

The Convergence of Environment and Development and Its Limitations:

the Case of Colombia and

the Hydroelectric Project *Arrieros del Micay*

by

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Chapter One:

Introduction

Some would argue that environmental concern is income-sensitive at a national and international level. In the United States, the environmental movement draws support from the upper and middle classes that are interested in protecting their property and privacy. Internationally, only developed countries¹ can afford to protect the environment in their development policies since it is a costly and long term investment. However, I believe that presently the environmental movement draws support from many groups indifferent to class, ideology, race, or nationality. While the commitment of developing countries is less evident, I will argue that environmental concern *is*, out of necessity, on the rise in developing countries.

Contrary to popular belief, environmental awareness can arise from national development aims, rather than grassroots activism. For example Samuel Hays (1959) argued that in the United States, conservation efforts arose from a concern for the efficient use of national natural resources by a select group of technicians and scientists. The challenges of the new technological society called for different management strategies that ensured the efficient use of natural resources. In particular natural disasters, such as floods or forest fires, had a detrimental effect that could be prevented. Over time, the concern for efficiency evolves to an environmental awareness that has a "spill-over effect" to other sectors and problems. The evolution of environmental policy varies depending of the social, economic and political conditions facing individual nations.

Undoubtedly, the incorporation of environmental considerations in developing countries is still in its infancy. Most developing countries have had environmental legal codes in place for at least a decade. Until recently, these had remained ineffective codes of conduct due to a lack of political will, failing to prevent the environmentally deleterious impact of development. The majority of the leaders in LDC's viewed environmental policy as contrary to development. Yet in

¹ I want to acknowledge the inadequacy of the terms "developed" and "developing". The division of nations according to this dichotomy is simplistic and static. It does not portray the social, political, economic, environmental, and cultural differences between nations of both groups. In addition, it places a country in a stationary global hierarchy that seems too deterministic.

the last decade, there has been a growing environmental awareness, with the level of commitment varying across the world.

I believe that this consciousness in developing countries is a result of the coming closer together of the development and environmental fields. This convergence can be explained by three reasons: the seriousness of the problems, the action of environmental groups, and the evolution of the academic and policy debates on development and environment. I believe these explanations interact with one another, reinforcing the importance of environmental policy and creating an opportunity for action in developing countries.

Seriousness of the Problems

In the past decade, environmental problems have gained recognition worldwide. Our inability to solve these problems has made the public more aware of the environment, and consequently the need for environmental policy.

Public Pressure

As problems intensify, the public in developed and developing countries has become more aware of environmental constraints, and as environmental NGO's work to create an international pressure group of environmentalists, decision-makers realize the practicality of establishing environmental policy. What makes this process particularly challenging and interesting is that due to modern communication, environmental action is not confined by national boundaries, creating international pressure for environmental policy.

Evolution of the Debate

In addition, environmental considerations are being proven to be beneficial for the development process. Development specialists have had to reconsider their goals and methodologies considerably during the last four decades. The growing disillusionment of the development field contrast with what has happened in the environmental field. As environmental problems are more visible, environmental specialists are gaining support and attention giving recognition to environmental problems as related to other social problems. The "retreat" of the "development perspective" gives "environmentalism" a grand opportunity that can be beneficial to