation moving towards contractual shareholder involvement.

Three, several papers discuss specific legal, institutional, and project-based techniques which environmental actors use to try to affect change. Historical land tenure policies and fire repression laws form the focus for short papers by Bertrand and Kull. The 1996 GELOSE (Gestion Locale Securise) legislation, which sets the framework for a decentralization of resource management to local communities, features prominently in the papers by Bertrand and Henkels, as well as Kull. Rabetaliana and Schachenmann look more towards institutional solutions, emphasizing a collaborative approach to ICDPs. Finally, Gezon and Freed present a detailed consideration of the use of agroforestry projects by ICDPs to promote specific environmental changes. Below, we introduce each paper individually.

Lisa Gezon and Benjamin Freed explore agroforesty issues particular to protected area management, using the Amber Mountain complex of protected areas as an example. Tracing a trajectory for agroforestry from the colonial period forward, they assert that agroforestry has not been successful on the Ankarana Massif. Specifically, they have found that while tree

planting has met with some success, tree survival has been rare and the popular participation necessary for conservation has not been stimulated. People living in areas adjacent to the National Park have not identified with the interest of protecting new trees. Instead, they see the planting of trees as corresponding to international conservation actors much in the same way that it corresponded to French interests during the colonial period. Furthermore, there is not a history of commodification of tree products by local people. If policymakers continue to ignore land use history then it is unlikely that agroforestry efforts can succeed. Instead, local participation in the project must be employed to a greater degree. A closer rapport between city-based officials and the local population must be cultivated. And, increased emphasis needs to be placed on local economic needs. They conclude that agroforestry might not be a universal solution. Even if all of these factors are met, agroforestry still may not lead to reduced resource exploitation.

In the first of his three short papers, Alain Bertrand discusses afforestation on Madagascar's central plateau, coming to a different conclusion than Gezon and Freed. He argues that eucalyptus, though not indigenous to Madagscar, has historically been a valuable income-generating crop through the urban fuel wood market, and a key strategy in asserting claims to property rights. According to Bertrand, the combination of tenurial and commercial motivations explains the persistence of this dynamic of peasant plantations over the course century. As clarified in his second short paper on tenure insecurity, Bertrand feels that ultimately the state has been poor at formal land tenure immatriculation. Traditional, community-based tenure systems still dominate, yet their legitimacy is challenged by the overly complex legal rules. Ultimately, the failure to maintain land tenure security has been one of the primary stumbling blocks to development. This failure is part of the same failure of the state to engage effectively the rural citizenry in a participatory process of conservation. His third paper outlines in detail the GELOSE legislation and program, which aims to devolve management of renewable resources to local communities . This program is funded by the World Bank, French Aid, and the U.S. Agency for International Development. Moving beyond a participatory approach to conservation, GELOSE focuses on a contractual approach whereby local communities gain the rights and responsibilities of local resource management through formal legal contracts with the national government and other stakeholders.

Diane Henkels addresses these links between local and national resource management rules through a legal evaluation of the case of Ranomafana National Park. She sets out to explain the key points of Malagasy environmental law, placing the relationship between local and national institutions in law-making in a historic and cultural context. According to Henkels, until recently local and national law-making institutions existed in a state of perpetual conflict. First the colonial then the independent Malagasy state attempted to supercede local laws and resource-use strategies in an attempt to protect resources for its own gain. It was only in 1996 that the GELOSE legislation incorporated the primary local rule-making process (the "dina") into official management. Under this law the dina establishes the norms by which local actions are measured; judicial redress cannot exist until after the dina mandates key procedures. Henkels argues that it is too soon to tell if the unification of local and national law-making will be successful, but she is hopeful that this innovative approach will lend to the participation and local voice necessary for conservation and economic development. She concludes that a

successful implementation of laws depends on the creation of a judicial structure which respects and legitimizes local cultural and legal systems.

Christian Kull, working on Madagascar's central plateau, uses an anecdotal observation as a window to discuss the politics of grassland and woodland burning. He briefly traces the history of fire for agricultural use in Madagascar and the way in which both colonial and independent state powers have acted to criminalize its use to the detriment of the local population. Curtailing such an important agricultural tool without considering local economic needs means that attempts at conservation are unlikely to succeed. Kull argues, like Gezon and Freed, Bertrand and Henkels, that participation is the key to successful policy creation. The devolution of the management of landscape burning also falls under the rubric of the GELOSE legislation, but this shift has been slow in implementation. Kull further contends that fire management policy is a good example of an area in which researchers tend to be biased. We judge the issue and create a solution before they truly understand the problem. He concludes by arguing that as researchers it is necessary for us to confront our biases, "seeking alternative explanations, listening to the logic of [our] informants."

Hanta Rabetaliana and Peter Schachenmann give us an example of the ways in which the Andringitra ICDP has attempted to coordinate local needs and values, scientific research, and conservation. They share the story of the creation of the protected area and then outline the goals of the ICDP. Key to the process is the coordinated participation of local, state and international actors. In an important summary of lessons learned, Rabetaliana and Schachenmann state that conservation must be done by local people, not to local people, if conservation goals are to be met. International actors play an important role in education and national actors play an important role in institutional development, but "conservation objectives can [...] better be considered by inclusion rather than exclusion of people and by favoring a synergistic co-evolution of the transformation process." For them, responsible stakeholders at all levels must be accountable shareholders. If participation and local voice had been excluded from the Andringitra ICDP then the project would have been a failure from the start. But, through the inclusion of multiple voices the ICDP has successfully "set the foundation stone for a future functional systems approach to eco-regional conservation and development."

Given the broad implementation of the Yellowstone model the world over, policy-makers in Madagascar, both Malagasy and international, have demonstrated a willingness not only to write innovative policy, but to create innovative institutions that allow room for public participation. In 1997, Madagascar shifted from the first to the second Environment Program (of three set out by the National Environmental Action Plan). With this shift came the beginning of a slow movement away from relying on locally-oriented ICDPs for the integration of conservation and development, towards a broader "landscape approach" working not only in the peripheries of parks and protected areas, but in larger priority corridors throughout the country. The degree to which the ICDPs have successfully met their goal of increased participation, and the degree to which a form of participation that is valuable enough to incorporate local voice while not allowing the international and state-level communities to set the tone of the discussion is still in question[2]. Furthermore, the success of integrating conservation and development in an ICDP or even broader landscape format has yet to be empirically proven as a path to the attainment of the component parts[14]. Yet, this collection of

papers demonstrate that far from pouring old wine from new bottles, Madagascar is attempting to confront the political difficulties of resource management and the environmental imperative in imaginative ways that engage rather than deter stakeholders at all levels.

Notes

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