

1 Global Political Economy of Conservation Policies and Ecosystem Services in the Tropics

Philippe Méral, Colas Chervier and Symphorien Ongolo

1.1. Introduction

The increase in environmental damage and tensions in the use of natural resources since the 1970s have been analysed as evidence of a new era in the contemporary global expansion of capitalism (O'Connor, 1994; Newell, 2013). The growing interconnection of economies brought about by increasing trade, direct foreign investment and diversified global value chains has caused some observers to examine how these developments might be regulated at international level. Starting from an economics approach in which governments are central to such regulations, both as constraints and as levers for effective public action, analysis has gradually extended to other stakeholders: multinational companies, international institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), scientists and other civil society organisations (Wijen et al., 2005; Kütting, 2011; Dauvergne, 2005).

In addition to the role of these stakeholders, emphasis is placed on the circulation of ideas, concepts and norms and the strategies and instruments some of them use to advance their interests and/or modify the positioning of their allies and competitors. Thus, a field of study has emerged and gradually become established that specifically examines various aspects of the global governance of the environment. Because of the diversity of topics covered and the numbers of stakeholders involved, the field comprises specialists in international relations, international economics, international law, etc. Despite the diversity of their approaches and analytical frameworks, the common feature of their research is that all these specialists converge on a holistic approach to understanding the challenges inherent in the governance of natural resources at a time of accelerating global change (greenhouse effects, desertification, ocean acidification, erosion of biodiversity, deforestation, destabilisation of the human-nature relationship, etc.) with no binding global framework of norms regulating environmental issues.

The aim of this chapter is to illustrate the complexity of the interactions between stakeholders and the challenges and purposes of globalised governance of the environment, using the example of global governance of biodiversity in the tropics. It focuses on one of the most frequently used instruments for conserving biodiversity: protected areas. This is because in situ conservation policies using protected areas are a particularly instructive example of the impasse that

DOI: 10.4324/9781003363101-2

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stakeholders and change initiatives find themselves in with respect to the global governance of the environment in its aspects of biodiversity conservation. The forests included in these protected areas were initially considered, and still are by some, as natural resources to be used for food security and/or export income, and as land that could be converted to other uses (agriculture, logging, mining, oil, etc.). Currently they are also seen as providing ecosystem services (carbon sequestration, protection of catchments and coastlines, habitats for emblematic species, tourist resources, etc.). In developing countries, particularly in tropical Africa, the governance of protected areas crystallizes a whole set of tensions and interests among stakeholders of varying legitimacy, often contested in certain forums. This article seeks to describe stakeholders' thinking and positioning strategies for or against the economic use of biodiversity conservation in the creation and expansion of protected areas in tropical countries. In order to resist the pressure to convert forest to other uses and the accelerating use of these resources, some stakeholders (conservation NGOs, international environmental organisations for biodiversity conservation policy, sometimes in coalition with local communities) have constructed an alternative rhetoric based on making economic use of biodiversity. This positioning is sometimes interpreted as a commodification of nature, as described by generations of socialist economists since the pioneering work by Karl Marx and Karl Polanyi. These conservation stakeholders and the scientists they have been inspired by have increasingly turned to economic instruments. This economic approach to nature and subsequently to biodiversity may well aim to show that it is more effective and beneficial to conserve nature rather than exploit it, but it dismisses a range of questions about the limitations of any approach that ignores or neglects the central role of governments in the governance of biodiversity. Similarly, the economic approach to nature does not fundamentally challenge the productivist model that underlies the increasing globalisation of natural resources. Nor does it focus sufficiently on the power relationships between the stakeholders in biodiversity conservation policy and the inequalities caused by these processes, particularly in developing countries.

The chapter is structured as follows: first, we examine the origins of conservation policies and the creation of protected areas in tropical countries from the colonial period to the 1980s, since when a set of new stakeholders has emerged as governance of natural resources and biodiversity has become increasingly globalised. Then we analyse how these new stakeholders have tended over time to turn to economic instruments; this reveals a preference for apolitical market solutions and a *de facto* rejection of government regulation, typical of neoliberal rhetoric and the fetishisation of the effectiveness of incentive-based governance.

1.2. The colonial roots of conservation policies in Africa

Over the last two centuries, the role of governments in managing nature has often been hegemonic, then contested and tolerated to various extents by non-governmental stakeholders and communities whose survival closely depends on nature. This central role of governments and their colonial predecessors was often a

strange mix of over-exploitation and conservation. As Rodary et al. (2003) point out, the expansion of capitalism from the late 19th to late 20th centuries was characterised by an ambivalent relationship with nature, displaying both over-exploitation and strict conservation of nature in general and forests in particular. On the one hand, these resources were almost always systematically plundered to supply the economies of the colonial powers via various forms of commodification above and below ground: deforestation, plantation economies, logging and mineral extraction, etc. (Hufty, 2001; Mbembe, 2001; Coquery-Vidrovitch, 2017). On the other hand, the colonial administration laid the foundations for coercive nature conservation policies by creating vast protected domains often seen as fortresses off limits to local communities (Colson, 1971; Adams and Hulme, 2001). One of the main functions of these extensive conservation areas was to create and preserve game hunting grounds for settlers and their friends (Hardin and Bahuchet, 2011; Blanc, 2020).

Either way, the colonial administration, representing the home government, was seen as the only legitimate entity able to ensure the proper management of nature by economically exploiting resources and conserving protected areas. In the latter case, colonial conservation policy would often involve violent dispossession of local communities. Less dramatically, Indigenous communities would be given strong incentives to abandon primary forest areas and settle near communication routes. This strategy was intended both to free up land marked out for economic use and facilitate the colonial administration's control of these communities. One major legacy of this historical situation has been that the colonial and post-colonial government took over the ownership and subsequently the virtually exclusive management of land and natural resources, at the expense of local communities whose customary unwritten rights were replaced by new forms of regulation based on so-called modern written law (Chouquer, 2011; Boone, 2014).

1.3. Globalisation and neoliberalism of biodiversity conservation

In the latter half of the 20th century, the role of government in managing nature in the Global South was initially confirmed by the political elites of postcolonial countries. Across the Global South, most of these stakeholders maintained the privileges of a regulatory framework whereby the government was free to decide in matters of natural resource management (Dominguez and Luoma, 2020). The central role of government was strengthened during the Cold War, a period when geopolitical confrontation between Soviet and American blocs increased competition on both sides to extract natural resources.

Meanwhile, as UN bodies assumed a dominant role on the world stage (United Nations Environment Programme set up and first UNESCO biosphere reserves recognised in 1972), the conservation community shifted towards a vision based on the compatibility between conservation and economic development. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), for example, which since its foundation in 1948 had promoted action to preserve species and natural sites, revised its doctrine. In a policy document entitled *World Conservation*

Strategy: Living Resource Conservation for Sustainable Development (1980), it proposed an approach seeking to reconcile the development community (aid agencies, UN bodies such as FAO, WHO and UNDP) and the nature conservation community. Its language also adopted terms like biodiversity, ecosystem and sustainable development.

The emergence of this international governance of biodiversity led by conservationists coincided with some questioning of the role of governments within the development aid community. The influence of public choice theory economists in institutions like the World Bank (WB) reshaped the international aid paradigm. The new vision emerged in the early 1980s, particularly with structural adjustment plans, and peaked in the Washington Consensus of 1989 (Williamson, 2003).

The fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Cold War and increasing indebtedness in developing countries all accelerated the spread of these ideas and policies. The international aid community became much more critical of the role of governments and urged greater involvement by local communities in development projects, efforts to extend ownership to their beneficiaries and greater coordination of donors' actions. Global governance of biodiversity was launched by the Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future* (Brundtland et al., 1987) and institutionalised at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. This led to a greater diversification of stakeholders and the promotion of these new forms of biodiversity management.

The authoritarian governments of post-colonial states were thus gradually pushed towards greater democratic openness and the joint management of natural resources. Central government no longer governed unilaterally, but rather in cooperation with new stakeholders both local and transnational (international organisations, development agencies, NGOs), the latter often acting as allies or defenders of local communities in the Global South.

This was a fundamental moment for change in how the Global South's natural resources were managed. A shift occurred from a government approach to nature to the globalised governance of biodiversity. This meant a change in the discourse and practice of stakeholders carrying out biodiversity policies in the Global South. For example, the narratives and initiatives favouring fortress ('fines and fences') conservation of nature, long promoted by NGOs, were gradually replaced by approaches recommending greater consideration of development and participation issues in biodiversity conservation policies. Integrated Conservation and Development Projects (ICDPs) were flagship programmes in this approach (see Box 1.1).

Box 1.1. Experience of Integrated Conservation and Development Projects (ICDP)

Integrated Conservation and Development Projects were initiated in the mid-1980s by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), a pioneering transnational NGO in biodiversity conservation. Their initial purpose was to advance a new approach to biodiversity conservation that combined ecological aims and the socio-economic development of the communities in the Global South whose survival closely depends on forest ecosystems (Alpert, 1996).

One specific contribution of ICDPs to the globalisation of biodiversity conservation policies in the Global South was that they emphasised the intertwining links between poverty and threats to biodiversity (Robinson and Redford, 2004; Blom et al., 2010), notwithstanding the debates surrounding these links (Roe, 2008). The economic principle of ICDPs was that introducing incentive funding for micro-projects for local people would help reduce poverty and improve the effectiveness of biodiversity conservation policies (these incentives are more widely discussed in Section 5). The allocation of these incentives was also intended to make protected areas more acceptable and ensure more active participation by local communities in biodiversity conservation initiatives (Blom et al., 2010). Despite the numerous controversies (breach of customary rights, inadequate alternatives proposed, local externalities induced by global sustainability targets, etc.) provoked by ICDPs from the outset (Rodary, 2008), these socio-economic projects continue both explicitly and implicitly to inspire the management of many protected areas in the Global South.

The internationalisation of biodiversity governance issues coincided with the democratisation of the 1990s in the Global South and led to the creation of new regulatory systems for access to and use of natural resources and biodiversity in those countries. For example, the promotion of ecotourism, a term that emerged in 1990, was intended to justify the pro-development use of protected areas.

Despite the changes, protected areas have consequently remained the main instrument for nature conservation in tropical countries: witness the IUCN's 1994 categories of protected areas ranging from so-called Strict Nature Reserves to jointly managed protected areas with multiple uses.

Nevertheless, pressures on these areas' biodiversity remain strong, and greater media coverage of the human causes of deforestation and the poaching of wild species mobilises conservationists. Faced with governments' inability or unwillingness to stick to their international biodiversity commitments, conservation NGOs supported by international donors press for extensions to protected areas to slow tropical deforestation (Hrabanski et al., 2013; Aubertin, 2013). One of the first major initiatives of this type involved the World Bank and World Wildlife Fund (WWF). The WB-WWF alliance¹ was formalised in 1998 and was intended to incite countries in the Global South to set aside 50 million hectares of new protected areas and to advance the sustainable certification of 200 million hectares of forestry concessions. In countries like Madagascar, a fragile state context with poor governance and weak law enforcement from the 1990s onwards led to a wave of privatisation in the management of biodiversity to the benefit of conservation NGOs (Corson, 2014; Méral et al., 2016). Because policymakers and citizens in the developed countries see the work of these new stakeholders as attractive and legitimate, the NGOs receive greater support, which now matches the modest human and financial resources that Global South governments invest in biodiversity conservation.

So, although protected areas are the result of a long process that began in the colonial period, their number increased considerably in the 1990s. Despite their limited effectiveness, and indeed doubts about their existence (some authors use the term paper parks for protected areas that only exist in official documents, with no presence on the ground) and the legitimacy of their advocates, protected areas remain the main instruments for conserving biodiversity. However, the way they are managed has gradually shifted from the authoritarian, coercive enforcement of colonial and immediate postcolonial days to more decentralised approaches.

1.4. Linking economic rhetoric to biodiversity conservation policies

In order to increase the size and legitimacy of protected areas, biodiversity advocates have gradually adopted the incentive approaches of economic analysis (McNeely, 1988). This point of view broadly comprises three schools of thought.

The first is usually called environmental economics. It began in America and was gradually constructed to take into consideration the requirements of economic analysis for the environmental problems that had emerged in the US since the 1950s. As environmental costs and benefits were included in public decision-making (like costs for infrastructure projects and benefits from recreation in nature parks), so methods of monetary valuation were developed such as contingent valuation and the travel-cost method. This school is part of a wider public economic approach that focuses on the supply of public goods with positive externalities. It is supported by bodies such as the highly influential American think-tank Resources for the Future (RFF), which was behind the creation of the Association of Environmental and Resource Economists (AERE) in 1979 and more particularly the US government's Environment Protection Agency (EPA) in 1970. The interest in environmental matters of such renowned economists as William Baumol and Robert Solow helped to develop environmental economics in most Western environment agencies and the international aid community (USAID, World Bank, etc.). By the late 1980s, the idea that protected areas were justified by the non-market benefits they procured became commonplace (Dixon and Sherman, 1991; McNeely, 1994). New monetary valuation methods supported the case (Munasinghe and McNeely, 1994).

The second school is that of new resource economics, largely an offshoot of the public choice school mentioned above (Grolleau et al., 2007). Its influence takes the form of environmental policy recommendations based on the benefits of market-based regulation and privatisation rather than public regulation. It, too, began in America in the early years of the Reagan administration. The shift to neoliberalism and distrust of government regulation, particularly the action of the EPA, led to advocacy for market-based instruments, seen as more effective than government regulation (rules, taxes). The pejorative term 'command and control,' referring to the hypercentralisation of military decision-making taken to explain US failure in the Vietnam War, was even applied to the US administration's environmental regulations. Conversely, decentralisation via market-based regulation became the be-all and end-all of US environmental policy and, in turn, that of

international bodies such as the World Bank. Other stakeholders and networks gained in influence, such as the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) and the Political Economy Research Center (PERC).

The third significantly influential school to develop has been the economics of biodiversity (Pearce and Moran, 1994; Perrings, 2000). Its principles are the environmental economic valuations described above, which it applies to the conservation of biodiversity, with a focus on tropical ecosystems. Much work has been done on the monetary valuation of the services rendered by ecosystems. This shows the benefits gained from conserving ecosystems as services rendered in terms of regulation. Saving forests by means of protected areas not only saves the habitats of emblematic species but also enhances carbon sequestration and reduces soil erosion. This approach is also taken towards all ecosystems, forests on land and others in marine and coastal areas, including mangroves and coral reefs. These approaches developed following the Rio Summit in 1992, and even more from the 2000s, with such international initiatives as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2001–2005), and *The Economics of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* from 2008 to 2012 (TEEB, 2010).

Conservation stakeholders, especially the advocates of Global South protected areas, see these approaches as valuable, innovative levers and quantitative decision-making tools appreciated by policymakers and donors. The reason is that since the Rio Summit, more transversal participatory approaches have been promoted that encourage conservationists to make use of community management and income-generating activities. The point is to seek support from local communities and bring them into pro-environmental economic activities and thus turn them away from extractive activities detrimental to ecosystems, such as trading in wildlife, timber and minerals, often taken from protected areas. This economic approach based on promoting profitable local activities (ecotourism, eco-guards, bee-keeping, sale of non-timber forest products, new crafts based on forest products, etc.) is of real value (see Box 1.1). But the impact of their expansion on the living standards of rural households seldom diverts these households from extractive activities (with high levels of deforestation) whose returns are often greater. Furthermore, these approaches usually affect local communities and arouse distrust among Global South governments, who may perceive them as ways of undermining their sovereignty both to manage their natural resources and independently govern their citizens.

1.5. The growing influence of economic regulation in the biodiversity sector

Advocacy for the economic regulation of biodiversity irrespective of socio-political considerations (reducing the role of governments, inequalities, power relations between dominant and dominated stakeholders in conservation policy, etc.) became stronger and more institutionalised in the mid-2010s. It increased with the emergence of the term ecosystem services in the development programmes of many international organisations influential in the Global South: World Bank,

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), etc. At this stage, the emphasis was on the capacity of preserved ecosystems to stock carbon and act as common goods to mitigate climate change, while Global South claims of sovereignty over these ecosystems were downplayed or even ignored. As the international governance of biodiversity has focused on market-based instruments, a number of mechanisms have been developed targeting tropical countries with vast forest ecosystems. Payments for ecosystem services (PES) are a prime example (box 1.2).

Box 1.2. An example of Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES)

PES are incentives designed to internalise externalities. The principle is that payments from stakeholders or economic agents who benefit from ecosystem services are made to those who provide them. The classic example is the fight against deforestation. Here payments go to those stakeholders whose endeavours to fight deforestation help to store carbon in trees and forest soils and avoid soil erosion (and thus the loss of farm soil fertility or the silting up of watercourses of use for drinking water and efficient hydro-electric plants). The beneficiaries of the water whose supply and quality are preserved therefore pay the opportunity cost of stopping deforestation borne by upstream users of forestland. This system was a great hit in the 2000s and the early 2010s with donors, conservation NGOs and researchers, particularly in environmental economics. Some of these stakeholders saw PES as an exemplary decentralised incentive. Its advocates had scholarly backing from the Coase theorem, evidence of the influence of environmental economists mentioned above. The direct nature of this mechanism is emphasised, since farmers are paid directly for not converting their forestland to other uses, rather than, as before, funding development actions to compensate for stopping deforestation. PES payments are made to conserve ecosystems, particularly forest ecosystems, mainly for water flow regulation, carbon sequestration, and ecotourism. The World Bank, together with conservation NGOs such as TNC, CI, WWF, and FFI, developed this instrument in the light of success stories like Costa Rica and other Central American countries. The approach has also been rolled out in South-East Asia and, to a much lesser extent, in Africa. Note that alongside PES paid to private local stakeholders another incentive scheme was developed in the 2000s in order to extend to governments this type of biodiversity conservation for payment deal. This is the mechanism to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+). Institutionalised at the Paris climate conference, it has had little effect on tropical deforestation and symbolises the limitations of an apolitical approach to the international economics of biodiversity.

1.6. Global network of protected areas and related financial issues

This preference for an economic discourse on protected areas needs to be understood in the light of international commitments made in the last 20 years. The erosion of biodiversity has been warned against in a succession of reports from such bodies as IUCN and UNEP and has prompted initiatives such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and, more recently, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). It is in these international forums that conservation stakeholders influence governments. Rounds of negotiations have led to commitments to increase the total size of protected areas. In 2010, for example, the Aichi conference agreed on a growth target for protected areas. These were to cover at least 17 per cent of the world's land area and 10 per cent of its sea area, an ambitious target for 2020. This form of international governance based on such a simple indicator quickly became problematic for tropical countries, since their existing protected areas and those set up under this agreement are chronically underfunded.

Over the years, the use of market instruments advocated on account of their supposed effectiveness in internalising the positive externalities generated by protected areas has become a way of finding additional funding for these areas. Since the start of the 2000s, many international networks of committed conservationists, ecologists and economists, plus financial experts and protected area managers, have emerged, with telling names like Ecosystem Marketplace and Conservation Finance Alliance. These networks have been influential in revising international biodiversity agreements (particularly under the Convention on Biological Diversity) and have brought into their discussions, stakeholders from banks, insurance companies, major private corporations and philanthropic foundations. Their shared objective is to create what Daily and Ellison call a 'new economy of nature' (Daily and Ellison, 2002). The point is not only to internalise positive externalities as with PES but also to extend the use of these types of payment by setting up new ecosystem service markets for forest carbon, protection of catchment areas by new planting, etc. The aim is to arouse the interest of private investors in allocating some of their funds to schemes likely to provide a significant return on investment. Although the application of such markets is still limited and has mainly been tried in rich countries (particularly the United States and Australia), international bodies have gradually adopted this thinking. In 2013, the OECD published a handbook entitled *Scaling-up Finance Mechanisms for Biodiversity*, and the Global Canopy alliance of 37 scientific bodies in 19 countries produced its own *Little Biodiversity Finance Book: A Guide to Proactive Investment in Natural Capital* (Parker and Cranford, 2010; OECD, 2013). The latter was supported by the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the NGO is funded by the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation; the book clearly states both that the main sources for funding biodiversity conservation come from government budgets for their own protected areas (half from the United States, Canada, Europe and China) and that the amount of development aid devoted to biodiversity in 2010 was USD 6.6 billion. Consequently, increasing the total size of protected areas as

much as was agreed internationally in 2010 focuses attention on obtaining extra resources. The discourse shifts from market instruments to innovative financing mechanisms: where to find extra funds for developing countries that since the advent of the structural adjustment policies have little capital of their own.

This pressure on financial resources is currently increasing, since the Convention on Biological Diversity is considering extending the global network of protected areas to 30 per cent of all land and sea ecosystems, when it is now ‘only’ 16 per cent for land and 7.4 per cent for sea (below the commitments made for 2011–2020). As Global Canopy’s new, catchily titled, *Little Book of Investing in Nature: A Simple Guide to Financing Life on Earth* (2021) points out, the need for finance will be considerable (Tobin-de la Puente and Mitchell, 2021).

One consequence of this focus on what are scarcely innovative financing mechanisms is that it largely ignores how existing protected areas are actually managed. Increasing the total size of protected areas, particularly in tropical countries, is not based on any close examination of the effectiveness of the existing ones but is rather the effect of institutional momentum at global level. It is this momentum that leads to discussions of how to make financing sustainable. This is well illustrated in the case of trust funds, as explained in Box 1.3.

Box 1.3. Conservation trust funds

Trust funds are a prime example of current trends in the international governance of tropical biodiversity. They are legal instruments whereby a donor has capital managed by a third person for a specific purpose. For biodiversity, these conservation trust funds are set up to finance conservation actions and, particularly, protected areas. The specific feature of these trust funds is that they enable an entity, usually a foundation, to manage the capital obtained and use it partially (investment earnings only) or totally for a period of years with no accountability to the governments of the countries where the conservation actions are carried out. Since conservation trust funds began in 1979, they have continually increased in number. There are currently nearly 90 for biodiversity conservation. Although the managements of these funds do not always practise transparency, we estimate their total capital to be USD 2 billion. One reason these trust funds are so popular with international stakeholders is that they are often used to manage funds arising from what are known as ‘debt-for-nature swaps.’ The capital obtained is often invested in shares and only the earnings are used at the discretion of the foundations that manage it. Although governments are sometimes represented on the boards of these funds, most funds are managed by a consortium of stakeholders where the government representative(s) are often a minority in the decision-making processes. However, on the ground these trust funds’ activities are regularly faced with the complex reality of government economic policy in the Global South, where there is often no point in attempting to circumvent governments in the governance of biodiversity. Even when such circumventions appear to bring about changes that

favour the sustainability of ecosystems in the Global South, most of these changes are reversible, given the lack of political will in the governing class to consolidate progress made, particularly where that progress threatens the informal interests and private agendas of decisive stakeholders excluded from the process (Doinjashvili et al., 2021).

1.7. Globalisation and biodiversity conservation politics

The current globalisation of biodiversity governance continues to give a key role to the protected area system, a system of territories that are consequently subject to national sovereignty. And yet the economics-based discourse on conservation has produced forms of regulation based on economic incentives. We have described PES payments, but others could have been included, such as carbon offsets, socio-environmental labels and certificates, etc. Most of these systems and instruments are designed to circumvent government or reduce its previously dominant role in the Global South in production systems, natural resource management and biodiversity conservation. These attempts to circumvent government are generally motivated by the weakness or failure of postcolonial governments and aim to ensure a rational and fair management of biodiversity that will be compatible with global concerns for sustainability.

This weakness of governments has often been worsened or indeed created by global circumstances of austerity policies and neoliberal reforms imposed by international financial institutions such as the World Bank. In many cases, government weakness has aggravated the confusion between public and private sectors, between public and private interests. Whether sectors or interests, one consequence for biodiversity management is that informal practices persist or increase in the access to and exploitation of natural resources. This leads to a prosperous trade in plundering biodiversity, often exacerbated by globalisation: transnational smuggling of wildlife and derived products (ivory, pangolin scales, etc.), illegal trading in precious woods, especially rosewood, occupation and plundering of protected areas by insurgent movements, informal or discretionary acquisition of huge forest areas (land grabbing) for industrial farming or biofuel schemes, etc.

These attempts to delegitimise Global South governments in biodiversity governance are, however, thwarted by some governments' tendency to break their international commitments on environmental matters, particularly if those commitments are likely to compromise their interests. This increases tensions between conservation projects (often put forward by international stakeholders and their allies in civil society organisations) and priority agendas to make use of biodiversity, an option particularly advocated by local governments. Initiatives for the sustainable management of biodiversity in the Global South, whether focused on norm-based regulation or economic incentives, find it hard to achieve their aims because they underestimate or overlook the central role of government and the constraints involved in attempting to reduce it. One example is the international attempts to have forest ecosystems and biodiversity declared 'global public goods'

(Kaul et al., 1999; Compagnon, 2008). These regularly come up against claims to sovereignty by Global South governments, who see the location of these resources as *de facto* evidence that they should be managed by the public interest policies of the countries concerned. As for decentralisation policies, attempts to circumvent government veer between partial delegation of access rights and biodiversity management and recuperation by central government of that governance (Ribot et al., 2006). Recent developments include the greater use of international instruments based on allocating financial incentives to combat deforestation (UN REDD+ initiatives) and the preservation of biodiversity (PES), where it has been observed that their chances of success intrinsically depend on a Global South government's ability or political will to support their implementation (Karsenty and Ongolo, 2012; Tosun and Howlett, 2021).

1.8. Conclusion

As pressures on natural resources increase across the world, conservation stakeholders are looking for any way to make protected areas sustainable and effective. A host of initiatives aim to restrict the conversion of forests to farmland and any more land grabbing to exploit natural resources, often as concessions. This way of thinking about the use and conversion of natural spaces for economic purposes is countered by another that aims to make these spaces sanctuaries as habitats for natural species and more recently for the ecosystem services rendered to societies.

From colonial times to the present day, when tropical ecosystems are seen as providing global public goods, Western governments have often had a determining influence in defining forms of access to and regulation of tropical ecosystems and their biodiversity. The models of thought advanced by economic analysis pervade decision-making forums in international organisations and conservation NGOs, universities and research centres specialising in biodiversity questions.

These models have two limitations. One is that they fail to address the sovereignty that governments have and intend to maintain over their territories, including protected areas. In fact, although international environmental regulation accords an ever-larger place to networks of non-governmental stakeholders, it is ultimately government agreement to international or regional conventions that decides the speed of decision-making. At national level, the success of public action, including for the environment, remains conditional on the political will of government officials to support its implementation, even in those countries where the government is weak or vulnerable. The desire to restrict the governance of protected areas to the closed circle of international and non-governmental stakeholders, justified by rhetorical statements about government incompetence (policy failures) and the ineffectiveness of centralised regulation (market instrument fetishism), can only lead to deadlock. The case of Brazilian governments under President Bolsonaro and their pro-deforestation policies suffices to show how governments can at any point stop or hinder the conservation of biodiversity in the name of sovereignty (Meeus, 2019) or to preserve the private interests of their supporters or political clients.

The other limitation is that this economisation of nature conservation obscures the capitalist dynamic that is one of the main causes of these pressures on natural resources and the places where they are located (Cuypers, Geerken et al., 2013). One reason pressures on ecosystems too are increasing is that global demand for raw materials, especially agricultural ones, is increasing (Pendrill et al., 2019). To continue to enlarge the protected areas, a perfectly proper idea as seen by the conservation community, without attempting to restrict the well-known causes for the human impact on ecosystems driven by the current capitalist dynamic, can only be an illusion. Very few signs of greater consistency of thought are emerging, such as the Europe-wide adoption of a policy to combat imported deforestation, an initiative to internalise the impact of European import and consumer markets on the sustainability of tropical ecosystems. Once again, government has a determining role to play.

Note

- 1 <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/825041468739261524/world-bank-world-wildlife-fund-wwf-alliance-for-forest-conservation-and-sustainable-use-annual-report-1999>

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