Ecuadorian perspectives on international aid cooperation

*Experiences and challenges encountered by the environmental movement*

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Abstract

This project aims to understand how the actors in the Ecuadorian environmental movement experience the cooperation with the international development aid industry. The environmental movement is defined here as those working with environmental issues, not pertaining to the government, be it national or international organizations, academics, grassroots movements, activists, or others. It is a qualitative study, and has applied the use of in-depth interviews to understand how the informants make sense of their worlds. The informants are 20 actors from the Ecuadorian environmental movement, and one actor from the Ecuadorian Ministry of Environment. The actors interviewed from the environmental movement work in national and international NGOs, the UN, grassroots organizations, are environmental lawyers, and academics.

Ecuador is one of the megadiverse countries in the world, and protecting the Amazon rainforest is crucial in fighting climate change. The aid industry aims to help the world’s poor and vulnerable, and climate change affects people living in poverty in the global South especially. With this as a backdrop, the objective of this study is to understand how the relationship between Ecuadorian actors and the international development aid agencies works, as seen from the Ecuadorian perspective, and whether it is possible to identify ways of improving the cooperation. The most important findings are related to the importance of local and cultural knowledge in the aid relationship, the necessity in building horizontal alliances, and the role of the government in hindering development aid cooperation in Ecuador.

Key words: Ecuador, environmental movement, international development aid cooperation, development, environment
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1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in how development aid can best be utilized and distributed. The development aid industry is continually carrying out evaluations of projects and partnerships, in order to determine how to improve their practices. The literature produced on this topic is burgeoning. As described by Ramalingam, aid should be a ‘system to change the system’, and its aim is for a more ‘even, fair and just world’ (Ramalingam, 2013, 7). At what he calls its most idealistic and ambitious, aid should change the global system, both socially, economically and politically, to benefit and include the poor and vulnerable (Ramalingam, 2013, 7). The reality, however, is that this ‘system’ is so complex and often unorganized, that it has been named a ‘non-system’ by the OECD’s Poverty Unit (Ramalingam, 2013, 6).

Development was deemed a ‘universal and inalienable right’ at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 87). It refers to improving people’s living conditions (Melkote & Steeves, 2001, 34). However, how development should progress is a complicated question. There has been a tendency to view development as comparable to a scientific experiment, where it is possible to identify all variables. Crewe and Harrison argue that it is ‘impossible to isolate social, economic, ecological, political, or ideological variables from each other, and predict how any will change in the future, because understanding social life is a matter of interpreting relationships and not recording behavioural elements or ‘variables’’ (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 97). This can be understood as a critique of the positivist, scientific model, which omits the importance of including the ever-changing social aspect in development, a part which cannot be quantified. The idea of the Western model of development being assumed a good model for emulating, and thus transferred to developing countries, without regard to social, cultural and political differences, has also been scrutinized in recent years.

Crewe and Harrison explain that the way of understanding development is twofold. The first entails development intervention as having ‘a set of institutions, policies, and practices with an identifiable history’, this history stemming from post-war decolonization. This sense development has been characterized as an industry, with organization such as the World Bank, the UN, bilateral donors and NGOs executing development activities (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 14). The other way of understanding development is development as an ideal, as a goal to work towards. This goal is seen as inherently good, and that the ensuing changes
will by default be positive changes, because it is *development*, although what this
development entails might not be clearly defined (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 15). Development
as inherently good has been disputed, especially by those concerned with the environment,
and will be further discussed throughout this study.

**Global environment and climate change**

“On the global systemic level, this is not a theoretical point but a factual one: in the
course of the first eight months of the year, the world economy consumes resources which it
would take twelve months to reproduce. The consequence of the systematized speeding up of
production everywhere is that the whole world lives on borrowed time. Acting as though
humanity has several planets at its disposal won’t change the fact that we have one and only
one” (Vetlesen, 2015, 43).

Climate change is by many considered the greatest challenge for humanity in the 21st century.
The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), an international body for assessing
the science related to climate change, has declared that human influence on the climate system
is clear, and that these changes have widespread impacts on human and natural systems
(IPCC, 2015, 2). The causes of climate change, as per the IPCC, are anthropogenic
greenhouse gas emissions propelled by economic and population growth, and has led to
unparalleled concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide in the atmosphere
for at least the last 800 000 years (IPCC, 2015, 4). According to the Climate Change
Synthesis Report, climate change exacerbates threats to social and natural systems, especially
for the poor, and is a threat to sustainable development (IPCC, 2015, 31).

The systems of climate change are described by the IPCC as ‘chaotic’ and ‘non-linear’, and
that changes are complex and incredibly hard to predict (IPCC 2, undated). As an extension of
affecting societies, ecosystems and agriculture, the economic realm is also greatly affected.
The Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change considered the effects of climate
change on the global economy, concluding that if non-linearities were taken into
consideration ‘the economic cost of climate change would rise from 5 per cent of gross
domestic product to 20 per cent, in perpetuity’ (Ramalingam, 2013, 343).

The Worldwatch Institute, one of the world’s leading research institutes devoted to global
environmental concerns, poses the question “If development isn’t sustainable, is it
development?” in their yearly report from 2013, *Is Sustainability Still Possible?*. According to this report, human-caused climate change shows no sign of slowing down or entering a time of sustainability. The Institute underlines that ‘demographic and economic growth drives growth in greenhouse gas emissions and natural resource use’ (Worldwatch Institute, 2013, 10). This report also emphasizes the fact that we have ‘dug ourselves so deeply into unsustainability … that we are now passing critical environmental thresholds or “tipping points”’ (Worldwatch Institute, 2013, 11). Nine such environmental thresholds or planetary boundaries were identified in 2009, and these nine boundaries can roughly measure and monitor sustainability. Out of these nine boundaries, the three first boundaries – climate change, rate of biodiversity loss, and the nitrogen cycle – may already have been crossed.

“Together, they describe an envelope for a safe operating space for humanity that, if respected, would likely ensure that Earth remains in a Holocene-like state. The safe operating space means avoiding moving into a zone of uncertainty where there may be largescale and critical thresholds” (Worldwatch Institute, 2013, 22).

Yet many scientists conclude that we may have already left the Holocene, by a human-induced shift which can compare to the transition which ended the last Ice Age (Worldwatch Institute, 2013, 12), and have entered the Anthropocene – the ‘recent age of man’ (Rafferty, 2016; Worldwatch Institute, 2013, 22). As Vetlesen states, the influence of humanity on the global environment ‘now outweighs how the most powerful natural forces impact on the functioning of the Earth system’ (Vetlesen, 2015, 18).

However, it should be noted that there are also some positive changes. The Worldwatch Institute points to the rapid growth of renewable energy, corporations vowing to improve their environmental footprints, and the growing acceptance that global warming is in fact caused by human activities (Worldwatch Institute, 2013, 12). The Paris Agreement, an important outcome of COP21 in 2015, should also be mentioned in this context. It is an agreement between 187 countries in which they have all committed to emission reduction from 2020, and is a legally binding treaty on climate action. It has been called a ‘turning point for action to limit climate change below dangerous levels’ (Mabey, Burke, Gallagher, Born & Kewley, 2015).

On the topic of environmental responsibility, and the debated idea of ‘ecological debt’, Singer argues: “If we believe that people should contribute to fixing something in proportion to their responsibility for breaking it, then the developed nations owe it to the rest of the world to fix
the problem with the atmosphere”, a suggestion which was officially acknowledged by industrialized countries after the 1992 Rio Summit (Singer in Greig, Hulme & Turner, 2007, 194).

Backdrop for choice of research question

My journey in Latin America started out in 2005, when I went to Guatemala to learn Spanish and work there for a semester. The following two years I went back to Latin America, first to travel from North to South on the American continents, and the subsequent year to stay in Chile. A few years later I spent a semester at the University of Buenos Aires as a part of my bachelor’s degree in Latin American studies. In 2015 I worked as an academic intern at the Norwegian Embassy in Santiago, Chile, and was fortunate enough to travel with the ambassador, as a part of the embassy being in dialogue with the indigenous Mapuche movement. After spending more than a decade, on and off, in various Latin American countries, one is bound to become bewildered and outraged by the vast inequalities existing between the global North and South, as well as aware of the Eurocentric attitudes which still exist. As argued by Ramalingam, the aim of development aid is a more even, fair and just world, which is what triggered my interest in researching the development aid industry.

Aid is meant to help the poorest and most vulnerable, and the IPCC has determined the link between climate change and the poorest in the world being directly affected. This fact, in combination with the conviction that climate change is our greatest prevailing challenge, is why I decided to research the Ecuadorian environmental movement’s cooperation with the international development aid industry. Ecuador is one of the most biologically diverse countries in the world, and protecting its rainforests and species is important not only for the wellbeing of the people living there, but also for the rest of the world’s population. Deforestation of rainforests affects not only the people living in and around rainforests, but because it releases large amounts of carbon into the atmosphere, it further accelerates climate change (Rainforest, undated). This is the backdrop for my decision of researching the environmental movement in Ecuador.
Research question

Which experiences do the actors in the Ecuadorian environmental movement in Quito, have with international development aid cooperation?

- What are common challenges in international development aid cooperation in Ecuador?
- How can inequalities between donors and recipients affect the cooperation?
- What can be done to improve the international development aid cooperation?

Because there is some debate of whether there exists an environmental movement as such in Ecuador, a definition is in order. In this dissertation, the definition of the Ecuadorian environmental movement is those working with environmental issues, not pertaining to the government, be it national or international organizations, academics, grassroots movements, activists, or others.

In Delivering Aid Differently it is underlined that scholars from donor countries are dominating the production of literature about aid effectiveness, even though the importance of recipient country ownership of aid has been made clear (Fengler & Kharas, 2010, 2). I realize the possible contradictory character of my decision to research the Ecuadorian environmental movement’s perspective on international aid, as it makes for yet another ‘scholar from a donor country producing literature about aid effectiveness’. However, I will to my best ability in the following portray the experiences made by the actors in the Ecuadorian environmental movement.

“To build long-lasting relationships, to build solid relationships is one of the challenges of conservation, because it is crystal-clear that conservation is not possible to carry out alone. No organization, however large, can do this work on its own. We need to build alliances” (Interview 9, 39.15 min.).

Context

Local environment - Ecuador

Although a relatively small country in size, Ecuador is one of the most biodiverse countries in the world, in eighth place (Mongabay, undated). The country has thousands of animal and plant species and is divided into four biogeographical zones: the highlands with the Andes, the Pacific coast, the Amazon and the Galápagos Islands. Ecuador is one of seventeen
‘megadiverse’ countries - meaning the most biodiversity-rich countries - in the world. These seventeen countries maintain between 60 and 70 percent of all biodiversity on the planet (CBD, undated). Of the four biogeographical zones in Ecuador, two are particularly important, namely the Galápagos Islands and the Yasuní Biosphere Reserve in the Ecuadorian Amazon (FAO, 2016).

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN, Ecuador has the highest rate of deforestation in South-America. The Ecuadorian rainforest is threatened by a multitude of activities, such as an expansion in agriculture and cattle farming, building of roads, logging, mining and oil extraction (Rainforest, undated). Yasuní is the ancestral territory of the indigenous peoples the ‘Huaorani’, the ‘Tagaeri’ and the ‘Taromenane’, the last two living in voluntary isolation. The Yasuní reserve is also an important area because of what Amazon Watch calls ‘extreme biodiversity’ and ‘containing what are thought to be the greatest variety of tree and insect species anywhere on the planet’ (Amazon Watch, undated). Underneath this hotspot of biodiversity lies approximately 900 million barrels of heavy crude oil, and although the country relies on oil for 60 percent of its exports, President Correa launched an initiative in 2007 – Yasuní-ITT – which would leave this oil untouched if the international community would contribute financially for the anticipated revenue lost in leaving the oil underground (Amazon Watch, undated). However, Correa’s plan in reaching out for 36 billion dollars from the international community failed, and as of September 2016 the exploitation of oil in the ITT-block of the Yasuní began (Ecuador Transparente, 2016).

Civil society and the State in Ecuador

“… the Citizens’ Revolution project in Ecuador has created a complex regulatory-institutional machinery, which, paradoxically, seeks to reify the main scenarios of action by civil society in the public sphere” (Ortiz, 2014, 583).

The president of Ecuador, Rafael Correa, and his government (2006-present) established what they call ‘the Citizens’ Revolution’. This political project has promised, among other things, to make a model of ‘participation in democracy’ which has supposedly been sought after by social movements in the country. The Correa government has instead introduced more regulation and social control, as well as disciplinary action against people and institutions with critical opinions of the regime, and has even counteracted practice of social movements
(Ortiz, 2014, 583-84). These claims are supported by various scholars and media outlets, and the PanAm Post goes as far as calling Correa a dictator (Lince, 2016).

The current Ecuadorian government has a complex bureaucratic apparatus ‘which has facilitated a process of colonialization of the public sphere’ (Ortiz, 2014, 584). Recent studies of the Correa administration show both a rejection of diversity in political parties and a troublesome relationship between the Citizens’ Revolution and social organizations, such as the indigenous movement. The leading indigenous organization in Ecuador, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), has even declared an uprising against President Correa (El Comercio, 2016).

According to Ortiz, the relationship between the Ecuadorian state and civil society has historically been coloured by the State being controlling and using the guise of ‘participation’ to exercise this control. Civil society in the country has played a part in democratization and has acted as a critic both of political and economic systems in Ecuador.

“…the Ecuadorian civil society has developed critical intersubjectivity faced with a political society characterized by the weakness of its institutions and its inefficiency in processing the different social demands” (Collins in Ortiz, 2014, 587 – my own translation?).

After Correa was elected he dissolved the Congress and fostered a Constituent Assembly with the aim of writing a new constitution. The Constituent Assembly included various social movements’ demands in the constitutional text, such as a declaration of plurinationality, collective rights, and nature’s rights, however neither was clearly defined (Ortiz, 2014, 588). As an example, the constitution states that ‘Nature or Pacha Mama … has a right to complete respect of its existence’ (Asamblea Nacional, 2008, 52).

The political organization, Alianza PAÍS, of Correa’s Citizens’ Revolution drafted some regulations when it comes to participation, such as the large social movements entrusting the Citizens’ Revolution with their work, a unanimous rejection of any social movement critical of the regime, and that the State should exercise the ‘social control’ normally practiced by the civil society (Ortiz, 2014, 592). Article 36 of the ‘Civil Participation’ law states that ‘all organizations have to be legalized’ and Article 26 that ‘decree 16 permits the government to close down organizations if they are considered to be dedicated to political activity’ (Ortiz, 2014, 593).
A recent example of Article 26 in use, can be found in the case of the environmental NGO ‘Pachamama’. In 2013 Pachamama, working for the support of indigenous peoples in the Amazon and nature’s rights, was closed down by the government (El Universo, 2013). The official reason for the closure of the organization was ‘violent acts’ during a protest against oil exploitation in the Amazon, and Correa declared that NGOs ‘aren’t supposed to enter politics’ (El Universo, 2013). The president of Pachamama vehemently denied any violent act on their part, and the unofficial reason for the closing down of the NGO was Pachamama’s critique of the government, and the government’s opening up for transnational oil companies getting concessions in highly diverse areas (Ecuador Noticias, 2016).

As argued by Lewis, the Ecuadorian case of the government’s environmental policies clashing with the country’s economic growth goals is quite common. However, the author claims that Ecuador is unique in this aspect – even calling Ecuador “most likely to succeed in sustainability” in the Global South – for two reasons: firstly, because being a country with high biodiversity attracts transnational environmental resources, and secondly, because of the rights granted nature in the constitution (Lewis, 2016, 4). Considering the Correa government’s stand on oil exploitation in the Amazon, and having recently opened up for drilling in Yasuní, even with nature’s rights in the newest constitution, this can be contested (El Comercio, 2016).

Ecuador was the first country in the world, in 2008, to recognize nature’s rights in their constitution (UICN, 2008). However, when the debate in Ecuador went from talking in general terms about ‘nature’s rights’ to discussing specific topics such as the management of water basins or mining in indigenous territories, it became clear that the strategy of articulating social demands had failed and thus ceased to be a point of connection between the government and the civil society (Ortiz, 2014, 601).
2. Critical theory and environmental philosophy

I will in the following present a branch of philosophy and a theory which has influenced my thought process in this research, namely *environmental philosophy* and *critical theory*. Environmental philosophy criticizes an Occidental understanding of nature and the natural discourse, and denounces typical Western anthropocentrism. Throughout this study, topics such as development and aid will be in focus, and both will be discussed as ideologies. Critical theory functions as a backdrop in these discussions, because of its questioning of society’s dominant ideologies.

One of the main ideas in critical theory is that of Ideologiekritik. Ideologiekritik refers to the criticism of society’s dominant ideology. The members of the Frankfurt School meant that a criticism of society and of its dominant ideology were two sides of the same coin.

“…the ultimate goal of all social research should be the elaboration of a critical theory of society of which Ideologiekritik would be an integral part” (Geuss, 1993, 26).

Ideologiekritik is explained as a criticism of an ideological form of consciousness which is false, a delusion – ideology as a false consciousness. Another characteristic is its contrast to the natural sciences, and its demand for changes in the epistemological views stemming from traditional empiricism (Geuss, 1993, 26).

Environmental philosophy is concerned with the belief in nature’s intrinsic value, and concerned about the human-inflicted degradation of it (Vetlesen, 2015, 2). It has a critical view of the modern anthropocentrism, criticizing the ‘societal assault on nature’ (Vetlesen, 2015, 3), the domestication of nature through commodification and challenges the Enlightenment idea that only what can be measured and counted, converted to numbers, can be said to be of real existence (Vetlesen, 2015, 53).

Critical theory and environmental philosophy have in common their scepticism towards reification, in other words a thingification, of matters being reduced into things or objects. In critical theory, the concern is the reification of human beings and relations, and thus the belittling of human beings’ value. In environmental philosophy, the concern is the reification of nature, and the consequent human alienation from nature (Hailwood, 2015, 102). However, if we are to look at it from an environmental philosopher’s point of view, these issues can be connected, because deeply rooted in environmental philosophy is that human beings *are*
nature. Thus, what is being done to nature and the planet, is also being done to all human beings. As per Bhaskar:

“The destruction of nature is not only murder, but suicide, and must be treated as such” (Bhaskar quoted in Vetlesen, 2015, 4).

Another issue critical theory and environmental philosophy share, is the scepticism towards capitalism and the positivist ideas stemming from the Enlightenment. The Frankfurt philosophers were concerned with the ‘self-destructive mode of capitalist modernization’ and that of Enlightenment’s mission to control nature, and at the same time control man’s inner nature (Vetlesen, 2015, 94).

The critique of capitalism in environmental philosophy is pointed out in ‘The Denial of Nature’. Here it is stated that the way to make a profit is for capital to produce commodities from living nature, but at a faster rate than nature can reproduce itself, and in this way making a profit usually exhausts natural resources (Vetlesen, 2015, 34).

“The point is that sustaining profit – in the way in which profit must be sustained for capitalism to sustain itself, to remain capitalism – and sustaining the environment are mutually exclusive” (Vetlesen, 2015, 23).

Vetlesen argues that the ‘domination of nature and the domination of man go hand in hand remains a crucial insight of early critical theory, one to which Habermas subscribes’ (Vetlesen, 2015, 95). However, he goes on to ask why the concern of the damage made by capitalist modernization is purely aimed towards the ‘human-to-human axis’. Of Habermas’ overlooking of the nonhuman world in his critical social theory Vetlesen says: ‘the neglect of the damage done to the nonhuman world reflects in theory the indifference fostering and accompanying those damaging practices’ (Vetlesen, 2015, 95).
3. Literature

History of international development aid

Development aid springs from the time after the Second World War, when the foreign minister of the USA, George C. Marshall, suggested The Marshall Plan: to help rebuild the European countries economically through large scale aid (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 8). This development was thought to advance through industrialization (Rapley, 2007, 1). The Plan was initiated in 1948, along with the establishment of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2003). President Truman presented a plan to expand American foreign aid in 1949 which would give aid to countries ‘threatened’ by communism. By the mid-50s the support for Western European countries ceased, yet increased to other parts of the world, such as Asia and the Middle East and later to Africa and Latin-America (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 8).

The dominant theories in development studies after the War, which remained important until the 1980s, were modernization theory and dependency theory (Greig et al., 2007, 73). The essence of modernization theory was a moving away from a traditional society, with the Western, scientific model as a prototype which the poorer countries should emulate (Greig et al., 2007, 74). Dependency theory emerged with Paul Baran’s The Political Economy of Growth, in which he claims that the First World acted as an obstacle for the Third World emerging from poverty. André Gunder Frank advanced this theory, saying that the First World was actually draining the Third World of its resources, and in this way keeping it underdeveloped (Rapley, 2007, 26).

The focus on national security as a motivation for foreign aid was central in the USA until the 1990s. The government also stressed the importance of helping poor countries develop, as a moral and humanistic obligation, since the 1950s, although the latter motive was not necessarily shown in practice (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 8). The official motives were different in other large industrial countries. Both Great Britain and France contributed with aid as a moral duty, and especially to their own former colonies in the Third World. The unofficial motives could, nevertheless, stem from a wish to keep access to natural resources and markets in the former colonies, and in this way enhance economic interests. In the Nordic countries the motives were strongly linked to a moral and humanitarian commitment, and the prevailing thought in this region was that rich countries
should help poor countries, which is the same reasoning which was used when creating the Nordic welfare states (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 9).

With changes in political powerholders in large industrialized countries around 1980, for instance the USA, the UK and Germany, came changes concerning development goals. Heads of state such as Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and Helmut Kohl brought with them large transformations in economic policy, particularly a decrease in the state’s economic role and an increase in free market forces (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 27).

“For foreign aid goals, this meant that the main focus was moved back to national economic growth, but now connected to a structural transformation of developing countries’ political economy” (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 27).

The structural adjustment programmes of the World Bank also meant a restricted state in economic development, and with this, less or no involvement in production, the private sector and general expenditure like health and education. This brought with it less poverty-alleviation measures within foreign aid (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 27). The structural adjustment programmes were accepted within international development cooperation in general and the framework consequently applied. This consensus has been referred to as the “Washington Consensus” seeing as many of the organizations who endorsed it had their headquarters in Washington DC, such as the IMF, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 27). The structural adjustment programmes also changed the dialogue between donor and recipient countries, and can be seen as the first practice of donor conditionalities.

“Now, very clearly formulated demands were made of recipient countries to implement a specific economic policy according to the recommendations of the ‘Washington Consensus’” (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 27).

This topic will be further discussed in the chapter on ‘Critical perspectives on development aid’.

**Environmental considerations**

Environmental issues became a topic of interest in the study of development in the 60s and 70s, yet stayed for a while in the periphery of the field (Rapley, 2007, 211). From the mid-1980s environmental considerations became important in donors’ foreign aid policies.
Environmental issues in the foreign aid debate was first introduced as significant with the 1987 Brundtland Commision’s report, and consequently placed on the agenda (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 15). The idea of sustainable development was launched with this report – examples of sustainable development being deforestation having to be balanced by reforestation, and only releasing as much pollution as the atmosphere can absorb (Rapley, 2007, 211). Sustainable development is described as ‘development that fulfils present human needs without endangering future generations’ possibilities for fulfilling these needs’. (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 28). The report included an emphasis on the inter-dependency of all countries, and the need for the global community to work on a common strategy towards sustainable growth and development, faced with the immensity of environmental problems. With this, it was also underlined that there should ‘be an increase in the rich countries’ foreign aid to developing countries to support the implementation of their environmental policy’ (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 15).

A report from 1990 by The South Commision concluded that extensive poverty in developing countries was a reason for the degradation of the environment on a global scale. The population growth in mass poverty puts pressure on resources available, which in turn degrades the environment (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 15). Further, the UN Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992 highlighted the fact that it was a global issue to take care of the environment, also through foreign aid. In 1995 it was suggested in a report from the Commission on Global Governance that the motivations for giving aid could and should change, from being an ‘inter-state charity’ to being a payment for delivered services. In the environmental sphere of aid this would mean that developing countries receive aid as a payment for protecting biodiversity or the environment (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 16).

Per Woodhouse (2002), today ‘environmental issues affect virtually all aspects of development policy’ (Woodhouse in Greig et al., 2007, 187). The neoliberal approach suggests that investing in better management of the environment should be considered after incomes have risen for the poor, a logic which is refuted, because of the constraint environmental degradation already has placed on development. The UN Millennium Development Goals reproached the idea that environmental considerations can wait, and underlined the support of the idea that environmentally sustainable practices must be integrated in development programmes (Greig et al., 2007, 189).
An important idea in foreign aid has always been economic growth in the recipient country, where increased production and consumption has been central. It has been thought that this would lead to a general improvement in living conditions for people in the recipient countries. However, when seen from an environmental perspective, this model is considered unsustainable.

“The history of economic development has always involved ‘the development of more intensive ways of exploiting the natural environment’” (Greig et al., 2007, 187).

Some environmentalists claim that development has, instead of being a solution, become a problem. They question whether the planet can ‘accommodate a world of “developed” nations’ because of the consequences of modern economic growth, which are linked to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions and loss of biodiversity (Greig et al., 2007, 8).

**Partnership**

“Paternalistic approaches have no place in this framework” (Eriksson Baaaz, 2005, 3).

The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD describes partnership as a cooperation where things are done *with* developing countries and not *for* them. It is necessary, according to DAC, to increase developing countries’ capacities to be able to do things for themselves and that local actors should take the lead (Eriksson Baaaz, 2005, 3).

Development aid has gone through different stages of cooperation, and is now focused on the idea of ‘partnership’. According to Eriksson Baaaz it has been difficult to create a non-paternalist and equal relationship between donor and recipient. She also underlines that studies show that partnership does not work in the practice of development aid, and that some claim that there might be hidden agendas in trying to apply a partnership (Eriksson Baaaz, 2005, 6-7). The author does stress, however, that reducing partnership to being an empty rhetoric is a simplification, and that the development industry is too heterogeneous to contain a coordinated conspiracy (Eriksson Baaaz, 2005, 8).

Degnbol-Martinussen and Engeberg-Pedersen also stress the two important ideas in the development aid industry of ‘partnership’ and ‘equality’ - these concepts entails the NGO in the South being in a decision-making position. They state, nonetheless, that this can be easier said than done – many Northern NGOs support these ideas in theory, but find it hard to realize in practice. Another concern is that inequalities can be ‘reinforced by the fact that large NGOs
in the North usually have bureaucratic structures with fixed routines and formal procedures for managing their aid work’ (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 149). This leads to the NGO in the South having to follow the formal demands if they wish to have a cooperation.

Recipients of aid are no longer referred to as ‘beneficiaries’ or ‘counterparts’ because of the implied passivity in these terms. Here the substituting term ‘recipient’ will be used. Although in a partnership, a common problem has been that projects have collapsed when the funding ends due to a negligence in transfer of skills and responsibilities to ‘local’ agencies. To remedy this there is a need for a better partnership, according to Crewe and Harrison.

“The partners of aid agencies are expected to achieve self-reliance through capacity-building. Most aid agencies aim, in theory at least, to become redundant within the partnership” (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 70).

Crewe and Harrison argues that between conditionalities and the good governance agenda, it is difficult to imagine a cooperation between equals within partnerships. They pose the question; “Is the idea of partnership … empty rhetoric, a form of ‘political correctness’ without substance?” (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 71).

According to Crewe and Harrison, the term ‘partnership’ is not clearly defined, which might be one of the reasons for its allure. They claim that practitioners and academics who recommend the partnership-model, will do so considering it a way of managing projects, rather than challenging power relations (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 75).

The Role of NGOs in development cooperation

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and are often focused on the poor, women and in newer years also the environment. According to Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen these organizations place great value on people’s participation through civil society. NGOs intend to strengthen people’s capacity to drive development themselves. Crewe and Harrison describe capacity-building as activities such as skills development, by for example learning to write proposals and reports, accounting, and auditing, creating alliances and networking. Capacity-building has become an important part of the type of aid Northern NGOs contribute with. A critical view of capacity-building is that it implies that the Northern NGO has
knowledge which is *valuable for sharing*, and Crewe and Harrison claim that ‘local’ knowledge is often considered ‘less than’ (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 95).

On the topic of evaluations and research on the impact of aid, Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen state that ‘…for many years, donor agencies and Western researchers have completely dominated these areas, but the authorities, NGOs and researchers in the South have gradually manifested themselves as independent actors who evaluate aid cooperation’s usefulness on the basis of their own interests and perspectives’ (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 216).

Alan Fowler suggests that the phases of a cooperation between a foreign (I)NGO and a local organization should be as following: entry, integration and consolidation, and withdrawal.

- **Entry**: central elements such as thorough preparation and in-depth discussion with the partner organization, and through this formulate common understandings and goals.
- **Integration**: development workers from outside can be directly involved in activities, however the ideal is to help build the partner organization’s own capacity and support integration of activities being funded.
- **Consolidation**: foreign development workers should ideally become advisers, and so the responsibility and decision-making competence have to be transferred to the partner organization. This is crucial so that it is possible to carry out a withdrawal without ending activities because of the withdrawal of the foreign NGO.
- **Withdrawal**: following the previous steps it should be possible for the project and activities to continue once the foreign NGO has left (Fowler in Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 153).

Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen remark that the completion of these phases can be difficult in practice, and many organizations cannot continue activities once the funding disappears, which has been one of the development aid industry’s great challenges.

**Cultural and local knowledge in the aid industry**

Keesing and Strathern explain that a culture ‘refers to those socially transmitted patterns for behaviour characteristic of a particular social group’ (Keesing & Strathern, 1998, 14). They note that the defining of the term ‘culture’ has been largely debated and both deemed too broad for explaining elements of human behaviour, yet many have tried to narrow it down so
it can be used in a more precise way. In this context the chosen definition of culture is by Ralph Linton:

“The sum total of knowledge, attitudes and habitual behaviour patterns shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society” (Linton 1940 in Keesing & Strathern, 15).

The importance of cultural and local knowledge in aid relationships has been placed on the agenda and acknowledged in recent years. With a shift away from the ‘value-free, results-orientation of the mechanical approach to organizations’, many researchers are paying more attention to cultural and social dynamics (Ramalingam, 2013, 86). According to a substantial part of the literature about development aid cooperation, having cultural knowledge is important for the success of projects and collaborations between organizations and states. Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen also underline this, and state that aid has moved from being mostly concerned with capital, technology and organization to including a political discussion about society, also involving placing cultural, religious and identity issues on the foreign aid agenda (Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 41). This is also emphasized by Eriksson Baaz who says that the development industry has gradually placed greater focus on ‘culturally sensitive’ cooperation (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 153).

An example of this is given by Crewe and Harrison (1998), who mention an example of a fish-farming project in Luapula province in Zambia. The pilot project was what Aquaculture for Local Community Development (ALCOM), a programme of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, called “an extraordinary case of fish-farming success”, because many people had dug fish-ponds seemingly on their own initiative and with little help. It was decided to research this supposed success through fieldwork studying the farmers and their relationship with project workers and ALCOM people (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 9). The goal of the fish-farming project was “the consolidation and improvement of existing fish-farming in the province and the strengthening of the local Department of Fisheries (DoF)”. After four years of considerable efforts and activity a review showed that the objectives had not been achieved.

“Fieldwork observations pointed to great discrepancies between the aspirations and aims of the ALCOM personnel, the local staff, and the farmers of Luapula. The planners’ assumptions, whether about motivation for fish-farming and local social relations or the priorities and commitment of the department, had been fairly wide of the mark” (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 10).
The study showed that the planners’ presumption of people’s reasons for farming was not necessarily based on economic rationality, that the project workers and the department were not in sync, and that the impact of earlier intervention by ALCOM and others was not taken into consideration. According to Crewe and Harrison the most important failure of the project, and which is quite common in development programmes, is the spending of large amounts of money without evidence that the beneficiaries are actually benefiting (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 10).

Furthering this argument, Crewe and Harrison refer to the critiques of development within the literature on ‘Putting the Last First’ and ‘Farmer First’ where lack of consultation with indigenous or local people and culturally insensitive, top-down interventions are central. Two issues persist in this literature: a turnaround in the attitudes and methods of the developers, and to better understand what the needs and priorities are of people receiving funding.

“The problem is still articulated as one of communication: with better understanding of what people already know and consultation about their needs, the process of development can proceed more effectively” (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 161).

‘Cultural barriers’ is described as a ‘conflict between values of individualism and those of communalism’ (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 132). Some claim that cultural barriers can be the reason for development interventions not succeeding. Because development is largely based on theories of modernization, and because of the supposed dichotomy between traditional culture and modernity, some argue that ‘Westerners’ follow modern rationality, while the ‘Others’ have cultural barriers. Nevertheless, Crewe and Harrison stress that ‘culture is a process that everyone is part of’ (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 133).

Rapley insists the same, noting that some modernization theorists have argued that Third-World peoples did not have the cultural values to make them entrepreneurial, lacking values as for example the ‘profit motive’. It is further argued that for development to advance, a Westernization and education in capitalist values is necessary. Underdevelopment is thus thought of by modernization theorists as an initial state which should be changed, and which the West has progressed beyond (Rapley, 2007, 24). This can be explained as evolutionism and Eurocentrism, which will be explained in the subsequent chapters.

According to Eriksson Baaz, racialism has been substituted for culturalism and cultural racism. While racialism would attribute the differences between for example the Westerner and the African to skin colour or biology, culturalism will attribute it to a ‘cultural difference’.
The intellectual inferiority of the Other is thus moved from biology to culture (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 47).

“References to cultural differences are recurrent in policy documents, and development workers are repeatedly urged to pay attention to them. That is, they are encouraged to pay attention to the difference between themselves and the Other – not to the similarities” (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 100).

**Indigenous peoples**

In Ecuador there are fourteen different indigenous nationalities, of which approximately 85 percent belong to the Kichwa peoples (UNICEF, 2001, 10). According to Escobar indigenous peoples as ‘development subjects, objects, and conceptualizers’ has greatly increased in recent years. He argues that indigenous actors are at the forefront with criticism of the development industry, explaining the recurrent incompatibility of development projects with their worldviews, and pointing out limitations in the European models (Escobar, 2012, Preface xi). The indigenous peoples in Ecuador are also at the forefront in the struggle to protect the environment, which in Ecuador in large part means protecting the rainforest.

As Marcus Colchester argues, the idea of mankind as separated from nature is an idea constructed in Western civilization. This is not the case in many indigenous peoples’ ‘animistic’ religions where they ‘see culture in nature, and nature in culture’ (Colchester, 1997, 97). The author states that the world view in ancient Greece consisted of nature being a threat to the city state, and untamed nature as designated ‘female’ and irrational characteristics, while culture being rational and ‘male’. The same discussion can be found in the West/East, North/South debate. According to Eriksson Baaz the East is portrayed as the West’s inferior Other in Edward Said’s ‘Orientalism’ (1978), which has in turn strengthened the West’s self-image as a superior civilization. A thought of East and West as opposites has given rise to the dichotomy of the West being rational, progressive and democratic, as opposed to the East being irrational, backward and despotic (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 43). This dichotomy can also be found in the ‘colonizing Self’ and the ‘colonized Other’.

“The colonized Others were, in various ways, defined in terms of their difference from the West” (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 43).
As maintained by Colchester the threat of barbarians to the civilized man was epitomized by the ‘Amazons – long-haired, naked, female savages who represented the antithesis to Greek civilization’ (Colchester, 1997, 98).

Indigenous peoples in Ecuador, as in the rest of Latin America, have been systematically oppressed since the beginning of the conquest - ‘la Conquista’ (Beck and Mijeski, 2000, 119), and many of the rationalizations described above have been used as the justification for this oppression.

**Critical perspectives on development aid**

There is no shortage of criticism of the development aid industry. According to Ramalingam, development consultants have been called by developing country counterparts ‘a plague of seagulls’ who ‘…fly in, flap around for a while, drop large white wads, and then fly off again’ (Ramalingam, 2013, 9). This message of chaos could be explained in part by the fact that development aid has moved away from the handful of bilateral and multilateral institutions giving aid, to including multitude of the aforementioned institutions, as well as INGOs, foundations, and private corporations (Fengler & Kharas, 2010, 1), and has thus become more complex.

**FIGURE 1-1. The Old Reality of Aid**

Source: Adapted from Homi Kharas, “Trends and Issues in Development Aid” (Brookings, 2007).
Crewe and Harrison mentions that Europeans used their superior technologies as a justification for the ‘white man’s burden’, namely civilizing the ‘underdeveloped’ (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 31). According to them there is also an idea within the development industry of traditions as holding people back, and that ‘traditional culture’ is not reasonable. They emphasize the point that there exist international political and economic systems which validate the idea of ‘First World’ being advanced and ‘Third World’ being backward. Further, Crewe and Harrison point out that because the development industry is predominantly commanded by technologists and economists, technology and economic growth continue to reflect what is thought of as development (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 47).

Peter Bauer argues that neither individuals nor states have any moral obligation to give aid or help of any kind. He claims that rich industrialized countries have accumulated their wealth in a just way and are in no way responsible for poverty in other countries. Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen refute this by saying:

“It is now obvious that further accumulation of wealth in the industrial countries is very much at the expense of developing countries’ long-term possibilities for material development, because this accumulation is based on exploitation of exhaustible natural resources, both in developing countries and globally” (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 12).

This injustice is by many seen as one of the reasons the foreign aid system needs to be in place. Crewe and Harrison argue that approaches such as participatory research approaches suggest that it was necessary to include recipients and local communities in development and that mistakes have been made because this was not done earlier (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 14).

**Evolutionism**

“Whichever political theory accompanies it, evolutionism has rhetorically justified intervention in ‘backward’ countries since European colonization, … through the presupposition that the influence of more advanced outsiders will enable traditional societies to catch up with them” (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 28).
The date when underdevelopment ‘began’, 20 January 1949, can be pinpointed because of President Truman’s post-war ‘bold new program’ for the development of underdeveloped areas. These underdeveloped areas were described as having ‘a primitive and stagnant economic life’ and defined in terms of ‘poverty’, ‘misery’, and ‘disease’ (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 37). This rhetoric marks the underdeveloped countries as something which should be avoided, something which is implicitly negative, and underlines the power in language and communication.

Eriksson Baaz (2005) explains the idea of society evolving as in biology, where biological organisms went from unicellular to more complex, as would society change from primitive and simple, to modern and complex. This idea supported the notion of some people being backward and others being higher on the evolutionary ladder. According to Eriksson Baaz, this is what legitimized “the white man’s burden” of civilizing and developing the “underdeveloped” (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 37).

“According to this discourse (of evolutionary development), one thing that connects Europeans and makes them different from Africans is that they belong to a higher level of development” (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 38-39).

This is seconded by Rapley (2007) who comments that underdevelopment has been thought of as an initial state, which the West has evolved beyond. However, the countries that were still underdeveloped were somehow lagging behind, a ‘problem’ which the West could help fix by helping to speed up development in the Third World. This could, according to this way of thinking, be done by the West ‘sharing its capital and know-how, to bring these countries into the modern age of capitalism and liberal democracy” (Rapley, 2007, 25).

“The traditional societies are all destined to become modern ones, according to this scheme” (Melkote & Steeves, 2001, 29).

An idea that societies are progressing in a linear way towards the same goal, is one of the ideas of development. This idea entails that development must follow certain stages, none of which can be skipped, for development to be successful. A conception of development going too fast has been attributed to the failure of certain development processes. (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 40). In this case development means moving from ‘tradition’ to ‘modernity’, and this development is often thought of as technological. Another idea of progress is related to money; the more you have, the greater the quality of life.
“All humans are (or at least should be if ‘modern’) motivated by rational, self-interested acquisitiveness” (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 25).

As mentioned, the combination of a supposed backwardness and ‘time lag’ in developing countries has been central in development discourse. Statements such as ‘…sometimes I have thought that I have ended up somewhere in the 1910s, 1920s or 1930s…’ is not uncommon when speaking of ‘underdeveloped’ countries (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 39). This idea of stages has given rise to the view of the general superiority of Europe, which is not only illustrated in the underdeveloped countries’ lack of technology, but an assumed ‘backwardness’ in their cultures and practices, which Europe has left behind long ago (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 111).

Not only has this way of thinking affected the development discourse about countries and societies, but it has also justified a derogatory rhetoric about the people in these societies.

“… the image of the lazy native, ‘indolent and without ambition in the midst of tropical plenty’, was central to legitimizing the colonial project. The terra nullius principle, according to which Europeans had the right to possess unoccupied – defined as ‘uncultivated’ – foreign land, underpinned the claim to legality of colonialism” (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 121).

In addition to this, in colonial rhetoric it was the white man’s undertaking to help the native out of passivity and into productivity (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 121), a version of which it is still possible to find in today’s development aid industry.

**Eurocentrism**

“Overcoming Eurocentrism is an illusory project in that even the most explicit and successful efforts to challenge it take place in a material and discursive context that remains grounded in a Eurocentric international order” (Berger, 2001, 153).

Eurocentrism can be explained as the idea that the European culture should be universal (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 103). Eurocentrism is closely related to that of evolutionism, in that it suggests a stance of Europe and Europeans as being on superior to others. In this school of thought, the European society and culture should act as a model that the rest of the world should strive to emulate. The focus on the cultural differences, and the European culture defined – explicitly or implicitly – as superior to other cultures, has been a recurrent theme in the development aid industry. Eriksson Baaz notes that the emphasis on cultural difference
has made its way into development policy documents, and development workers are encouraged to be aware of these differences, but not to the similarities. The author notes that this can hinder possible identification between the actors in development, and even create alienation and fear (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 103).

Several post-development authors claim that Eurocentrism is at the core of development, and that development is a form of cultural imperialism, or acts as a continuation of colonialism. This idea entails that the industrialized states are still controlling countries in the Third World, only now it is through controlling development. This has not only been negative. Eriksson Baaz argues that this critique of Eurocentrism has affected the development industry in that there has been placed a larger emphasis on ‘culturally sensitive’ cooperation. Other symptoms of this critique are the introduction of new terminology (partnership), new roles for the development workers – from manager to adviser – and the renouncement of paternalism (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 153).

Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen give an example of Eurocentrism in practice in the development aid industry. The authors refer to a British survey from the mid-90s in which 80 percent of the Northern NGOs did not want to give direct funding to Southern NGOs. The Northern NGOs expressed this on the basis that they thought ‘Southern NGOs lack experience to manage, monitor and evaluate projects …; they are likely to respond to availability of money rather than need’, among other reasons (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 149).

As has been noted in the chapter about evolutionism, Eurocentrism also creates a divide between people, and can ascribe specific characteristics to certain people or groups. When looking at the world through Eurocentric glasses, the European is civilized, modern and progressive, and the ‘others’ are primitive, traditional and lazy (Crewe and Harrison, 1998, 30). As opposed to the traditional cultures which are thought to be unchanging, European technology has been thought to be so valuable, because it has been perceived as the ‘engine for progress’, along with money. According to Crewe and Harrison ‘the importance of technology in European images of modernity cannot be overstated’, and has been something which Non-European civilizations have been measured by (Crewe and Harrison, 1998, 30-31). In this way, ‘non-Western’ cultures and civilizations have been seen as the West’s ‘Other’.
There is a discursive strategy where the tables are turned regarding the First and the Third World. Here, the negative imagery of the Third World is substituted by a positive one, and vice versa in the First World.

“Thus the problems are located in the West while the virtues reside within the Third World Other. In general, the non-West before development is described as a happy place characterized by solidarity, conviviality and ‘noble forms of poverty’” (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 155).

Even though the non-Western cultures have been placed on what Eriksson Baaz calls the ‘lowest step of the evolutionary ladder’, they have also been an ‘object of desire’. So, the theory of Europeans as superior has also been turned upside down, with the idea of the ‘noble savage’, who was thought to have a ‘simple and innocent life untouched by the vices of Europe’ (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 55). Thus this could be explained as binary oppositions ‘between a spiritual, convivial, mutually aiding, sober Other and a despiritualized individualist, egocentric, materialist West” (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 156).

What both the Eurocentric model and the idea of the noble savage have in common, however, is the idea that the world is separated in ‘us’ and ‘them’, the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’.

**External paternalism and conditionalities in development aid**

Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen pose the question of whether development cooperation has become *external paternalism*, because donors have gone *too far* in influencing how things are done in recipient countries. They question whether the aid industry knows which development policy and organization of society are best, and if developing countries are so indistinguishable that they can be recommended the same development policy and social organization model. According to the authors, donors do tend to strive for the same developmental model for vastly different countries (Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 270). This has also been a topic touched upon by Rapley, who notes:

“In some cases the World Bank and especially the IMF virtually forced third-world countries into accepting neoclassical policies in return for funding. In the course of the 1980s, developing countries increasingly implemented neoclassical recipes for development” (Rapley, 2007, 77).
The change in development goals, in that they now included a wish to influence political development in the recipient countries, had before been frowned upon in the industry. The change was backed up by saying that democracy and good governance would increase economic development, and that human rights were an important part of relieving poverty. ‘Good governance’ encompasses human rights and the idea of democratic pluralism as the best way of social and political organization (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 69). In addition to this, bilateral donors would use political development goals as a way of conditioning aid.

These explicit *conditions* in the aid industry during the 1980s and 90s, were implemented because some donors believed that they knew what a recipient country needed even better than the country’s own government. Crewe and Harrison mention structural adjustment loans as an economic conditionality, loans which require economic changes such as fiscal reform, reduction of public sector, and elimination of subsidies (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 69). Structural adjustment is widely criticized and conveys the idea that ‘we know best’, as maintained by Crewe and Harrison.

“These newer tendencies entail increased interference in recipient countries’ political affairs, which raises several problems. There is undoubtedly broad support, in most recipient countries too, for the basic idea of promoting democratization and respect for basic human rights, but there are many contradictory ideas about how these goals can be best realized” (Degnbol-Martinussen, 2003: 279).

There has been increasing pressure from the dominating actors in the new economic world order on marginalized countries, these actors being private transnational corporations and finance institutions, official international organizations (WTO, IMF, World Bank) and confederations of states such as the OECD and the EU (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 269). Conditionalities are more widespread than before, and the aim of a package of conditionalities is to influence the whole policy process from structuring decision-making processes, to policy formulation, to implementation (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 270).

By the 1990s the new current within the antiglobalization movement, postdevelopment theory, was gaining grounds. Postdevelopment ‘questioned the whole concept of development itself’ (Rapley, 2007, 4) and deemed it to be more concerned with establishing external control, rather than improving people’s lives.
However, this is not straightforward, because DAC countries have underlined these countries’ right to lead the development cooperation, through declarations which have been approved by the DAC (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 31).

**Power structures within development aid**

“The absence of a recognition of the importance of power relations and the conflicting character of the development process can contribute to weakening the impact of foreign aid, because the work becomes organized on the basis of unrealistic and rather naïve premises” (Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 5).

According to Eriksson Baaz the unequal power relations within the aid relationship are often downplayed. In the author’s opinion, conflicting interests between donor and recipient is often presented as unproblematic in the official rhetoric. Some argue that this is one of the significant problems in development intervention, namely the downplaying of conflicts of interest. There does not exist a harmonious relationship based on mutual goals, but what Norman Long calls ‘a battlefield of knowledge’ with different interests and goals. This ‘battlefield’ is characterized by the donor and the partner having conflicting goals (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 73-74).

Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen note the same, underlining that ‘there is a widespread tendency to obscure the actual power relationship by using words and formulations that make it appear that foreign aid comprises collaboration between equal partners’ (Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 1). As per the authors, although there may exist examples of the aid relationship being quite equal, they emphasize that in general the donors set the agenda and conditions for the partnership. They argue that these unequal power relations can act as a crucial obstacle for economic, social and political change. Further, they note that resource-weak groups need to be ‘strengthened politically in relation to those in power (Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 5).

An example of a way for the recipients to tackle these unequal power relations, is expressed by Crewe and Harrison. They mention the fact that what people say may not always be a true reflection of reality. A project report from 1992 states that a group of women potters would abide by anything ‘outsiders’ wanted to teach them. Crewe and Harrison argue that this is not necessarily the case, but that they may have expressed the willingness to abide because they
want to come off as cooperative. Speaking on the topic of ‘beneficiaries’ being simply obedient in order to receive development aid, they note:

“…in conjunction with their own ideas, people may appropriate ideas that they perceive to be the currency of powerful people, and through using them in certain contexts find that they are more effective in their relationships with these powerful people” (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 160).

Ramalingam asserts that the ultimate recipients of aid are the ‘least powerful stakeholders in the system’, and he argues that this is in conflict with aid agencies’ moral positioning, because the aid agencies are supposed to exist to help others (Ramalingam, 2013, 88). Nevertheless, the motives for giving aid might not be so clear-cut, and both national security considerations and political and economic interests, have been mentioned in addition to moral and humanitarian motives for giving aid (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 8).

**Empowerment**

“We can see that aspirations towards participation, however genuine, take place in the context of existing relations of power and hierarchy. But a division between powerful developers and powerless recipients does not do justice to the complex power relations involved” (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 184).

One of the main aims of development-oriented NGOs is the empowerment of groups which are excluded from decision-making processes. This can be explained as strengthening a certain groups’ own organization and in that way strengthening their position of power in relation to other parts of society. This mechanism is often called ‘empowerment’, which is defined here as strengthening groups and organizations so that they can protect and promote their interests (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 37).

Empowerment is also explained as comprising ‘both immediate improvements in poor people’s material living standards and a psychological-social dimension’ and continue:

“This latter aspect can be characterized briefly as a stronger feeling of self-respect, to be achieved by uncovering internalized norms and feelings of inferiority that have contributed to their oppression” (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 153).
Melkote and Steeves’ definition of empowerment is ‘the process by which individuals, organizations, and communities gain control and mastery over social and economic conditions …, democratic participation in their communities … and over their stories’ (Melkote & Steeves, 2001, 37).

Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen note that empowerment is considered to be relational and relative, and that the focus is on both participatory rights and empowering, for example poor people, in relation to other groups in society such as dominant economic or political elite. The authors go on saying that although a better framework for self-organization and participation can be attained by governments, for the most part empowerment processes cannot be carried out by outside actors- as they say ‘NGOs and other outside actors can help, but it is impossible for outside actors to empower target groups; rather, these groups – as co-operating partners – must receive assistance in order to take root and grow stronger’ (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 154).

**Economic inequalities**

The economic inequalities between industrialized countries - the donor countries - and developing countries - the recipient countries – are undeniable. According to Eriksson Baaz the recipient has to have the same goals as the donor, and certain criteria needs to be met on the recipient’s end. The author argues that this is so because partnerships usually end if the recipient does not share the objectives of the donor, or because they do not follow the plan and objectives (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 74). There has been a change in aid terminology and the before-called ‘donors’ and ‘receivers’ are now both ‘partners’, yet this does not change the power dynamics involved in the relationship. As Eriksson Baaz states:

“The basic economic inequalities implied in the donor/receiver or partner/partner relationship remain, and situate the donor in a privileged power position” (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 75).

According to the author it is the donor which sets up ‘the rules of the game’ because of the aforementioned economic inequality. The partners are not painted as passive victims in this, yet they need to follow these rules should they want the partnership to continue. Whether a project is successful or not is often viewed differently from the donor’s side and the partner’s side. It is not uncommon that failure is thought of as being a result of the recipient’s efforts,
and due to the recipient’s lack of knowledge and capacity, unreliability, indifference or passivity (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 75).

Crewe and Harrison concur, arguing that an equality rhetoric in partnership is an empty rhetoric. The authors underline that there ‘is a gloss over the dominance that donors retain through their control of finance and the construction of public knowledge about development’ (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 189).
4. Method

Understanding social phenomena and giving voice

The differences between qualitative and quantitative methods are numerous, but one of the most important distinctions is the focus on in-depth knowledge versus the big picture. Although quantitative studies may summarize large amounts of information about many different cases at once, this may not always be the best way of understanding social phenomena. Ragin and Amoroso even argue that big-picture representations might seriously misrepresent social phenomena (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011, 111). As pointed out by the authors: ‘researchers do not want these broad views of social phenomena because they believe that a proper understanding can be achieved only through in-depth examination of specific cases’ (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011, 111).

In the case of understanding how the actors in the environmental movement in Ecuador experience international aid cooperation, it was necessary to talk to the actors at length to understand their viewpoints, and their way of seeing the situation in Ecuador. As Ragin and Amoroso (2011) states, qualitative research is especially appropriate for giving voice, interpreting culturally or historically significant phenomena, and advancing theory (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011, 113). Giving voice, often to marginalized groups, encompasses representing and letting the views of people who are usually not heard, be known. Although the case of the environmental movement in Ecuador may not fall under the category of “marginalized group”, I argue that knowing more about their outlook on development aid, in one of the most ecologically and biologically diverse countries in the world, is important. Although not a marginalized group, not much is being written about, nor has been written about, their perspective on the topic of the development aid cooperation in the country.

Interpreting culturally or historically significant phenomena and advancing theory are also potential aspects of the goals of qualitative research, yet my focus has been on “giving voice”. By this I do not claim that my giving a voice to the environmental movement in Ecuador is of importance to their operations, but I do believe that theirs is an important story to tell. Their experience, knowledge and opinions related to international aid cooperation can shed light on how development aid can best be utilized and implemented in their country.
Reasons for choosing qualitative interviews

My chosen research method is qualitative in-depth interviews. According to Ragin and Amoroso (2011) the purpose of in-depth interviewing is to understand how the informants make sense of their worlds. They argue that simply observing can deprive the researcher of important biographic details revealed during interviews (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011, 123). To obtain extensive knowledge of a research subject, one must base this knowledge on the perspective of the people being studied, and try to see the world through their eyes (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011, 123). This has been my intention in this study, namely to see international aid though the eyes of the receivers, in this case the actors in the environmental movement in Ecuador.

The most common way of collecting qualitative data is through interviews. The qualitative interview is described as a conversation with a certain structure and purpose by Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) (Kvale & Brinkmann in Johannessen, 2011, 135). The authors mention several important reasons to choose in-depth interviews as your chosen method, such as:

- The informants can express themselves more freely
- The informants can reconstruct occurrences
- The researcher can make custom-made interviews for each informant
- Qualitative interviews can uncover the nuances and complexities which exist in social phenomena
- Qualitative interviews can also be used as a supplementing method (Johannesen, 2011, 136-37).

Considering the first aspect, the informants being able to express themselves more freely as opposed to in a questionnaire, I would say this is one of the most important aspects for my research. Taking into account that this study concerns people’s experiences, I found it necessary for them to be able to explain everything in their own words. It was very useful to be able to discuss with my informants what they find important, and why. It allowed my informants to explain certain things in detail, and why something I wanted to discuss might not be relevant to them, or why other issues which I had not considered might be useful to my research. I made an effort to make the questions in my interview-guide open so that there were different ways of replying to each question, and ended each interview asking if the informant had anything to add which might be of importance to the study. It was also very useful to me that the informants could reconstruct occurrences, as many of the examples
about successful or failed development aid projects were illustrated by stories the informants had experienced.

Johannesen et al. (2011) also underline that another reason for choosing the qualitative in-depth interviews is that it can uncover the nuances and complexities which exist in social phenomena, which I believe to be another of the most important reasons for choosing in-depth interviews for this specific project.

**Selection strategy and recruiting informants**

Qualitative studies differ from quantitative studies in that they intend to accumulate as much information as possible about a phenomenon, and select their informants strategically. This strategic selection of informants is called purposeful sampling and has a clear object; The researcher circles in the relevant target group for collecting the necessary data, and chooses informants from this group (Johannessen et al., 2011, 106). In my case I aimed to interview actors in the Ecuadorian environmental movement about their experiences with, and opinions about, international development aid cooperation in Ecuador.

I set out contacting the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) and an environmental NGO, both actors having had projects in Ecuador. In NORAD I had a conversation with a person after receiving his contact details from my tutor, and he further put me in contact with one of his colleagues who knew more about the issues I was researching. I had a fruitful in-depth conversation with the second contact in NORAD and he invited me to Oslo REDD Exchange in June 2016, which was useful to get insight into how the UN’s REDD program works, in addition to general environmental challenges.

I also reached out to an employee and acquaintance working in the environmental NGO in Norway, and started with a conversation with her. This person thus directed me to talk to two of her colleagues with profound knowledge of the environmental situation in Ecuador. Consequently, I had interviews with them both to learn more about the situation in Ecuador regarding the environment, and their view on challenges and strengths in the aid cooperation between Norway and Ecuador.

After a few conversations with people working there, I was invited to a two-day seminar in Oslo conducted by the aforementioned environmental NGO, with their partners from the Amazon rainforest. At this seminar, I met my first informant from Ecuador – an employee in
an NGO working with socio-environmental projects. After arriving in Quito this was one of the first people I interviewed.

I started out researching organizations and people working for and with the environment in Ecuador, more specifically in Quito. The initial strategy for recruiting informants which I used was an intensive selection. After researching the environmental movement in Ecuador, I narrowed my target group down to certain organizations, institutions and people. I proceeded by reaching out to approximately 20 actors by e-mail. After a few weeks without any responses, I sent another e-mail to all the actors asking if they had received my first e-mail and whether it would be possible to meet with them. Once again I did not receive any replies. I decided to contact them directly by going to their offices once I got to Quito.

Once in Quito I went straight to the offices of one of the most prominent national environmental NGOs, and after much back and forth, and being uncomfortably insistent, I landed an interview with an employee there (and later also with the president of the organization). I also got an interview with an acquaintance of my tutor, an interview with an acquaintance of a fellow student, and an acquaintance of someone I met at a social gathering in Quito. I would describe the following as snowball-sampling. At the end of every interview I held, I asked if they knew someone else in the environmental movement they thought I should talk to, and whether they could put me in contact with these people. Requiring phone numbers and e-mail addresses, and with a lot of persistency, the ball started rolling. In the end, I could have interviewed even more people than I did, having built a network of contacts, but time did not permit more interviews.

**Selection size**

In qualitative methods, it is common to try and get as much information as possible from a select number of people – the informants. The number of informants can be limitless, but it is necessary to keep in mind both time and money available for the research project (Johannessen et al., 2001, 104). A point of saturation is reached when the researcher stops learning new things about the case studied. Ideally the researcher should keep investigating until this point is met, and information starts to become repetitive or excessive (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011, 117). In my case I do not think I met a point of saturation, because I could probably gain even more insight had I had the resources to do so. I had to take into account both the time and money I had at my disposal in terms of how long I could stay in Ecuador. I
did, however, find patterns, and many things were repeated in the course of my stay in Ecuador. I believe I have covered the grounds needed with my interviews to be able to answer my research question, but I acknowledge that there are other people and organizations which would have been both helpful and interesting to interview.

I started out the interview process in Norway whilst still figuring out my research question. I had my four first unstructured interviews in Norway, with NORAD and the environmental NGO, as mentioned. These interviews helped me map out some of the main actors in Ecuador and reflect upon what could be an interesting research question.

The principal selection of my informants is from Ecuador. I have interviewed a variety of actors in the environmental movement in Quito. My informants work in Ecuadorian NGO’s and INGO’s, the UN, the ministry of climate and environment, universities, grassroots organizations and as well as other individual actors. I aimed at obtaining at least 8 interviews as a minimum. After my fieldwork was done I counted 21 interviews from Ecuador.

**Interviews in Ecuador**

Seeing as all my informants have signed a form stating that they will remain anonymous, I will not make their names nor their exact place of work known. I will, however, share what kind of organization they work for and/or what kind of position they hold, as well as other general information about the informants to give the reader an idea of their relevance to this study. All my informants are from Latin America, and most of them are from Ecuador, with a couple of exceptions with many years’ experience in Ecuador.

All interviews were held in Spanish. They were taped with two tape recorders, and I made notes during the interviews. Most of the interviews were between 45 and 90 minutes.

**Interviews in chronological order**

1) Ph.D. and academic working with indigenous education. Experience with international cooperation, World Bank.

2) Coordinated execution of UN Small Grants Program project in indigenous community, focused on deforestation, degradation of environment and climate change.
3) Academic, author, member of the Constituent Assembly, «Ideological father of the environmental discourse».

4) Employee in, and co-founder of, one of the largest environmental NGOs in Ecuador. In charge of green economy and environmental services.

5) Director in one of the most significant indigenous organizations in Ecuador.

6) Researcher for Ecuadorian NGO with focus on environment, among other issues. Experience with Socio Bosque/UN REDD+.

7) Employee in INGO working with Ecuadorian grassroots organizations like CONAIE (indigenous organization).

8) President and co-founder of one of the most well-known environmental NGOs in Ecuador.

9) Executive director of one of the world’s largest environmental INGOs.

10) United Nations employee with focus on the environment.

11) Director of one of the departments in the Ministry of Environment in Ecuador.

12) Employee working with indigenous issues in a large INGO.

13) Renowned environmental lawyer with experience working with environmental issues in the Amazon.

14) President of Ecuadorian NGO working with marine conservation.

15) Director of a Latin American INGO with focus on development and sustainability.

16) Director of one of the world’s largest environmental INGOs.
17) Environmental lawyer with experience from environmental INGOs and the UN.

18) Director of an INGO working with pressing global issues.

19) Employee in Ecuadorian environmental NGO.

20) President in one of the world’s largest environmental INGOs. Experience from the UN and co-founder of Ecuadorian environmental NGO.

21) Director in one of the world’s largest environmental INGOs.

**Analytical method**

**Thematic analysis**

In order to systematize the analysis, I have chosen an analytical method which is widely used, stemming from the field of psychology, called thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 80).

I chose this method because it is what I have found to be what I would naturally do to analyse my data. An essential issue in thematic analysis is the importance of the researcher in the choice of themes and findings. It underlines the active role of the researcher in identifying and choosing themes and patterns, and refutes the idea of ‘themes emerging or residing in data’, as if it could be ‘found’ by anyone reading.

“If themes ‘reside’ anywhere, they reside in our heads from our thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them” (Ely in Braun & Clarke, 2006, 80).

This is also pointed out by Ragin and Amoroso, stating that researchers can potentially collect an unlimited amount of data, and that researches need to select and ignore evidence based on their ideas, analytic frames and interests (Ragin and Amoroso, 2011, 69). I acknowledge my role in choosing which evidence I focus on, and that this is not something which lies latent in the data I have collected. Nevertheless, my aim is to convey the experiences and opinions of my informants as meticulously as possible.
I started analysing my material by listening through all the interviews and noting all parts I considered of importance. I transcribed certain parts which I thought I might use as quotes or other especially important discussions. I wrote down the specific time, the minute and second, of these quotes or discussion so I could revisit them at a later point. Considering the time I had at my disposal, and the fact that I had 21 interviews in Ecuador and 4 in Norway, I did not transcribe all of the interviews as it would have taken too much time. While going through the interviews I looked for patterns as well as one off, intriguing comments or opinions. Most of my results will rely on the patterns I have found.

I continued by finding major themes, which is in part what I found most of my informants focusing on, but I also recognize my part in bringing up subjects and the role that my interview guide played. As Ragin and Amoroso states:

“The empirical world is limitless in its detail and complexity. Social research thus necessarily involves a selection of evidence” (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011: 69).

After selecting five major themes for the results, I went through all interviews again to explore if I had overlooked anything of importance relating specifically to these themes. I revisited the themes and they were revised, but not discarded, after this. The written systematization of the interviews has been continuously used. I proceeded to translate all quotes, and most of the discussions, of importance from Spanish to English.

**Reliability and validity**

In qualitative studies reliability is referred to as *random error*, and refers to how much randomness can be found in a specific measure. This randomness can according to Ragin and Amoroso occur because of different surrounding events (Ragin and Amoroso, 2011, 175). Reliability is concerned with the precision of research data, which data is being collected, the way it is collected and how it is processed (Johannesen et al., 2011, 40). According to Johannesen et al. reliability is usually tested in quantitative studies through either re-testing or several researchers investigating the same phenomenon and reaching the same conclusion (Johannesen et al., 2011, 40), however in qualitative studies this is not possible. This is because a) the structure is usually a conversation, b) the researcher’s observations are contextual and subjective and is thus hard to emulate, and c) the researcher uses his- or herself as an instrument in the research, and every researcher’s background and experience will
colour the investigation (Johannesen et al., 2001, 229). A way of bettering reliability in qualitative studies is through an accurate contextual description and presenting how the research has been realized in a detailed and transparent matter, which is what I have done here.

Closely related to reliability is validity, which is another important aspect to consider for social researchers. Validity can be understood as the social researcher intending to verify that their ‘data collection and measurement procedures work the way they claim’ (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011, 23). Qualitative research is not possible to quantify or measure, and consequently cannot be deemed valid by quantitative standards. However, the researcher can claim validity if the research truly reflects the phenomena and the reality being studied. This can be done through ‘long-term observation’, ‘triangulation’ or by conveying the results to the informants in the study, so that they can analyse the data. If their interpretation is similar to that of the researcher, the validity of the study is increased (Johannesen et al., 2011, 230). The validity of this study will be assessed through conveying the results to the informants, and I have been transparent and detailed throughout the process.

**Ethics**

It is a prerequisite that researchers follow certain ethical and judicial guidelines. In social research the focus on individuals and the interpersonal aspect makes these guidelines especially important (Johannesen et al., 2011, 89). All the informants in this study are anonymous.

This project has been registered in Norsk Senter for Forskningsdata (NSD) and approved by them. All recordings and notes will be deleted when the project is done. All my informants signed a letter agreeing to be a part of the study, which has been saved. A copy of the letter can be found in Appendix 2.
5. Results

An important contribution in assessments of aid, by Roger Riddell, asks the difficult question: *Does Foreign Aid Really Work?*, without finding an answer to the book’s title. The author underlines that many research studies start out with great ambition to address crucial questions, yet end up ‘wrecked, abandoned, or disappearing’ because of the complexity of aid and the critique that aid evaluations tells us nothing new (Riddell in Ramalingam, 2013, 10). After researching the aid industry, I have a newfound respect for the complexity it holds, and whether it is possible to pinpoint how these intricate systems can best be applied.

As we have seen, there exists an abundant amount of criticism of the development aid industry, and some would even suggest to ‘wage a global war on aid’ and to find another way for development to advance – such as through trade interests, corporate power or financial markets sorting it out (Ramalingam, 2013, 13). If development is to be environmentally sustainable I do not think it can be handed over to someone who would be inclined to treat nature as a commodity. Considering the progress the development aid industry has gone through since the Second World War, and the inclusion of environmental considerations in development, I will argue that the industry has come far, yet there is still a long way to go.

I have divided my results into five chapters. All the chapters will express the experiences of the well-versed people which I have interviewed. The first four chapters discusses topics which it is vital to have knowledge of, if one is to understand how development aid works as seen from the perspective of the environmental movement in Ecuador. These topics include local and cultural knowledge, indigenous peoples, criticism of aid and power relations. They are discussed by way of several sub-genres, which will help shed light on the overarching topic. There will be put more emphasis on certain sub-genres than others, yet the entirety of the sub-genres will paint a picture of why these topics are important. The fifth chapter concerns what is important in a successful cooperation, as seen from my informants’ points of view. Also, here there will be more focus on certain matters than others, but all the subjects have been carefully chosen to illustrate the opinions of my informants and their experiences. I will also introduce new literature in these chapters, to help paint a picture of the reality in Ecuador.

In the following I will present five chapters of key issues which in my opinion need to be discussed in order to understand international development aid cooperation in Ecuador, as seen from the perspective of the actors in the Ecuadorian environmental movement.
Local and cultural knowledge

“People in development agencies recognize that weaknesses in their projects could be partially attributed to a failure to understand or consult with the intended beneficiaries of their efforts” (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 161).

The term ‘culture’ has been given many definitions since the term became significant in the anthropological field during the nineteenth century. Here I will focus on ‘cultural knowledge’ in the sense of ‘culture’ being the awareness one has about ‘knowledge, attitudes and behaviour in a particular society’ (Keesing & Strathern, 1998, 15), in this case in Ecuador.

The importance of local and cultural knowledge in development cooperation was brought up consistently by my informants. Many emphasized that in order for people and agencies from the North to be able to understand how best to work in the South, they need to have knowledge of the local realities where they are going to be carrying out projects. On this topic, it was stated by several of my informants that there are certain significant differences between cultures in the North and in the South. My informants brought up issues such as the difference in realities, the logical framework in use, how predictable their lives are, what they consider to be good ways of communicating and working together, among other things. I will subsequently discuss some of the examples from the interviews with my informants.

Local realities

Nearly all my informants underlined how important it is for foreign development workers to know enough about the culture, local realities and internal dynamics of the country they are working with or in. Remember Crewe and Harrison’s example of the fish-farming project in Zambia, where they report of ‘great discrepancies’ between the aspirations of the development personnel and the local staff and farmers, which in turn led to the project not succeeding.

An environmental lawyer and author, with experience from INGOs and the UN, tells me of similar experiences. (S)he describes that the differences that exist, between for example Sweden and Ecuador, need to be taken into account:

“There are still discrepancies between what happens in Stockholm from what really happens in Papallacta, in Malchingui … In this journey you get lost, sometimes because of
technical terms or because of requirements of the offices to fulfil the formal vision of ‘add up the number of beneficiaries, and prepare the project and a logical framework’. I think that there, occasionally, you get lost” (Interview 17, 7.55 min.).

(S)he says that for development cooperation to function, you need to bring these realities closer to one another – the realities of the field need to be closer to the realities of the development cooperation offices. This entails, in my opinion, in development workers from the North needing to have a basic understanding of the culture, customs, language and everyday lives of the people they are going to work with, in order to bring the realities closer together. As pointed out by my informant, sitting in an office in Stockholm and being in the field in the Amazon rainforest for example, means having very different realities. I agree with my informant that for these realities to be brought closer together, the aid agency’s employees need to have in-depth knowledge of the situation in the country where projects are being implemented.

One of the complaints which could be heard frequently before, if not still, in the development industry, was that development workers from the North would start a project with a thought of already knowing how to make the project a success, with the help of economic models, a logical framework, and certain technological tools, for example. As Crewe and Harrison note, ‘…reformers within the development industry remain entangled in the principles and ideas upon which it was founded. These include a series of related assumptions, with their origin in the European Enlightenment, in which rationality, the search for objective truth, and a belief in a movement towards modernity are paramount’ (Crewe and Harrison, 1998, 15). This sort of Eurocentrism and way of thinking deeply anchored in the positivist tradition, might be one of the greatest obstacles to development projects succeeding, seeing as many projects are situated in places with other ways of seeing the world. Keywords continually brought up by informants such as ‘mutual respect’, ‘horizontality’, ‘reciprocity’ and ‘understanding’ paint a picture of a need to, mutually, understand each other to best be able to work together. In my opinion there is no room for neither the one, nor the other partner in an aid cooperation, to think that they have the answer on how to make the project succeed. It needs to be a co-operation.
Internal dynamics

All projects are made up of people, and both experts and my informants have mentioned how crucial the workers’ place-specific knowledge in the development industry is. Talking about cooperation which has been difficult, with an informant who has more than thirty years’ experience with development projects, (s)he says that it has depended largely on specific people, their career path and a (lack of) knowledge. (S)he says it can be a ‘cold person’ – not an uncommon description of Europeans -, but that this doesn’t matter as much as their knowledge.

“It’s important that they have knowledge. It is not the same level of rigidity with which you work in Europe, I guess. You have to understand the internal dynamics” (Interview 6, 32.00 min).

Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen confirm that certain large NGOs in the North have ‘bureaucratic structures with fixed routines and formal procedures for managing their aid work’ (Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 149), which can be difficult to merge with an NGO from the South. Although it is necessary to learn about internal dynamics and the way of working in the specific locations, I will argue that it is just as important to focus on what we have in common, as one of my informants emphasized.

Experts argue that a certain degree of flexibility is valuable, but that there is a need to balance this flexibility with solid planning and reporting (NORAD, 2015, 13). The director of a large environmental INGO, with experience from government and several Latin-American NGOs, puts emphasis on all collaborations needing a common goal, which is clearly defined and which is possible to measure. In his/her opinion, if a measurable goal is not in place, nothing that a project is trying to do will function. Some of my informants, however, would refute this statement of the importance of measurables, and reject it as capitalist, and an idea stemming from the Enlightenment. This informant placed great emphasis on this idea, which is highly related to costs and (s)he says of the topic:

“Very frequently NGOs from the South are not good at estimating costs” (Interview 21, 13.40).

The informant goes on to say that because Southern NGOs are not good at estimating costs, it results in the financial cooperation not being able to cover all costs needed. Of course, this is a very generalized opinion and statement about ‘Southern NGOs’, and strikes me as a somewhat ‘Eurocentric’ attitude anchored in the Enlightenment idea that only that which can
be measured is real. This calls to mind the British survey mentioned earlier, where 80 per cent of Northern NGOs did not want to give direct funding to Southern NGOs, as they were deemed unable to ‘manage, monitor and evaluate’ projects. In my opinion this is a paternalistic way of thinking, and making sweeping statements as above is careless. Nonetheless, it might say something about the internal dynamics in certain parts of a culture. As another informant told me, many international development agencies might for example be very strict when it comes to receipts. However, there are places in Ecuador where they do not have receipts, they simply do not exist (Interview 8, 38.00 min). It should be noted that (s)he is referring to smaller communities, and not to NGOs. Nonetheless, this can be a challenge if cooperating with an NGO who is working with this community, and existing in a society without receipts is for many people from the global North, unheard-of.

**Predictability and planning**

One of the founders and the director of a marine conservation NGO also mentioned the importance of local knowledge in international cooperation. If a foreign organization is going to work in Ecuador they should put themselves in the shoes of the people in the country, and get to know their reality. As an example, (s)he tells me that it is challenging and complicated working with local governments in Ecuador. One of the provinces they work in has seen a lot of corruption, and a mayor was even killed there. The informant tells me:

“In industrialized countries the planning process is obviously much more structured. Here, we live changing plans all the time, there are always many unexpected events, and sometimes it is difficult to understand these types of things. (Someone can say) ‘You have to follow the timetable’ – No, they simply killed the mayor – these are things which happen!” (Interview 14, 30.15 min).

(s)he continues saying that in these cultures, if things are too rigid, it’s difficult both on a technical and financial level. If things come up that aren’t planned it is important to be able to be flexible, both for the NGO in the South, and it subsequently needs to be a possibility for the NGO in the North as well, if the cooperation is to succeed. Although this is an extreme example of how unpredictable the situation can be, it is notwithstanding the reality, which is important for a foreign aid worker to understand. It should be mentioned that all societies are unpredictable, and that planning ahead is not necessarily easier in the North, however this is the experience of many of my informants. The wish from the Northern NGOs of following
timetables, reporting, and keeping in line with policies, can be difficult to accomplish in countries such as Ecuador, according to my informants.

One of the most influential environmental activists in Ecuador is of the opinion that people from the North possess a certain ‘set of values and a way of understanding reality’. In his/her opinion, people in the North are more ‘square’ and preoccupied with logical frameworks and results, and the informant expresses that people in the South have learned to manage this demeanour, and removed it of its importance.

“They should re-think many of the indicators and instruments with which … they evaluate the realities from the outside … If you say to me ‘What are your results after a year?’ … I mean, maybe the government has fallen (by then)! In this country things happen so fast … The unpredictables in the South are much more frequent” (Interview 8, 34.27 min).

This can be seen in relation to the previous example, of the mayor being killed, and I believe it is important to keep in mind these stories, especially for people from parts of the world with less turbulent governments, and less turbulence in society in general. This can be seen in the light of critical theory, and a transformation which became apparent with the Enlightenment. As is pointed out by Vetlesen, ‘formal logic provided the Enlightenment thinkers with the schema of the calculability of the world’ (Vetlesen, 2015, 53, emphasis added).

“As Horkheimer and Adorno note, ‘the mythologizing equations of Ideas with numbers in Plato’s last writings expresses the longing of all demythologization: number became the canon of the Enlightenment’” (Vetlesen, 2015, 53).

According to Vetlesen this is also one of the prerequisites for capitalism, because it entails the removal of value from things which cannot be ‘reduced to numbers’. This has been a longstanding criticism of development aid from the capitalist North, where this way of thinking stemming from Enlightenment has acted as an obstacle for good cooperation with different cultures, with different ways of seeing the world, and with different realities, as pointed out by my informants.

The logical framework analysis, borrowed from NASA, is the tool which is most used in aid planning and evaluation. If used right, it should systematize objectives, explain the causal relationship between objectives and activities, show indicators for success, and describe risks, and subsequently be put into a matrix (Ramalingam, 2013, 110). It has often been described by donors as offering clarity in chaotic processes and can act as a guide on how to proceed,
which can be the case when ‘done right’. However, as mentioned by my informant, using this type of analysis has its pitfalls. It has been criticized for being ‘highly technocratic’ in a way which ‘organizes and reduces complex social and political realities into simple and discrete components’ (Ramalingam, 2013, 111).

“This … tendency towards simplification and quantification makes the logical framework, in its current form, inadequate for monitoring complex development interventions” (Ramalingam, 2013, 111).

Several of my informants, from different parts of civil society and with different opinions on how cooperation with aid agencies works, agreed that there needs to be more flexibility and understanding of local realities. One cannot expect to be able to make plans in the same way in a society which is highly predictable, as in a society with more unpredictabilities. To give a concrete example of how different ways of thinking in different societies can affect the implementation of, in this case, an environmental development project, I will recount a story passed on to me at an early point in my fieldwork.

**Learning by doing**

One of the first interviews in Ecuador was with an indigenous informant, who had a great deal of experience with foreign development aid, both from NGOs and from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). (S)he lives in an indigenous community on the outskirts of Quito, and was in charge of the execution of several projects that the community received funding for. The informant told me specifically about a UNDP project which started in 2001, a GEF Small Grants Program which focuses on sustainable development through ‘thinking globally, acting locally’. The program gives financial and technical support to projects which conserves and restores the environment, all the while enhancing people’s well-being and livelihoods (GEF, undated). (S)he told me that this was important for the community, because it is very hard to get funding from both the State and from international organizations. One of the first things they did was to have capacity-building workshops to raise awareness about the deforestation problem, degradation of the environment, and especially climate change (Interview 2, 9.15 min.). (S)he recounts that this was a bit of a shocking experience for them, as (s)he explains:
“Who is degrading the environment, it’s not us! … It was a bit shocking and they said ‘why do we have to worry about saving the lives of others, if we’re not doing anything (wrong)?’. Quite the opposite … we have saved it” (Interview 2, 9.50 min.).

Because of this many people were a bit sceptical. One of the elders in the community was bored by the second or third workshop they arranged, and she didn’t want to hear any more from the ‘gringos’ (derogatory term for foreigner, usually from the USA or Europe). She asked “What do they want to do?”. My informant tells her “plant trees”. Her reply is “Then why don’t we go and plant trees?”. My informant’s point is that people there learn through working. They didn’t want continue with the workshops, they wanted to start planting trees. When they started the practical work of sowing, they started talking and discussing the issues at hand.

“We learned all of this from going and planting trees. Because the people in the communities, we don’t only sit down and learn. In the communities, the learning-experience is through work” (Interview 2, 15.15 min.)

In this community, work such as ‘la minga’ – un-paid, communal work - is very important, and even obligatory. The informant tells me that this is where issues can be discussed, but in an informal way, and that it is often a spontaneous conversation, as compared to the structured workshops which are quite common in the North. This illustrates that although entering with good intentions and funds, it is necessary to understand the people with which one is working.

On the one hand, I believe that these differences must be kept in mind in development aid collaborations, and it is necessary to have knowledge about the differences to understand each other. On the other hand, I believe it is also necessary to keep in mind everything which unites people and the similarities shared by people from different cultures. As Eriksson Baaz notes:

“The dominant perspective, which reads the practices of development in terms of an encounter between separate, bounded cultures, is problematic since it neglects the hybridity of cultures. It restricts the possibilities of identification and masks similarities between and differences within supposedly bounded cultures” (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 171).

This is also recurrent in policy documents and the author states that development workers are compelled to pay attention to these differences – between ‘themselves and the Other’ – and not to the similarities (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 100). Not many of my informants stressed this point, but a few did, as I have mentioned. They expressed that knowing enough about the
local realities and culture, paired with looking for common references, is a good starting out point for cooperation.

**Indigenous peoples**

I discovered during my fieldwork that an important part of understanding the local and cultural aspect of Ecuador, is also understanding the indigenous people’s worldview and way of life. Indigenous peoples are also some of the people which are the most affected by climate change, because many live close to nature and are dependent on its resources. Protecting indigenous peoples’ rights to land through measures such as ratifying ILO’s Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal peoples, which Ecuador did in 1998, has proven very effective for protecting the environment (Rainforest, undated) – assuming that the convention is respected and followed up on.

As confirmed by experts, governments and the UN, in many cases indigenous peoples’ role in protecting the environment is unique. The role of indigenous peoples in protecting the environment is especially important in Ecuador because of their presence in the Ecuadorian Amazon, with both contacted peoples and peoples living in voluntary isolation (SIISE, undated), and because Ecuador’s indigenous movement is considered one of the strongest in South America (Amazonwatch 2, undated).

Here we will consider some aspects of indigenous peoples in development, which have been brought forth by my informants. Issues such as indigenous identity and collectivism, understanding indigenous organizational processes and environmentalism as a consequence of their worldview, will be discussed in the following.

**Understanding the Kichwa worldview and indigenous organizational processes**

It is essential to be acquainted with the worldview of indigenous peoples of Ecuador in order to grasp their relationship with nature and the environment, and also how some indigenous peoples might regard development agencies and projects. It is necessary to keep in mind that these issues are interconnected. Because there are fourteen different indigenous nationalities in Ecuador, I cannot mention them all here, but will present the worldview of the largest indigenous group – constituting 85% of indigenous peoples in Ecuador - the *Kichwa* (Sánchez Ramos, 2012, 41). *Sumak Kawsay – Buen Vivir* in Spanish and loosely translated as
Good Living in English – is the most important concept of the Kichwa worldview. To give a more detailed explanation Sumak means plenitude, greatness, that which is just, complete and superior, and Kawsay means life which is always dynamic and changing (Sánchez Ramos, 2012, 42). Sumak Kawsay involves, among other things, coexistence in a system of community and solidarity, territorial and communal organization and administration, an exchange of knowledge, a communal economy and to take care of and protect la Pachamama - the Mother Earth. In short, it encourages a state of harmony with the Earth (Sánchez Ramos, 2012, 43). In this view, human beings are only one part of a bigger whole, in which there are different parts that are mutually dependent upon each other. The Kichwa’s worldview is fundamentally focused on the relationship with nature and Mother Earth (Sánchez Ramos, 2012, 44).

Naturally, this worldview leads to a special relationship with nature, seeing as the Earth in itself is so important, and a bearer of intrinsic value. Another issue which should be kept in mind when considering development cooperation, is the way indigenous peoples organize their communities, where there is great focus on just that – the community – as we will delve deeper into in the sub-chapter on ‘collectivism’.

One of my informants working in a large INGO with indigenous issues, such as rights, the ILO Convention 169, and self-management of territories, tells me that everyone in their organization has to learn about intercultural issues. The informant, being of indigenous origin, mentions the importance of the people working in the partnering organizations:

“Sometimes it doesn’t depend on the organization itself, but on the people working in the organization. Many people do not have a lot of experience with indigenous peoples. They are ignorant of organizational processes. That’s where they make mistakes” (Interview 12, 47.30 min).

(Sh)e says that one of the most important issues that should be considered in order to improve development aid cooperation in Ecuador, is to work with indigenous organizations in a structured way. (Sh)e tells me that many of the leaders of the parish boards in Ecuador are indigenous peoples, and underlines that working with the parish boards is also of importance (Interview 12, 36.15 min).

Another informant, having worked with indigenous peoples from the Ecuadorian Amazon for more than 25 years, emphasizes the challenges that come with the territory. His/her first
remark is that our culture, meaning Western and including him/herself in this, is irrational and that we are not capable of understanding a culture different from our own.

“Obviously, we do not understand the typical indigenous world, we do not understand the typical language of nature, and finally we end up imposing our opinions, our thoughts on other realities different from ours. It’s a challenge to be able to understand nature’s language, and a world different from ours” (Interview 13, 4.45 min.).

The informant underlines the fact that indigenous peoples in Ecuador, and from around the world, have not used money and have been hunters and gatherers. The world society has, according to this informant, imposed the economic commercial model upon indigenous peoples, and forced them from a subsistence economy into the market economy. Because of this many can no longer live off what the rainforest gives them, but have been driven to take a job in a company or the like to be able to support themselves.

The director of a marine conservation NGO tells me of their cooperation with the members of different communities, in particular indigenous peoples. When speaking on the topic of funding (s)he says it is complicated, and the time it can take from being granted funding, to actually receiving it can be a problem for the continuity of the project. Working with local, indigenous fishermen, this informant says that the time it takes can be hard for them, both to have patience, and that things have to proceed little by little.

“Because in their worldview … now is the time … and that’s how they live their lives. So when you tell me ‘you have to wait two or three years’ … for them this is abstract. They do not understand it” (Interview 14, 9.35 min.).

At first glance this might seem like a peculiar statement. However, to understand the Kichwa, you also need to understand their concept of time. As Martínez Novo explains, the Kichwa – in this case the Kichwa Canelos of the Amazon – have three concepts of time, loosely translated into: the past (kallari), various versions of the present (kunan), and the atemporal, mythical times (unai) (Martínez, 2012, 115). There is no concept of time for the future, and the Kichwa do not see time as in the Western world, where the past is behind us, and the future ahead of us. This can explain what my informant means when (s)he says that some indigenous people may have trouble understanding that it is necessary to wait for funds in the future. This is yet another example of why it is necessary to have a comprehensive understanding of the people with which a development project is implemented.
Valuing the indigenous identity

ILO’s Convention 169 (C169), concerning indigenous and tribal peoples, acknowledges that new international standards were needed to remove the ‘assimilationist orientation’ of earlier standards. These standards included that these peoples were not able to enjoy fundamental human rights to the extent of the rest of the population, and that ‘their laws, values, customs and perspectives have often been eroded’ (ILO 2, undated). According to C169 self-identification as indigenous is a fundamental criterion to be considered as such. This convention also underlines the unique contribution of indigenous peoples to ‘social and ecological harmony of humankind’, and to international cooperation (ILO 2, undated).

One of my indigenous informants decided to work with a UNDP project, in his/her words, to ‘recuperate the community’. There had been an internal divide in the community, between the mestizos who, according to the informant, wanted to split it up, make public and individualize the land. The indigenous peoples wanted to maintain it as a community, as one territory, and not divide it into lots. They had already lost a large part of their territory. It was a resilient struggle, and their connection with CONAIE was extremely important in this struggle.

“This connection permitted us three things; Firstly, to value ourselves as indigenous peoples. Secondly, to love the Earth as it is. And thirdly, to have a judicial support to save the community from people who wanted to divide the land” (Interview 2, 14.45 min.).

Territorial rights have been one of the determining issues for indigenous peoples in Ecuador, and as an extension of this, valuing the indigenous identity becomes important in the quest for territorial rights. Both in Ecuador and elsewhere in Latin America collective rights has been a key issue for the indigenous movements (IWGIA, 2009, 16).

As per Beck and Mijeski the colonial and modern state and its functionaries have had the power to define what it means to be indigenous, even when this has not corresponded with how indigenous peoples of Ecuador have perceived themselves. They argue that ‘the power to recognize oneself and one’s community was expropriated by the state’ (Beck and Mijeski, 2000, 120).

“The capacity to name and define other peoples and objects represents the ultimate exercise of power” (Beck and Mijeski, 2000, 120).

This meant that naming someone ‘un indio’ (Indian) also meant being placed at the bottom of social, cultural, economic, and political ladders, and at the same time under the control of
mestizos (of European and indigenous descent) who had the power to self-identify (Beck and Mijeski, 2000, 121).

An indigenous academic tells me that the State is not working with the indigenous people in the country. This informant’s opinion is that all states want to destroy communal life, and make all indigenous people ‘mestizos’ or white – not of skin, but by way of thought. The State wants them to think that they are backward and lagging behind in the past, and that they need to be civilized.

“For us, the “Conquest”, quote, unquote, still has not come to an end. It is still in schools and universities – the whitening process. Faced with this, we are trying to fight back” (Interview 1, 13.10 min).

This can be seen in the light of evolutionism and Eurocentrism. As Eriksson Baaz mentions, Western civilization has been presented as ‘the universal terminus of evolution, which the colonized should repeat, copy, and internalize’ (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 45). In order to stand their ground, they are working on projects of communication, teaching people to tape videos and recordings to spread their messages.

The same informant also expresses that young people feel embarrassed by showing that they are indigenous, and some express that being indigenous is ‘the worst’. He says that they have a saying, which goes: “Call me poor, but do not call me ‘indio’”. This stands to show why placing value on the indigenous identity, and finding pride in being indigenous, is important for the indigenous movement in Ecuador.

**Collectivism**

A topic which was brought up by several of my informants is the subject of individualism versus collectivism. Collectivism is described by Kim, as opposed to individualism’s focus on the “I” consciousness, as societies which focus on the “We” consciousness including ‘collective identity, emotional dependence, group solidarity, sharing … group decision’ among other things (Kim, 2001, 4). Indigenous peoples’ societies in Ecuador are collectivist in their organization, with a focus on the community, as pointed out by various informants. This fact could sometimes contrast with some development aid agencies’ individualistic way of doing things. Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen mention John Friedmann, and his idea of households as being the basic unit in society, and thus strengthening the
households can be a road to empowerment of those excluded from decision-making processes (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 154). However, even though this method might be applicable in the North, it would not necessarily be a suitable model in Ecuador, and especially not in indigenous communities, as we will see in the following.

One informant tells me about an NGO from the US which wanted to support indigenous communities in Ecuador, but they wanted to do it using the North-American model. This entailed that they wished to work with indigenous families and not with the communities. They thereby denied, according to the interviewee, that the community is the foundation of the indigenous society. The informant claims that they wanted to ‘break the communal way of thinking, because they think of development as being something individual’ (Interview 3, 23.00 min.). Whether or not this specific NGO indeed aimed to ‘break their way of thinking’ we do not know, but it is clear that such an approach is not advisable, because it does not take into consideration the local reality.

Another example of the divide between collectivism and individualism was brought up by an indigenous academic. He tells me of the special indigenous traditions, their way of working together and having a more horizontal organization. He says that these principles are ruined when there exists considerable dependency and paternalism.

“Capitalism leads us to individualism … I think, being a part of indigenous peoples, that the best way of being solidary between human beings is ‘the communal’ (Interview 1, 9.45 min).

By ‘the communal’ he wished to express his position in a collectivist society, namely being a part of a bigger whole. For indigenous peoples in Latin America, as in other parts of the world, collectivism is generally valued over individualism (Hart, 2008, 132). Seeing as the community and ‘the communal’ is so important to indigenous peoples in Ecuador, and around the world, it is understandable that it might not be wise to apply an individualistic development model in these societies. When a Northern NGO has concluded that the best way to help is by helping the core-family or household, and thus wants to bring this model to other countries, I believe it necessary to know something about the country and societies they want to help before doing so. Because being from the ‘individualistic’ North and bringing these models and values, expecting that one’s own models and values are valid everywhere, is not a good starting-out-point for cooperation.
Indigenous = environmentalist?

The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) is one of the many establishments which recognizes the valuable role and participation of Indigenous Peoples in protecting the environment around the globe. UNEP describes the input of traditional knowledge, which has been gained by indigenous peoples through generations, as significant in sustainable ecosystem management and development (UNEP, undated). As well as being important actors and contributors to a healthy environment, indigenous peoples’ dependency upon functioning ecosystems has made many vulnerable when the environment they live in is damaged or changed.

The Worldwatch Institute stresses the importance of indigenous peoples and their practices in combating climate change, because respecting indigenous peoples’ rights and realities is the key to reducing deforestation (Worldwatch Institute, 2013), the degradation of which releases large amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere (Rainforest, undated).

Speaking with one of the most prominent environmental researchers in Ecuador, (s)he tells me about the important role of the indigenous peoples when it comes to protecting the environment. The informant calls theirs ‘the most important role’, continuing:

“The indigenous peoples in general … they’re human beings who have an enormous sensitivity when it comes to issues concerning nature. For them it’s normal to protect nature. They accept themselves as nature. They are nature. They understand that we are all nature, but for them it’s normal” (Interview 3, 10.30 min.).

He explains that for indigenous peoples, the act of protecting ‘la Pachamama’, Mother Earth, is not because of ecological reasons as such, or because of an international cooperation, or because it’s a trend – they have always defended nature.

“The indigenous groups are in essence the root of environmentalism. Many of them might not be considered - they do not consider themselves - environmentalists, but in practice they are environmentalists” (Interview 3, 11.00 min.).

This idea of indigenous peoples as ‘natural’ environmentalists, was a common opinion when interviewing my informants. An environmental lawyer explains that indigenous peoples protect the rainforest, and as an extension the environment, because of various reasons. Firstly, because they understand and know nature much better than ‘we’ do – meaning non-indigenous people. (S)he states that although they may not have an academic background,
they know much more about the rainforest than any expert from any other part of the world (Interview 13, 23.00 min).

The same informant tells me that in the Ecuadorian Amazon, the Huaorani traditionally had a semi-nomadic structure where they were always rotating and stayed in one place only for a few years. They would leave a place after using resources there for a while, and if they returned 100 years later it would have been renewed. That way they could always live with quality food and quality resources, and did not exhaust Earth’s resources. This is however partly debunked in a study by Patricio Mena et al. in which they have studied the sustainability in Huaorani hunting practices (Mena, Stallings, Regalado & Cueva, 2000, 76). The authors claim that the Huaorani used a hunting strategy based on prey availability, meaning that they would hunt the largest and most easily available species first, and thus not necessarily following a ‘conservation-based strategy’ (Mena et al., 2000, 76).

Although indigenous peoples’ role in protecting the environment is widely acknowledged, this subject is not free from controversy. One side of this discussion can be close to comparing indigenous peoples to that of the ‘noble savage’, who was thought to live in a simple and innocent way. There does lie a risk in romancing indigenous peoples in this way, because just as with all people, there is no one, unified way in which indigenous peoples live. However, the general consensus in Ecuador, according to my informants, is that indigenous peoples have a different relationship with nature because of their world-view, and many also because of their reliance upon their immediate environment in the Amazon.

**Criticism of development aid**

“According to Rajni Kothari … ‘where colonialism left off, development took over’” (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 150).

As we saw in the literature chapter, there is no shortage of criticism of aid, neither why, how, or to whom it is given. When speaking with my informants about how aid cooperation has worked in Ecuador, most of them could share both success stories, and stories of how development aid has failed. One informant even asks ‘do we need foreign aid at all?’. Another tells me that we will never reach a point where it is possible to say that we have ‘arrived’ – that is a utopia, and the development cooperation is always changing.
Critiques of aid agencies include that the same mistakes are made time and time again, and that they do not change or improve despite of this. This is challenged by Ramalingam, stating:

“Aid is only as good as – can only ever be as good as – the politics surrounding it allows it to be” (Ramalingam, 2013, 11).

Most of the people I have spoken to would say that they do need foreign investments, but that there needs to be an equal and respectful *alliance* between the partners. In a capitalist world where money has such a central position in society, finding this balance in aid is not an easy feat, considering the monetary inequality between the North and the South. In the following I will focus on the symptoms of this inequality, and how it is shown I practice. Topics brought up in my interviews such as dependency, colonialism, conditionalities and foreign interests will be discussed.

**Aid dependency**

An important criticism of development aid is the notion of dependency in the aid relationship. Many of my informants express the view that Ecuadorian NGOs are dependent upon foreign investment, which in turn creates a power imbalance, and inhibits them from being independent. As the authors in *Negotiating Local Knowledge* underline, for development to emerge, there needs to be a certain degree of local autonomy (Pottier, 2003, 2). Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen underline that ‘donor control through project organizations and foreign experts has led to dependency in developing countries’ organizations, while also limiting their possibilities to lead and coordinate all development activities’ (Degnbol-Martinussen og Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 295).

One of my informants, having at an earlier point told me that they do not accept funding from the US, and that they do not accept funding from anyone trying to affect the agenda, tells me that they *are* dependent on foreign funding. (S)he goes on saying that to try and avoid the dependency-issue, they receive smaller amounts of money from numerous sources, so that they are not dependent upon one large organization. This way if the funding falls through from any one of their partners, or they have a conflict, they will not have to compromise their agenda to keep the funding. However, the ambition of auto-financing is not a reality thus far because, in her opinion, this relies on creating a welfare state. On the topic of the dependency upon funding from other countries and organizations, the informant tells me:
“It’s inevitable, as this is how the Third World is … there are no welfare states in the Third World” (Interview 8, 17.45 min).

As explained here, the financial inequality between the North and the South does affect the aid relationship, even though they have found a way to try and balance the power relationship which comes with one actor having the funds, and thus balancing the dependency relationship.

From the point of view of an indigenous informant, some NGOs create a relationship of dependence with indigenous peoples, where the indigenous communities become used to and reliant upon the NGOs. To illustrate this point, the informant explains that in the past indigenous people could visit other indigenous communities, and they would provide a place to sleep and food as a part of their solidarity principle, and it would be ‘a pleasure to have someone visiting’. Now, (s)he says, you would have to pay - the solidarity between them does not exist anymore. According to the informant, this is an influence from outside, and a dependency has been created where everything has a cost, and payment is necessary. People do not want to participate in the ‘mingas’ (unpaid work in the community), because money has become much more important.

“This type of dependency, this type of transformation into an individual which thinks that money can do everything … is a way of destroying the communal life, and the way of thinking of the fellow indigenous peoples. This is a result of the NGOs … They create a terrible dependency where they end up destroying communal principles of communal cohabitation” (Interview 1, 04.40 min.).

However, the informant goes on saying that there are some ‘good’ NGOs and development organizations which give support, and as an example mentions an aid agency which focuses on capacity building with indigenous peoples, and a project aims to rescue the ecological agriculture of the elders in a few communities.

Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen conclude that in general ‘aid dependency’ of developing countries has seen an extensive decrease (Degnbol-Martinussen og Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 264). However, my informants have expressed that they are more dependent upon international aid now than ever, especially with a government which does not support civil society. On the contrary, the government is counteracting the civil society and NGOs, which will be discussed in the next chapter about power relations.
Colonialism and colonialist mentality

Spanish colonial expansion began in the late fifteenth century, and within 100 years almost all of Latin America was either underneath Spanish or Portuguese rule. The motivation for colonialism was in part the search for precious minerals – a way to enrich the Iberian crown - and in part a religious journey – a way of saving heathen souls - if they even had souls, which was a topic of discussion (Greig et al., 2007, 60). According to Greig et al. the colonial experience has affected in a grave way the contemporary politics and even the power distribution in other countries.

As we have seen, Western social sciences have used a rhetoric during the nineteenth century, characterizing the colonial societies as ‘childlike’, and thus needing guardianship and guidance from the ‘civilized’ countries. This way of thought renders colonialism an example of ‘the modern tendency for the more powerful to see themselves as a template out of which the colonies could be shaped’ (Greig et al., 2007, 60).

“Almost all colonial schemes begin with an assumption of native backwardness and general inadequacy to be independent, ‘equal’, and ‘fit’” (Said in Greig et al., 2007, 60).

The topic of colonialism is an important topic in Ecuador, as in other Latin American countries. Ecuador was under Spanish colonialist rule until 1822 and finally independent from Gran Colombia (modern Ecuador, Venezuela and Colombia) in 1830 (Gerlach, 2003, 24). Closely related to colonialism is the issue of paternalism, and certain actors imposing certain rules, agendas or guidelines upon others, and having of a colonialist mentality. This is a subject which was touched upon very frequently in my interviews, not surprisingly considering Latin American and European colonial history.

One informant tells me although his/her experiences with foreign aid agencies have been positive, (s)he says that (s)he has heard of instances of imposition, and that there are people who say that there exists a colonialist mentality still, not only related to indigenous peoples, but also NGOs. According to her these people think that ‘they know more’ (Interview 6, 22.00 min).

When looking at aid history, this colonialist mentality of ‘knowing more’ and even knowing better than, is not uncommon. This has been implicitly expressed continuously by the donors from the North, who have been deciding the agenda, which frameworks to use and how to
manage projects. In my opinion this can be seen as, maybe not colonialism as such, but as a continuing of the colonialist school of thought. My informants’ opinions were rather diverse on this subject. Talking with another of my informants, the director of one of the world’s largest environmental INGOs, (s)he simply says that there are no incidents of other organizations or donors trying to impose (Interview 16, 34.45 min.). However, three suggestions for why this might be: a) (S)he has never experienced this because (s)he is a director, b) because of the magnitude of the organization in which (s)he works, or c) there simply have been no incidents of this sort in this specific organization. I am inclined to believe that a and b could be possible explanations for this, considering that the vast majority of my informants concurred that imposition by donors is rather common. However, among my informants there is also a general agreement that aid relationships have greatly improved over time, and that there is less imposition.

According to another informant, who has experience with development agencies in Ecuador and Latin America in general, (s)he says (s)he has never experienced imposition by other organizations either, and believes it was more common in the 60s and 70s. This informant’s impression is that the development industry had a more colonialist mentality before. (S)he tells me of examples of expensive, yet failed projects, because of a top-down design, where they did not respond to the necessities of the people they were trying to help. However, the informant is of the opinion that the development aid industry, organizations and countries, have learned. Nevertheless, (s)he goes on saying that there are ways of ‘hiding’ the impositions and that there is ‘still a colonialist mentality, it has changed, but not a hundred percent’ (Interview 15, 58.10 min.). As seen here, the informant starts out saying that (s)he has never experienced imposition, and that colonialist thought was more common before, implying that it is something of the past. However, further out in the interview (s)he tells me that there are ways of ‘hiding’ the impositions, implying that (s)he might have experienced it after all. This type of contradiction was recurrent in my interviews, and my experience is that answers in the beginning of the interview were more positively charged, and towards the end more nuanced answers were given. This could be because after an hour or more of discussing different subjects, the informants had remembered certain facts which hadn’t sprung to mind earlier, or simply because they might have become more comfortable in the interview setting.

The informant from the Ministry of Environment, speaking in general terms about European aid cooperation, he says:
“… there does exists a domineering mentality from time to time. Even in Norway, who say that they’re not” (Interview 11, 33.30 min).

An informant with nearly 40 years of national and international experience with environmental issues, in Ecuadorian NGOs and INGOs, the UN and positions in the government, expresses his/her thoughts on the issue. In line with what most of my informants express, (s)he says of top-down, condescending attitudes of actors from the North:

“It still exists, but it is less all the time. The relationship is becoming more and more mature. There is more awareness of the fact that we are in the same boat” (Interview 20, 31.50 min.).

Yet another testament on this topic was given by the director of a large Latin American INGO, who states that development aid cooperation did make the mistakes during the 70s and 80s of having a paternalistic work-model. (S)he describes this work-model as ‘take on a project, (the recipient had to) send a technical and financial report after a year, without the donor visiting the country and project in question’ – this was in her words a ‘perverse paternalism’ and a ‘remotely controlled management’ (Interview 18, 19.00 min.).

The general consensus among the actors in the environmental movement was that although there are still some tendencies of colonialist attitudes, in general this has changed for the better.

Cooperation with interests and conditionalities attached to aid

The development aid industry is supposed to be built on moral and humanitarian values. However, other motivations have also been suggested, such as national security aims, economic interests – such as former imperial powers keeping access to resources – and political interests – such as trying preventing communism from spreading.

One informant is sceptical of international development cooperation in general. (S)he tells me that there are certain instances when international cooperation is interesting, for example UN Small-Grants Funds, because they do not necessarily expect to change, but strengthen, the society. However, this informant questions whether we need international development cooperation at all, as (s)he notes that ‘there is another international cooperation, which might come from large countries … which shape all the negative elements which I mentioned to
you: cooperation with economic interest, cooperation with commercial interests’ (Interview 3, 31.00 min.).

Another example from the same informant is of the Spanish and how they gave credits to poor countries:

“There are very interesting studies on how the Spanish gave credits to poor countries, which in reality was to finance the Spanish companies, the Spanish counsels, the Spanish factories, so they would sell Spanish products. So, development aid is not always aid for those who receive it. However, it is aid for those who give it” (Interview 3, 21.00 min.).

This is in line with what Crewe and Harrison note: “Aid, many claim, is geared towards satisfying donors’ rather than recipients’ interests” (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 14).

As we have seen, it has not been uncommon to attach certain conditions to the aid supplied to developing countries, such as human rights or democratization. Although human rights and democratization are issues which are generally seen as altruistic and good for the general population, attaching such conditions to aid is not unproblematic. On the one hand I believe that these ideas, which are formulated in the North, is in part another way of saying that ‘We know how you should organize your societies’. On the other hand, I do believe these to be important values and a way to ensure equality and security for all people in a society. Whether it should be attached to aid is another question.

One informant mentions the Hallstein Doctrine of the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) as an example both of conditionalities and political interest. The Hallstein Doctrine encompassed that certain donor countries would not give development aid to poor countries which had diplomatic relations with the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) – the communists. The informant continues by saying that development aid forms a part of the foreign policy of rich countries. According to him/her it is not an aid which aims to help, but aid which forms a part of their diplomatic or international policies. The informant continues that for the former colonial powers such as England or France this might even be seen as a part of colonialist politics.

“While domination under colonialism was upheld through direct occupational rule, the continued domination in the postcolonial era has been staged in the context of independent states and organized through trade negotiations, aid conditionalities, debt management and concessions, and so forth (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 32).
According to my informant in one of the leading indigenous organizations in Ecuador, they have known to choose their partners in international cooperation, and have not simply accepted to partner with anyone offering funds. (S)he tells me of an earlier cooperation:

“In previous leadership … an NGO from (country) tried to condition the cooperation. So, what we did was to give the money back to them. We already had the money deposited in our account. We didn’t accept … even if they would have shared our political ideology, it wouldn’t have been enough, because they shouldn’t be conditioning the agenda” (Interview 5, 11.00 min).

This is one way around both the issue of conditionalities and that of cooperations with interests. Many of my informants have told me of rejecting funds, however, if in a pressed situation, it could be easier in theory than in practice.

**Power relations and inequality**

“The ruling ideas (…) are the ideas of those who rule” (Brecht in Bronner, 2011, 112).

Power relations are profoundly connected to the last chapter, and issues such as dependency, colonialism, cooperations with interests and conditionalities, all express this imbalance in power relations. However, in the following I will explore the issue of power relations in the development aid industry in Ecuador even further, also encompassing the position of the State.

According to Foucault, power is only meaningful and constituted in a network of social relationships (Melkote & Steeves, 2001, 36). Assuming Foucault’s explanation of power in social relations, it can further be divided into different *kinds* of relational power, as Rowlands suggests: ‘power over (controlling power); power to (generate new possibilities without domination); power with (collective power, power created by group process); and power from within (spiritual strength that inspires and energizes others)’ (Melkote & Steeves, 2001, 36).

In this chapter, we will have a look at relational power in the form of controlling power – *power over*. I will argue that unequal power relations, with one actor having *power over* another, can be a hinder to development aid cooperation.

Ramalingam stresses that ‘the power relations within aid have a self-similarity throughout the sector’ (Ramalingam, 2013, 88) – he argues that it is possible to see a hierarchy chain consisting of Southern NGOs being controlled by Northern NGOs, which in turn are
controlled by UN agencies, donors controlling both NGOs and UN agencies, who are controlled by political powers and so on. On this note, Ramalingam claims that Southern NGOs’ complaints about Northern NGOs are the same as the Northern NGOs have about donor agencies (Ramalingam, 2013, 88).

As with the criticism of aid, many of my informants have expressed quite an ambivalence when talking about this issue. A recurring situation in my interviews is that in one part of the interview the informant tells me that they have never experienced abuse or demonstration of power on the Northern agency’s part. However, later in the same interview the informant might tell me that Northern NGOs trying to impose or control the agenda is not uncommon. On the topic of funds, some state that they will simply reject funds from organizations who try to decide on their behalf, on the other hand most are open about the fact that they are reliant upon foreign aid and international development cooperation.

**Power imbalance between global North/South and global inequality**

There exists an immense inequality in the world, and the richest countries, with one fifth of the world’s population, were producing over four-fifths of the world’s GNP by the turn of the century (Greig et al., 2007, 2). Classical political economists believe that if each country would produce and trade commodities in which they had a ‘comparative advantage’, then general wealth would increase. According to this theory, the USA and Western Europe should trade industrial goods and the postcolonial world should focus on trading primary commodities. This model has shown the tendency of primary product prices falling relative to the industrial goods, which in turn led to poorer countries having to export more to buy the same quantity of industrial goods – which essentially ‘transferred capital out of the non-industrial world into the industrial world’ (Greig et al., 2007, 87). If we are to believe that an advantage in power relationships follows capital, then the power relations are clearly in favour of the countries in the North.

Many environmentalists are sceptical towards the current global capitalistic system, because, to paraphrase a point made in the theory chapter, sustaining capitalism and sustaining the environment are mutually exclusive. Another criticism of capitalism is the inequality it creates, in favour of industrialized countries. This point was emphasized by an environmental activist and biologist with 30 years of experience, working in a prominent environmental NGO. (S)he shared some of her thoughts on the power relations in the world and the current
system of capitalism. The informant underlines that in the current capitalistic system, the people with the money have the power, and that ‘this is a problem if we want to change the power model for a more just one’ (Interview 8, 28.45 min). If this is to be done it is necessary, according to this informant, to find an alternative which will place value not only on money and resources, but also on for example the ability to build and innovate.

“One is accustomed to that the one with the money has the power and has the ability to decide. And one has to find that this ability to decide should be closer to the places where it is going to be applied … If you don’t have the ability to decide, you’re screwed” (Interview 8, 29.25 min.)

The director of an environmental INGO talks about the importance of cultural sensitivity in international cooperation between the North and the South. (S)he underlines the importance of respecting the local decisions and needs.

“This is a matter which is complicated to manage … (thinks for a long while) which requires a large dose of cultural sensitivity. I am not saying that the local people are always right, sometimes they can be wrong, but it is extremely important to understand that having financial or technological resources does not mean that you can decide for the project” (Interview 21, 17.15 min).

The informant says that one part is to contribute with funds and technology and another part is to contribute with the execution in the field, and that both components are just as important. With this (s)he is implying that organizations from the North consider their resources, funds and technology, as being of more importance than the experience and knowledge local people can contribute with. (S)e tells me that the one shouldn’t think it can decide for the other, and impose something upon the other, and that this happens quite frequently.

The director of an INGO with a long background both from national Ecuadorian NGOs and international NGOs kept his/her focus on what unites us rather than what separates us. On the subject of a power imbalance in the world, between the North and the South, (s)he says:

“It’s true that this imbalance can be found, but I think that the key is in finding what is called ‘shared objectives’. What unites us in the end? There you will find that there are many more elements which unites us than elements which divides us. What I think one has to understand is that there are different abilities. Maybe an organization from the North might be able to obtain more resources, simply because there is more wealth there, there is a larger
group of possible donors, there are more financial sources. There is a donation culture” (Interview 9, 46.00 min).

(S)he continues saying that it can be difficult for an organization from the South to access these resources, but that this can be done through alliances.

Appreciating what each partner can bring to the table, without placing more value on resources and monetary funds than for example local expertise and innovation, might be a way to balance the unequal power relations. However, this is probably easier said than done in the contemporary global society which places such a large value on money.

All this kept in mind, although many say that there are some attempts of imposition or affecting the agenda from other instances farther up the hierarchy, in general their experience is that this was worse before and that they have a general feeling of partnership.

Hierarchies and unequal power relations in Ecuadorian aid relationships

The INGOs in Ecuador usually support national NGOs, and function as a donor organization for local organizations and projects. The director of a Latin American INGO, told me about the need to control the development of the projects they are a part of:

“Unfortunately, I would say, the idiosyncrasy of the Latinos, of the Africans – in general of human beings as such – they would think ‘nobody is watching me, so they do not know how I am managing the funds” (Interview 18, 18.15 min).

In the continuation, (s)he goes on to say that no extreme is good, but that it’s important with monitoring tools, and that the donor should ‘not let go, or give too much liberty to the recipient project, nor should you put too much pressure on them’.

This particular rhetoric – that control is in the ‘Other’s’ best interest - has been heard, not only during colonialism and the oppression of the native peoples in Latin America by Europeans, but also in aid history. During colonialism, the Europeans often justified their conquest of indigenous territories, and the control of indigenous peoples, with the ‘white man’s burden’. This is an evolutionist idea that the modern and developed West should ‘help’ the backward and underdeveloped, though means of control.

“Whichever political theory accompanies it, evolutionism has rhetorically justified intervention in ‘backward’ countries since European colonization, (…) through the
presupposition that the influence of more advanced outsiders will enable traditional societies to catch up with them” (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 28).

As discussed in the literature chapter, evolutionism means that the ‘underdeveloped’ are in an initial state, which the goal is to move out of by the help of the West’s capital and know-how, as described by Rapley. The people in underdeveloped countries have repetitively been referred to as ‘lazy’ and ‘backward’, as opposed to the ‘industrious’ and ‘modern’ people of developed countries. Many development authors express an existence of certain oppositional binaries in the aid relationship, and Eriksson Baaz underlines the fact that certain binaries prevail, the Third World as the West’s Other, and the latter being described as progressive and the former as non-progressive.

“Donor and development worker identification involves a positioning of the Self as developed and superior in contrast to a backward and inferior Other” (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 166).

Eriksson Baaz states that this positioning results in the recipient being seen as less reliable and less trustworthy. This in turn, results in a mistrust and an obstacle for partnership. My informant’s comment that ‘the idiosyncrasy of Latinos and Africans’ entails that they would not manage funds well if no one is watching them, or controlling them, reveals to me this type of binary still existing. The idea that certain people cannot be trusted, and thus must be supervised, and justifying it by implying that you know what is best, strikes me as a blatant demonstration of the power relations at work. It can be compared to, if not being a version of, the white man’s burden. It was surprising to discover this in my research, especially when coming from someone themselves from Latin America. However, this might also reveal my own prejudice, in thinking that it would be people from the USA and Europe who would have this sort of attitude of not trusting the recipients of aid.

The director of this particular INGO also tells me about some difficulties which they have been having with one of the Ecuadorian NGOs they have been supporting. According to the informant, the NGO did not have the capacity for a well-functioning administration of the project. This constitutes a problem because the INGO is responsible for the project and must answer to the donor, the European Union, and the Ecuadorian NGO does not have this responsibility. This made them establish certain criteria for the partnering NGOs:

- They needed an adequate administrative structure to manage large projects
- Transparency in management of funds was required
And to follow the European Union’s required guidelines and procedures, and be held accountable

The national partner organization did not accept these terms. This resulted in the INGO having to tell the EU about the challenges, and decided to change partner organization in Ecuador. The reaction to this was with an outcry of “(name of organization) is a colonialist NGO!”. The INGO’s reaction was, nonetheless, with relief that it was at the beginning of the partnership, and not after spending a lot of time on it.

This is a complicated situation. On the one hand, it is understandable that certain guidelines must be in place for the cooperation to work, and the INGO having to answer to the EU means that they are in a ‘locked’ situation. However, having EU’s criteria as a norm might be too rigid for many Ecuadorian NGOs, as seen in the example above. Many of my informants have emphasised this point, that there needs to be a certain degree of flexibility in the cooperation, as seen in the chapter about local and cultural knowledge. Telling me that they simply switched partner, from one local NGO to another, when the first could not administer the project in the way they wished, is another demonstration of power. But it is also an illustration of the power relations as explained by Ramalingam, of national NGOs having to answer to INGOs, which in turn have to answer to the UN or other donors, such as the EU in this case.

These hierarchies, and the power relations within them, can also be seen on another level: between the ultimate recipients of aid, such as communities, and the local NGOs. Another informant, the director of a marine conservation organization, tells me that (s)he started out with a more ‘romantic’ view on issues such as caring about animals and conservation when explaining about his/her education as a biologist. The informant says that after being in the business for a while, it became clear that working with people was an important part of protecting animals and natural habitat, but that this has been difficult and a challenge. The NGO is functioning as a donor for certain communities in Ecuador, for instances groups of fishermen on the coast.

“For them … the value that they understand the best is the value of money. Obviously, it’s this way because they are communities which do not even have the basic services … so to talk about conservation for conservation’s sake, does not make sense to them … If you start talking about money, it sounds bad (!), but it’s real” (Interview 14, 13.55 min).
This is explained with that money is an incentive for the fishermen to, for example, implement conservation or responsible fishing. The person in question is very experienced in working on conservation projects and with different communities, and probably has good reason for saying what was said. Nevertheless, it reminds me in part of the discussion above. It can also be understood as an exhibition of power relationships operating. I argue this, because when ascribing to someone that ‘they understand best the value of money’, and at the same time implying that they do not understand the importance of conservation, it bears resemblance of the paternalist notion of the attributing of ‘childish’ traits to the ‘Other’. Also, if the fishermen mostly care about money as an incentive for conservation, and the NGO has the funds, the consequence is that the power relations are askew.

However, it should be noted that for every one of the difficult or failed attempts at partnership, I was also told many success stories of partnerships with Northern NGOs. However, this was not the case when discussing the relationship between civil society and the Ecuadorian government.

**Power relations between the State and civil society**

“If the government is efficient, competent and accountable to its citizens …, then it is very likely that aid will translate into significant improvements …” (Baskaran, Bigsten & Hessami, 2013, 45).

Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen point to three different relationships between authorities in the South and NGOs:

- Confrontation: NGOs in opposition to authorities, the latter try to limit NGOs’ work
- Co-opting: only NGOs integrated into the state system allowed
- Cooperation: authorities and NGOs committed to dialogue and working together

(Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 165).

In Ecuador’s case, the relationship could be described as a combination of ‘confrontation’ and ‘co-opting’, with emphasis on confrontation, as we will see in this chapter.

The general consensus of my informants is that the Correa administration is acting as an obstacle for NGOs and INGOs in the country. My informants have told me that Correa has called the indigenous movement ‘right-wing’, he has said that people in the environmental movement, more specifically the environmental organization Acción Ecológica, are ‘childish
ecologists’, and claimed that people in the environmental NGO Pachamama were violent, and subsequently closed down their organization. The Correa administration has shown their power by closing down or threatening to close down several local environmental NGOs, and have even ‘thrown out’ USAID – an international NGO from the USA – from the country. As depicted by my informant from the Ministry of Environment, paraphrasing him/her:

‘To be able to sign contracts with a person from Ecuador, you should follow the Ecuadorian regulations, as applies to any country. In Norway for example, you should follow the Norwegian rules. USAID does not follow the rules of the country, USAID follows their own rules, made in the US congress. We gave them a couple of years to change these regulations so that they could abide by the regulations in the country they were in. In the end they didn’t and that’s why the cooperation ceased’ (Interview 11, 16.30 min.).

This statement is a testament of the power dynamics in swing, on many different levels. On the one hand my informant from the Ministry has a point – it is questionable that a US-based NGO should decide how things are to be done in Ecuador. As (s)he points out, if an Ecuadorian NGO were to try the same in the States, they would not succeed. It is also, however, an exhibition of power by USAID, when they will not abide by the Ecuadorian rules. There are many communities and national NGOs in the country who need funds, so another question is at what cost should the government exert their power in relation to INGOs. As an employee in an INGO working with indigenous issues tells me the, public policy support for indigenous communities has not reached them. Even though the communities need the help from the development agencies, the government has restricted the cooperation and support has thus diminished (Interview 12, 31.00 min). It is apparent that there is a power struggle at work in Ecuador, between the State and the civil society.

The government’s role in hindering development aid agencies’ contributing in the country, was repeatedly brought up in my interviews. Many of my informants, both from national and international NGOs, express that the relationship with the Ecuadorian government is deeply challenging. When the civil society in the country comment on the way things are run by the current government, the testimonials vary from ‘Correa is the tyrant of the 21st century’, ‘it’s chaos, total chaos’, and that the government’s 2008 constitution is ‘window-dressing’ – a constitution which speaks of the environment, but does ‘nothing’ in practice. I will get back to the apparent nature-constitution disconnection later in this chapter.
On the topic of the environmental movement in Ecuador, one informant tells me that many people working with environmental issues in civil society, started working for the government instead. (S)he goes on saying that ‘one would think that this move of people from civil society to the government would strengthen the environmental cause’ (Interview 16, 16.20 min.). Although the government claims that is the case, in this informant’s opinion this is not what has happened.

“One of the profound weaknesses of the current administration, with almost 10 years in the country, is that the environmental issue – there have been very few good examples of strengthening of this capacity” (Interview 16, 14.40 min.).

When looking into what the government is doing, and their priorities concerning the Amazon rainforest, it becomes clear that calling the government’s handling of environmental issues a ‘profound weakness’ is accurate. Keeping oil in the ground and rainforests intact are two of the most important measures for fighting climate change, a reality the Correa government has acknowledged. This fact, paired with the fact that Ecuador was the first country in the world granting nature rights in the constitution, makes Correa’s opening up for oil extraction in Yasuní in September 2016 perplexing, even though his claim is that it is necessary to fight poverty (Telesur, 2014). This can also explain the tension between the Correa government and the civil society in the country, because it violates not only nature’s right, but also indigenous people’s rights, as there are indigenous peoples living in the areas where they have opened for oil extraction.

The informant from the Ministry of the Environment contributed with some thoughts on power relations, both inside the country and with the international community. (S)he says of international aid cooperation that:

“On the environmental level … the (international) agencies have always imposed the agenda. When the States and Europe started caring about global warming, we all started talking about global warming” (Interview 11, 43.00 min).

The informant goes on to say that there is ‘no environmental organization of importance (in Ecuador)’ (Interview 11, 5.45 min). Speaking of one of the largest environmental organizations in Ecuador, (s)he uses the same rhetoric as Correa and says ‘they are infantile’ and that they set out to do things which are impossible to accomplish.
“The national context has changed radically. The environment in which the NGOs
could have endured has been reduced. Formulation of public policy. The State makes the
public policies. Which is how it should be (laughs)!” (Interview 11, 06.15 min).

The informant explains that the closing of NGOs in the country is because of the State taking
over many of the tasks they have had, but also because of the economic crisis in the US and
Europe. This is debatable. There was unanimity among the informants that the current
government intends to ‘break any initiative which builds associations, especially concerning
the environment because it disturbs their politics’ (Interview 20, 23.00), in essence.

Another challenge when working with the government has been the issue of disbursements.
One of my informants explains that collaborations which have not succeeded have mostly
been with the Ministry of Environment. (S)he tells me that on the governmental level it is
very complicated, because even when it has been decided to support a project with funds, the
actual disbursement of this money can ‘take a very, very long time’. For smaller organizations
this can be a large problem, as compared to larger organizations, because they might not have
the money to cover the costs while waiting for the government pay-out (Interview 14, 26.45
min).

According to my informants, environmental NGOs are seen as threats to the politics of the
government. One of my informants calls the government’s environmental politics for
‘camouflage’, (s)he says that the government in general is not transparent, and that the
constitution is filled with ‘poems’. Considering that nature in general has its own rights in the
constitution from 2008, one could think that this would affect the environmental policies in
the country, yet this has proven to be simply for the sake of appearances so far. The same is
the case with indigenous rights and C169 (Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention,
International Labour Organization) – this convention was ratified in 1998 in Ecuador (ILO,
undated), yet my informants tell me that although it is officially ratified, it does not mean that
it is followed up on.

Nature in the Ecuadorian constitution
An indigenous informant tells me on the topic of the constitution in Ecuador, and nature
having its own rights in the constitution, that it was an outcome from when Correa,
environmentalists and indigenous peoples were still in the “political romance” that they were a part of. As mentioned, this constitution from 2008 was the first constitution to include nature’s rights. However, Correa soon thereafter wanted to open up the possibility of drilling for oil in Yasuní - one of the most biologically diverse parts of the Ecuadorian rainforest. The reply to this from the environmentalists and indigenous peoples was that this was not possible, and that nature’s rights was right there in the constitution. My informant poses the question ‘for what does the constitution and legislations serve, when the economic interests are bigger? Unfortunately, they are simply violated’. He tells me that through reading the Ecuadorian constitution, Ecuador seems like a great country, but that this does not correspond with the reality.

“The most beautiful poems are found in constitutions” (Interview 1, 30.35 min, quoting Bartolomé Clavero).

Seeing as nature’s rights in Ecuador are being systematically violated, there might be something in what Paul Taylor and J. Baird Callicott, both environmental philosophers, claim – namely that nonhuman species, or in the case of Ecuador nature itself, cannot be granted rights. According to Callicott species rights is ‘philosophical non-sense’ and Taylor asserts that ‘only beings who are capable of making claims against others – say, by pointing out violations – can be bearers of moral rights’ (Vetlesen, 2015, 107). This would be in line with Kant’s notion that the relationship between, what Taylor would call moral agent and subject, has to be symmetrical and reciprocal (Vetlesen, 2015, 107). Nature’s position in Ecuador can be seen in the light of, and maybe even partly explained, by this idea. Because nature as such is not a moral agent, and cannot make claims, the rights granted to nature can be seen as ‘philosophical nonsense’ or as my informant points out as ‘poems’.

While I had expected to find more difficulties with, and experiences of demonstrations of power by, the Northern NGOs and INGOs, it seems that this is not the main issue for environmental movement in the country. The most important and most imbalanced power relationship exists between the civil society and the government, which as we have seen affects both the environmental movement and the environment itself. Nevertheless, there does exist power imbalances and other challenges between the Ecuadorian environmental movement and international aid agencies as well. In the following I will articulate some of the most important issues in improving the aid relationship, as provided and expressed by my informants.
The Ecuadorian perspective on improving international aid cooperation

Keeping in mind the local and cultural aspects, the significance of indigenous peoples, critical perspectives on the aid industry and the existing power relations in development aid, this knowledge leads us to the question “How can the cooperation improve?”. I have set out to research this question, and considering my initial assumption that the Northern development agencies were largely in charge, or were taking the charge, I wanted to hear from the people on the receiving end of aid, how improvements could be made as seen from their perspective. Through my interviews, many ideas and recommendations for improving aid cooperation were brought to light. There were too many suggestions to mention here, but I will discuss some of those which were most frequently mentioned, and which stand out as significant in my opinion.

Constructing alliances and partnerships

“To build long-lasting relationships, to build solid relationships is one of the challenges of conservation, because it is crystal-clear that conservation is not possible to carry out alone. No organization, however large, can do this work on its own. We need to build alliances” (Interview 9, 39.15 min.).

The concept which was most frequently brought up and emphasized in my interviews, is the concept of ‘alliance’ in aid relationships. Constructing alliances is mentioned as of importance by informants having worked with the UNDP, in the UN, in national and international NGOs, as well in earlier governments. Per the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD, a partnership entails an inclusive process, comprised of stakeholders such as government, parliament, civil society, beneficiaries and international partners. This is intended to ‘increase ownership of development’ and to ‘build mutual accountability for results’ (OECD, 2010, 7). The wish to create a more equal relationship in development aid has been articulated through different concepts such as ‘empowerment’ and ‘participation’, however creating such a relationship in practice has proven difficult (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 6)

“… it is not easy to pinpoint what is meant by partnership. Indeed, it is arguable that, as with other loosely used terms such as empowerment and participation, part of the attractiveness of the term lies in its slipperiness.” (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 73).

The concept of ‘partnership’ has been accused of being an empty rhetoric, and as being a way of hiding other goals, for example being able to lower costs of development aid (Eriksson
However, when speaking with my informants about what could be done to improve the cooperation between the North and the South, the constructing of ‘alliances’ was undoubtedly the answer.

Building alliances entails a moving away from the traditional donor-recipient relationship, and over to a currently highly relevant ‘partnership’ model. According to the OECD’s 2016 progress report *Making development cooperation more effective*, it is ‘essential to build inclusive partnerships for effective development’ (OECD/UNDP, 2016, 83). Progress on inclusive partnerships is measured by two indicators; Firstly, how governments and development partners enable civil society organizations (CSOs) in being able to operate in a maximized way, and how the CSOs apply development effectiveness themselves. Secondly, a public-private dialogue which promotes contribution in development and engagement from the private sector (OECD/UNDP, 2016, 84). Here we will focus on the first indicator, which is comprised of:

- The availability of spaces for multi-stakeholder dialogue on national development policies
- CSO accountability and transparency
- Official development cooperation with CSOs
- The legal and regulatory environment (OECD/UNDP, 2016, 84).

All the above subjects were touched upon in my interviews, some more thoroughly than others. As we have seen, the government in Ecuador does not enable civil society in maximizing their operation, so the focus here will be on how development partners and the CSOs themselves work in alliance. Eriksson Baaz argues that two central concepts are ‘transparency’ and ‘partner responsibility’ (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 24), OECDs point number two above. It entails a move from a donor-driven to a partner-driven way of working together, where the partner in the South has much more responsibility than earlier models.

According to an informant with more than 30 years of experience, both from national and international NGOs in Ecuador, it is not only necessary to create an alliance, but it has to be constructed on the right foundation. Of this the informant says:

“This alliance, if it’s only for the money, sooner or later it will fail. But if it’s an alliance based on objectives, it’s more probable that it will last. This is the hypothesis … Let’s make an alliance, but not an alliance for that project or for that money. Let’s make an alliance, let’s see, what are your objectives and what are mine? Let us build some common
objectives which you and I, which we feel that are ours, that these objectives are shared” (Interview 9, 47.30 min).

As we have seen in earlier chapters, there has been a tendency, both in the North and the South, to start projects with money as the foundation. An example of this is agencies expressing that they have money for a certain cause, without a critical review of what the priorities in the country are, which has been seen repeatedly in the course of aid history. A good example of why it is important to listen to the countries’ priorities was given by an environmental lawyer having worked with various NGOs and INGOs. He tells me that many aid agencies will say “I have money for work in marine conservation. Period.”. The response might be “Our necessities are not in that area, but in this area”, yet the aid agency has earmarked the money for marine conservation for example (Interview17, 25.45 min.). This situation is problematic because it is not based on common objectives, but is based on money and to what the funds should go. However, this issue is not unproblematic. As Eriksson Baaz notes:

“Contrary to the message that urges partners to articulate their goals as if there were no stakes involved, there are indeed risks involved in articulating goals that differ from those of the donor. In this sense, complete openness is impossible if one is to become and remain a ‘partner’” (Eriksson Baaz, 2005, 172).

The donor’s power, which is closely linked with having control of the funds, should not be underestimated, as we saw in the example of the INGO which was accused of being ‘colonialist’ in the chapter on power relations. Faced with a situation where the ultimate donor, the European Union, had certain conditionalities for the aid cooperation, and these were not accepted on the local NGO’s part, the alliance was simply terminated.

Another of my informants discusses the importance of alliance building, and breaking the donor-recipient relationship which has coloured development aid since the beginning. (S)he has experience from the UN, NGOs and INGOs and says that this is necessary for a successful cooperation:

“I think that something which is very important (…) is that one must break, when it is not already broken, the donor-recipient relationship (…) which is a very bad formula for success. And it is necessary to build a vision, which is: ‘We are partners’. Without first having this attitude change, it is impossible to build a good relationship. Because often, and mainly because of deficiencies in the dialogue, a donor-recipient relationship was formed where the
donor decided what to do and the recipient abided. This relationship is very destructive” (Interview 20, 29.00 min.).

What is needed, according to this informant, is a readjustment of the playing field. (S)he describes what has been seen in the aid industry since the Second World War, which is an inequality between the actors in this industry. This also requires that the people working in aid agencies, both in the North and the South, have attitudes which can be merged with the concept of partnership. Key words which were often brought up when speaking of building an alliance or partnership, are for example ‘mutual respect’, ‘horizontality’, ‘trust’ and ‘reciprocity’. In order to be able to realize any of these concepts, I believe it is necessary to keep in mind the importance of having cultural and local knowledge, and a moving away from the Eurocentrism and evolutionism which has coloured aid since the beginning. Another informant expresses the need for strategic alliances with donors, one step further than simply receiving donations (Interview 15, 31.10 min). On this topic, yet another explains how the relationship has already changed, and that Northern aid agencies ‘no longer want to be the ones to merely sign the check’ (Interview 8, 32.00).

Another important alliance, which was brought up by several informants, is the South-South cooperation. South-South cooperation (SSC) is described by the UNDP as a ‘broad framework for collaboration among countries of the South’ where two or more developing countries ‘share knowledge, skills, expertise and resources to meet their development goals through concerted efforts’ (UNDP, 2016). One of my informants mentions that it would be interesting to promote the South-South cooperation from the North. This is of importance, according to him/her, because there exists a greater understanding of local realities between the Latin American countries (Interview 6, 37.45 min).

**Clarifying objectives, roles, and responsibilities**

As explained above, alliances are seen as important in today’s development aid culture in Ecuador. Several of my informants remark that one of the main issues in successful cooperation is *shared objectives* within the alliances.

An informant who has founded an environmental NGO in Ecuador, subsequently worked there for more than a decade, and spent the last 14 years leading the Ecuador office of one of the largest environmental INGOs in the world, had numerous suggestions to how international cooperation can be improved. (S)he tells me that one of the great advantages of the INGOs is
that they have better access to resources, donors and information than do the national NGOs. Still, the informant argues that when INGOs and NGOs *join forces* it gives the best results. (S)he says that the key, and some of the determining practicalities, in a good alliance are ‘clear and shared objectives, clarity in roles, responsibilities, and the distribution of resources, and clarity in who gets authorship and institutional credit’ (Interview 9, 29.30 min). The informant emphasizes the importance of transparency in these processes, and underlines the importance of being *explicit* in the cooperation. (S)he believes that a large reason for failed projects is that these topics have not been discussed properly, and emphasizes the need to talk about these issues explicitly, and not *assume* anything (Interview 9, 31.30 min).

All the projects and cooperations this informant has seen fail have something in common: the lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities, lack of clarity in budgets and distribution of resources, and lack of clarity in recognition of people working on the project. Three things which always need to be clarified:

- Objectives, roles, and responsibilities
- Budgets and distribution of resources
- Credits or recognition of individual people and the organization

“These three things, in my experience, need to be discussed from the beginning. The mistake is that sometimes it’s not talked about and people *assume* (things)” (Interview 9, 35.00 min.).

This stands to show that the effort put in *planning* beforehand how the cooperation should proceed is very important. As we have seen before, the planning process in Ecuador, where my informants underline that the amount of unpredictabilities are persistent, is not always straight forward. However, a clarity in details from the very beginning is a good foundation to build upon.

**The role of communication in the aid relationship**

“Communication is the maintenance, modification, and creation of culture. In this sense, the processes and institutions of communication, of culture, and of development are all woven together. It becomes impossible to think of communication as predominantly a process of information transmission” (Melkote & Steeves, 2001, 31).
According to Melkote and Steeves many critical scholars argue that, because communication and culture are intertwined, communication can strengthen hegemonic values in society (Melkote & Steeves, 2001, 31). The author also notes that leading theorists and philosophers maintain that the dominant discourse holds the power to shape society and reality. Melkote and Steeves emphasize that ‘the language and imagery of development certainly provides insights into values and agendas of those communicating’ (Melkote & Steeves, 2001, 32). An example of this is in our choice of words: we are used to terms such as “Third World” or “underdeveloped” when speaking of countries in the global South. The authors challenge this by suggesting the term “overexploited” instead, and argues that this changes the meaning, and consequently may change our way of thinking (Melkote & Steeves, 2001, 32).

Several of my informants emphasise that communication is key in a good cooperation. It depends both on language skills, meetings in person, channels of communication, and individual people’s ability to communicate competently. On the topic of communication, one of my informants says:

“I think it’s the most important part of the relationship between NGOs and development agencies – communication - because everything is understood while talking. But it’s necessary with spaces in which to talk” (Interview 6 pt. II, 7.15 min.).

My informant from the UN also discussed the importance of communication. He explains that this is substantial in a professional and bilateral meeting setting, to make sure of ‘co-programming and -financing of activities, and to make sure that there are no duplications of work in the territories’ (Interview 10, 13.10 min.).

An example of this can be found in Ben Ramalingam’s Aid on the Edge of Chaos where he describes a small-scale case of such duplication. He recounts an incident in which a young girl supposedly had gotten measles following the Indian Ocean tsunami, yet recovered surprisingly quickly – it turned out that she did not have the measles, but had gotten the same vaccine three times, from three different aid organizations, and as a result had gotten measles-like symptoms (Ramalingam, 2013, 4). According to the author, this sort of duplication – or fragmentation – is common whenever aid is given. This illustrates one of the reasons why organized and clear communication is of importance. As yet another environmental professional tells me, that ‘in the end, everything is communication – it’s the most important thing’ (Interview 9, 36.20). (S)he underlines the importance of open and explicit communication. It is necessary right from the start to discuss in detail what each side’s
expectations are, regarding for example exactly how the resources should be distributed and recognition in project documents.

**Listening to the country’s priorities and experiences**

“The lack of feedback between beneficiary and donor, and the insensitivity of aid agencies to the needs of local and national actors, is seen by many as being at the heart of the problems facing the relevance and effectiveness of aid activities” (Ramalingam, 2013, 91).

Another aspect of communication which was mentioned often in my interviews, is the issue of *listening*. I was told a number of times that international development aid organizations should ‘listen to the (recipient) country’s priorities’. This is closely related to having knowledge both of the reality in the country, and extensive cultural knowledge, because only then is it possible to create a horizontal alliance. As discussed in the chapter about local and cultural knowledge, this is a prerequisite for successful aid cooperation. The pitfalls of assuming that the models which have been tried and tested in the North, can simply be transferred to countries in the South, have been made clear, something my informants also expressed repeatedly.

Aid to Ecuador has diminished in recent years, as pointed out by most of my informants. Except for the government blocking aid, an essential reason for this is that Ecuador is now considered a middle-income country. As an informant with experience both from government, the UN and INGOs states, measuring a country’s need for aid by their gross domestic product (GDP) might not an adequate measuring tool. (S)he emphasizes that this macroeconomic criterion for measuring poverty does not show that the country has *not* improved the structural poverty index, but that it has become a middle-income country because of higher income from exports such as commodities (Interview 15, 39.45 min.). The informant’s point is also emphasized by Ragin and Amoroso who explains that countries may seem statistically better off than they are when using GDP as a measurement, because a country might have substantial inequality, with some very rich people, yet many poor (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011, 175).

Another important reason to listen to the recipient country’s priorities is that of local knowledge – I have argued that the people best equipped to manage their territories, projects and societies, are those who have the local knowledge. An indigenous academic tells me about a knowledge exchange and dialogue with an organization from Spain which has become
a horizontal agreement, because both parts have realized that they have something to learn from one another. (S)he says that international development agencies should be interested in learning from them, and justifies it simply saying:

“To put it like this: Europe does not have the Amazon” (Interview 1, 6.25 min.).

The informant continues saying that international development actors should learn about the Amazon, how fragile it is, and how ‘this reserve for the whole world is very much desired by the oil companies’. (S)he is of the opinion that the government in the country, regardless of political stance, will make agreements with oil companies once in a crisis, and that this could result in the destruction of ‘this heritage for mankind’ (Interview 1, 7.00 min). The informant was proven right – six months after this interview was held, the Correa government opened for drilling in Yasuní, one of the most biodiverse parts of the Ecuadorian Amazon.

Some claim that a bettering of the communication between people is an illusion, and that it does not structurally change the relationship. As Crewe and Harrison point out:

“Better communication between the partners might provide a sense of equality but it does not alter the structurally unequal relationship of donor and recipient” (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 74).

As Melkote and Steeves note, communication can strengthen hegemonic values in society (Melkote & Steeves, 2001, 31). I argue that if communication can strengthen hegemonic values, it can also weaken hegemonic values, and thus help balance the unequal relationships. Listening to the country’s priorities, and having knowledge of the local reality and culture, might also act as a reason to reconsider the conditionalities which many Northern agencies have been known to require.

One of my informants says that almost all development cooperation has an agenda, but that this agenda should be adjusted to match the local necessities – ‘that’s the art of development cooperation’ (Interview 10, 10.40 min.). He comments that the most successful collaboration he has experienced is with an INGO which does not impose the agenda – it’s an INGO which asks “What do you need help with?”.
The importance of the individual

The issue of listening goes hand in hand with another matter which several of my informants have expressed: the significance of the individual people who work in the organizations. One informant tells me that their cooperation with a specific INGO has succeeded in large part because the people in the organization ‘know how to carry out projects, and they are understanding, because they have knowledge’, but that the most important part is the specific person from the organization you are faced with. In this specific case, they are met with a person in the aid agency coincidentally also being from Ecuador, which the informant describes as a good experience because they could understand each other to a great extent. (S)he gives another example of the importance of individual people working in the organizations, only this time in an unfortunate sense:

“There was one case in which they substituted a person who knew a lot, for a person who did not know anything, but who in addition tried to impose … The results weren’t achieved because it wasn’t possible for the country. But for this person it had to be ‘like this’” (Interview 6, 30.00 min.).

On the topic of how to improve the relationship and cooperation, an environmental activist mentions the importance of finding a common ground and discussing your objectives and what you want to accomplish, rather than focusing the administrative and bureaucratic part.

“I think you have to humanize the relationship. When you humanize it and you meet another, the dialogue improves” (Interview 8, 48.30 min).

This can be seen in the light of critical theory, in that relationships need to be humanized, as opposed to quantified, to succeed.

Sharing and transmission of information

Technology has sped up the flows of information exponentially all around the world. With more radio- and TV-stations, smart phones and the Internet, our access to information is greater than ever before.

One of the leaders in the most prominent indigenous organization in Ecuador mentions that aside from mutual respect in cooperation, what they seek is more information. He expresses that there is a lack of information about possible cooperation with aid agencies, especially in Europe (Interview 5, 19.50). Many of the actors in Ecuadorian NGOs mentioned this fact, that
they are missing an overview of which aid agencies it is possible to collaborate with. This is seconded by another informant, who suggests that it could be possible to improve cooperation through more information.

“Norway is a country which has a lot of money. How can I know what cooperation Norway has? I mean, the issue is, how do I get this knowledge? This is the part which I think needs to be improved” (Interview 8, 42.00 min).

She says that many cooperations take place based on coincidences, and there needs to be a network for donors and recipients, connecting them together.

**Transmission of information**

An informant with environmental experience both from government, the UN, national and international NGOs says that communication and how information is transmitted is ‘vital’. (S)he expresses two essential aspects of how information is communicated: firstly, that it is no longer necessary for everyone to read long reports or books to understand for example global warming – saying ‘a 5-minute video can sometimes teach me more than a 100-page text’.

Secondly, according to the informant, it is crucial to talk about difficult things in a simple way. On the topic of how environmentalists and environmental scientists transmit their research and information (s)he notes:

“We still have not learned to talk in a simple way about difficult matters. We think that our prestige lies in speaking in difficult terms, in speaking with scientific terms, in a language which no one understands (…) We need to humanize the language (…) of the messages on difficult topics (…) that people need to know” (Interview 20, 36.10 min).

The informant’s point is that even after almost 40 years of being involved in environmental issues, (s)he still does not fathom what a ton or a million tons of carbon is – (s)he asks ‘is it big, is it small? I have no idea’. The informant goes on to say that ‘the scientist is not a good communicator’ and even states that there should be a new profession which concerns itself with ‘translating the scientific language into communicative terms’.

“If we do not do this conveyance of information, so that the politician understands, so that the mayor understands (…) so that the journalist understands, and so that the kid understands, the young person at the university, you and I (…) if we do not understand this difficult information, why should we be concerned about climate change?” (Interview 20, 38.20 min.).
This stands out, in my opinion, as a very important point. From my point of view, one of the great challenges in the battle against climate change, is communicating the severity of the problem so that it is clear that it affects everyone.

**Institutionalization and long-term projects**

“The partners of aid agencies are expected to achieve self-reliance through capacity-building. Most aid agencies aim, in theory at least, to become redundant within the partnership” (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, 70).

Two subjects often brought up in the development cooperation discourse is ‘long-term cooperation’ and ‘institutionalization’. Many of my informants mentioned one or both of these concepts as substantial in international aid cooperation. Aid experts largely agree that for development problems to be solved, it is necessary to have long-term projects of more than a year or two (Fengler & Kharas, 2010, 4).

One informant underlines the importance of long-term collaborations, which in his/her opinion is necessary to build sustainability in the work they do, especially when it comes to local organizations and communities (Interview 4, 19.20 min). Another informant emphasized that when working with development agencies, foundations or organizations, even if there is not much money, they will try to continue the cooperation if they have a long-term and solid relationship (Interview 15, 39.20 min.). This focus on building long-term cooperation was highly agreed upon.

Another factor is, as mentioned, the importance of institutionalization, and according to my informants, the lack of institutionalization in Ecuador. According to Collins ‘…the Ecuadorian civil society has developed critical intersubjectivity faced with a political society characterized by the weakness of its institutions and its inefficiency in processing the different social demands’ (Ortiz, 2014, 587).

The issue of institutionalization as important in development processes can be found in development aid literature since the 1960s. A prevailing thought back then was that developing countries should imitate industrial countries’ institutional models. Donors now generally shy away from this idea, and rather take the individual country’s existing institutional situation as a place to start (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 34). Having sound institutions is of importance, as reported by numerous evaluations and
studies, because the lack thereof has been identified as a reason for development efforts failing in countries where the governments have not had the capacity to realize and manage them (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 34).

Since the 1960s 3.2 trillion USD has been given from rich to poor countries, however this does not necessarily mean that the aid given has led to fundamental and lasting changes (Fengler & Kharas, 2010, 1). An example of this is in Ecuador is given by an informant who tells me of his/her personal experience with development loans from the World Bank. (S)he is from an indigenous community, and they spent millions of dollars in this community on what (s)he calls “quote, unquote development” through public loans from the World Bank. There were people from Quito who came to work on the project, but these were people who did not know this particular indigenous group or the area. The problem, (s)he tells me, was that the money was simply spent, and the public ended up in debt. The informant underlines that the underdevelopment and poverty did not change after the money was spent, and the project ended (Interview 1, 2.00 min.).

Several of my informants have told me similar stories, of foreign aid agencies starting up projects in the country, but as soon as the agency leaves, there is no institution to continue managing the project. As Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen notes, developing countries needs permanent institutions, in the state or civil society, for aid in development of institutional capacity to achieve results (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 295). Considering the weakness of the institutions in Ecuador, it becomes even more important to make sure aid funds are spent where institutionalization has been a focus. As another informant underlines, the success of projects has often been the institutional configuration of the projects. The fact that there is someone who knows the place, the people, and knows the project, and who is going to stay even after the donor is gone, makes for a solid foundation to keep building on (Interview 19, 16.40 min.).

This is something which is seconded by many of my informants, as one points out, telling me that there are many institutional weaknesses, especially at the local level, and that local governments do not have the institutional strength they need. (S)he goes on saying that international aid has many lessons learned, of what has worked and not, after many decades of working with and in Latin America. According to this informant, during the 60s, 70s and 80s international cooperation has invested a great deal of money in Latin American countries, yet there were not many real changes, and the beneficiaries continued being dependent on the international cooperation (Interview 15, 42.00 min.).
The lack of institutionalization is closely related to that of dependency in Ecuador, because without solid institutions, the projects and organizations become dependent upon the foreign investment and management of them. Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen underline this in saying that ‘there is no doubt that intensive donor control through project organizations and foreign experts has led to dependency in developing countries’ organizations’ (Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen, 2003, 295).

The director of one of the leading INGOs on conservation in the world, tells me of institutionalization:

“We are looking for what we call ‘institutionalization of processes’. That is to say, how do we do it so that what we are involved in, does not end when the money runs out or we leave” (Interview 16, 7.55 min).

This informant goes on to say that (s)he sees three fundamental elements for effective cooperation:

- Align with local priorities
- Work with local actors
- Obtain institutionalization

The importance of long-term cooperation and institutionalization is brought up by yet another informant, who is the director of an INGO working with Ecuadorian environmental NGOs. This INGO has decided in recent years to have projects with the local NGOs of at least 10 year’s duration. In this time the NGOs would be able to build the capacity needed to be able to continue working even if the support of the INGO was to end. As many others have mentioned, the aid to Ecuador has diminished, so institutionalization becomes more important than ever (Interview 18, 6.60 min.). Keeping in mind Alan Fowler’s model for INGOs, and the steps which should be taken in an aid alliance – entry, integration, consolidation and withdrawal – the last part is seen as an essential element of the partnership, and this is where institutionalization is of importance. Although my informants admitted to being reliant on international aid cooperation as of 2016, the goal for most local organizations is to become independent. If the ultimate goal of the international aid industry is indeed the unconditional support of poorer and more vulnerable societies, it is imperative that the recipients of aid are put in charge.
6. Conclusion

During my fieldwork in Ecuador I completed 21 qualitative in-depth interviews with actors from the environmental movement in Quito. My aim in this dissertation was to get an understanding of how these actors see the international development aid industry, and whether they had experiences which could highlight how this industry works, and could be improved, as seen from their perspective.

As I have emphasized throughout this study, both the development aid industry and the vast challenges which exist pertaining to the environment, are made up of extremely complex systems. There is no \textit{one} answer for improving neither the development aid industry, nor making this development sustainable.

My findings show that the actors in the environmental movement in Ecuador agree upon many issues related to international aid cooperation. One of the most important things I discovered, was that there has been a shift in \textit{experienced} power structures between the actors in the South and the North, as seen from the Ecuadorian actors’ point of view. In general, the informants revealed that collaboration with the international aid community is coloured by mutual respect, and a willingness to build horizontal alliances. This surpassed my expectations, as I had a presupposition that the relationship would be more unequal, and that the relationship would be more influenced by the history of Eurocentrism. In this sense, according to my informants, the aid industry has evolved and learned from past mistakes. It has in large part moved away from the traditional donor-recipient relationship, and is closer to encompassing real partnerships.

The informants also expressed how crucial local and cultural knowledge is in the aid relationship. For cooperation to succeed, all parties in the cooperation need to have intrinsic knowledge of the realities revolving the cooperation. This is a prerequisite in building equal and horizontal alliances, and in creating lasting solutions and outcomes of the cooperation. Recipient agency - the possibility of being an agent in one’s own reality - instead of being simply at the mercy of others, is key in aid cooperation. This means that listening to the recipient country’s priorities is a central topic. According to my informants, the cooperation should be focused on \textit{mutual learning}, to avoid the paternalistic approaches of the past, and the idea that the agencies from the North hold the solutions for successful projects.

Another significant finding in this study is that of the Ecuadorian government’s influence on civil society’s possibility of maximizing their operations. According to my informants, one of
the main obstacles for civil society organizations, and in particular environmental organizations, is the politics of the current government. The government has been described by my informants as trying to ‘break any environmental initiatives’, because it is in conflict with their politics. Considering the fact that Ecuador’s constitution of 2008 was the first to include nature’s rights, it could be understood as being genuinely concerned with the environment, however, this has not been shown in practice. As of September 2016, the Correa government opened up for oil extraction in Yasuní ITT, one of the most biologically diverse places on the planet, and home to indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation.

As argued in my findings, indigenous peoples in Ecuador, as in other parts of Latin America, play an important part in the protection of the environment. The Kichwa worldview places great emphasis on the intrinsic value the Earth holds, and human beings living in harmony with nature. Granting indigenous peoples territorial rights is thus, generally, a step towards protecting the environment.

In my opinion the importance of, not only ‘development aid’, but of ‘sustainable development aid’ is crucial. This fact was underlined already in the 1980s, in the Brundtland report, as in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, and by countless others, as deepened knowledge of environmental challenges has increased. Development aid exists, in essence, to help poor and vulnerable people around the world. These same people are the ones who are the most vulnerable to, and affected by, climate change, as concluded by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Development has often been characterized as inherently good, and as a universal right. However, when this process affects people in all corners of the world, when seeing the correlation between industrialization and environmental degradation, it becomes clear that changes must be made. In my opinion, this change must be made by way of sustainable development. If the people receiving development aid, most of which residing in the global South, are ultimately suffering the most from climate change – and if we presume that increased development also speeds up environmental degradation, as many experts hold – it should be evident that development aid needs to focus on sustainability.

Consequently, it would be valuable to do further research on how to advance practices in the development aid industry, with the ultimate goal being sustainable development. Furthermore, exploring how the agency of the recipients of aid could, to an even higher degree, be the focus of attention.
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**Acronyms**

CONAIE: La Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador

COP21: 21st Conference of the Parties

DAC: Development Assistance Committee

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization (UN)

INGO: International Non-Governmental Organization

IPCC: The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

ODA: Official development assistance

OECD: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

REDD+: Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (as well as conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks)

UN: The United Nations
Appendix

1. Interview guide

Manual de entrevista - Ida Ulleberg Jensen

El material será anonimizado.

Temas para la entrevista

Introducción

1. Presentación del informante.

¿Dónde trabaja Usted?

¿En qué trabajan Ustedes?

¿Cuál es su puesto y cuáles son sus encargos?

¿Qué es su experiencia y educación?

¿Por qué decidió trabajar justo con esto?

2. Colaboración internacional

¿Con cuáles cooperaciones internacionales colaboran?

¿Cómo es su rol en la colaboración?

¿Podría dar algunos ejemplos de colaboraciones buenos o exitosos que ha experimentado Usted?

¿Cómo se puede explicar que fueron colaboraciones buenas?

¿Podría dar ejemplos de colaboraciones difíciles o malogrados? ¿Por qué cree Usted que la colaboración fracasó?

¿Ustedes son dependientes de tener buenas colaboraciones con las cooperaciones internacionales?

¿Tiene Usted algunas ideas o recomendaciones para mejorar la colaboración?

3. Comunicación entre las organizaciones

¿Cómo se comunican con otras organizaciones? ¿Usan tecnología para comunicar y en este caso cuál?

¿Tiene Usted ejemplos de cómo se comunica de manera buena? Cuáles ventajas tiene esto/por qué es importante?

¿Tiene Usted ejemplos de comunicación mala o deficiente? ¿Cuáles consecuencias puede tener esto?

¿Alguna vez tienen reuniones en persona y tiene algún significado juntarse en persona? ¿Ejemplos?

¿Es importante conocer y tener una relación buena con sus colaboradores? ¿Qué significa (si significa algo) tener una buena relación con los colaboradores?
4. Toma de decisiones

¿Quién toma las decisiones finales en la organización – vuestra organización o la cooperación internacional? ¿Tiene Usted algún ejemplo de esto?

¿Alguna vez ha pasado que una organización externa haya tomado decisiones por parte de la organización?

Si haya algún conflicto entre Ustedes y la cooperación internacional, ¿cómo trabajan para arreglarlo? ¿Me podría dar un ejemplo de un conflicto que no fue resuelto y un conflicto que fue resuelto?

¿Tiene Usted algunos consejos o ideas para cómo mejorar el proceso de la toma de decisiones entre las organizaciones?

5. Conclusión

¿Hay algo que le gustaría profundizar?

¿Tiene Usted algunas preguntas sobre mi proyecto?

Por favor contácteme si después le ocurre algunos ejemplos concretos relatados con lo que hemos hablado.
2. Acceptance letter for informants

Solicitud para la participación en la investigación:
“El movimiento ambientalista ecuatoriana y cooperación internacional”

Antecedente y objetivo

En este proyecto voy a investigar las relaciones de cooperación entre el movimiento ambientalista ecuatoriana y cooperaciones internacionales. La pregunta principal de la investigación es: Cómo experimentan los actores en el movimiento ambientalista ecuatoriana la cooperación con cooperaciones internacionales. Este es un proyecto de un máster en el Instituto de Literatura, Estudios Territoriales y Lenguas Europeas en la Universidad de Oslo, Noruega.

Voy a contactar a organizaciones relevantes en Ecuador y deseo entrevistar a personas que tienen experiencia con cooperación internacional. También voy a contactar a personas externas con una percepción sobre el movimiento ambientalista en Ecuador.

¿Qué implica participación en el estudio?

Participación en el estudio implica participar en una entrevista cualitativa por alrededor de una hora. Voy a recoger información sobre educación, experiencia de trabajo, sus puntos de vista y experiencia con cooperación internacional. Los datos se registran a través de notas y grabación de audio.

¿Qué pasará con la información sobre Usted?

Toda información personal será tratada confidencialmente. Sólo el encargado y yo tendremos acceso a la información personal. Grabaciones e información personal serán guardados en una computadora con contraseña o en una caja fuerte. No será posible identificar los participantes en el estudio.

Según el esbozo el proyecto será terminado antes de 1.1.2017. En ese momento toda información personal será borrada.

Participación voluntaria

La participación en el estudio es voluntaria y Usted puede en cualquier momento retirarse sin dar explicaciones. Si se retira, toda la información sobre Usted será anonimizada.

Si Usted quiera participar o tenga preguntas sobre el proyecto, por favor contáctese con Ida Ulleberg Jensen por correo electrónico: idajensen_no@hotmail.com o teléfono: 09-79776055. Se puede también contactar al encargado, Roy Krøvel, por correo electrónico: roy.krovel@hioa.no.

Consentimiento para participar en el estudio

He recibido información sobre el estudio y estoy dispuesto a participar.

(Firma del participante, fecha)