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## Localised Voices in the Globalised Amazon: Challenges of Civil Society Building in Ecuador

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March 2010



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# Localised Voices in the Globalised Amazon: Challenges of Civil Society Building in Ecuador<sup>1</sup>

*Brian Wallis*

## Abstract

Civil society building efforts in Ecuador have provided the Achuar and Kichwas of the Amazon with a voice. This is particularly relevant given the global significance of the Amazon, which makes it essential that local voices are empowered to have a say in the future of their local space. Civil society building efforts aim at empowering historically excluded groups, leading to their political inclusion, as well as to an increase in their decision-making power. The Amazonian indigenous movement demands autonomy, but this has become unattainable due to the area's insertion into the process of globalisation. In response, the Amazonian indigenous movement has joined forces with counterhegemonic global actors such as activists and environmental NGOs.

Donor support to the indigenous movement in the Ecuadorian Amazon empowered indigenous leaders, who have challenged traditional economic development models in their efforts to achieve Sumak Kawsay, or 'the good life'. The resistance of the indigenous movement of the Amazon to a developmental model that has not delivered on its promises has inspired alternative solutions among post-development enthusiasts, academics and activists. This case study of the Amazon in a global era shows how power relations play out between the indigenous leadership and powerful external actors concerned with the administration of the Amazon's resources. Civil society building in the Amazon has provided the platform for the expression of indigenous voices. Independently of whether or not powerful groups agree with these visions, these voices have opened up the debate on development alternatives.

## About the author

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<sup>1</sup> This working paper is based on the author's research paper written in compliance with the requirements for obtaining the degree of Masters of Arts in Development Studies at the Institute of Social Studies, finalized in December 2006.

## INTRODUCTION

This article is based on research carried out for the civil society building knowledge programme, a joint research programme between the ISS and HIVOS. The research includes primary material collected from 30 semi-structured interviews with Achuar and Kichwa leaders, NGO staff, academics and local government officials in Pastaza and Quito, Ecuador. The research underscores the ongoing process of inclusion of the Achuar and Kichwas of the Ecuadorian Amazon—which have historically preferred autonomy—vis-à-vis the state and globalisation.

The identity politics of the Amazonian indigenous movement in terms of its participation in global solidarity networks and its claims to the state through citizen participation are also reviewed. The research looks at how these organisations of the indigenous movement relate to the state and to other non-state actors, and how—given the importance and value assigned to the Amazon by various powerful actors—power relations play out in the Amazon in an age of globalisation.

Given the diverging views on how to exploit or not exploit the Amazon, the opinions and voices of the Achuar and Kichwas are central towards determining the future of the region, and the management of its resources. Furthermore, participation by the Achuar and Kichwas in this debate provide alternative non-western views. Donors have provided invaluable support to the Amazonian indigenous movement and have strengthened and empowered its leadership, but have also imposed their agendas. The power balance has shifted in the Amazon, giving the Achuar and Kichwas a say in the future of their territories. This is the result of a long historical process of indigenous organising rather than due to donor support. The local space is now also shared by actors such as the traditional missionaries, anthropologists and local indigenous nationalities. There are also environmental NGO activists, conservationists, biologists, ecological economists, reporters, scholars and scientists.

The Achuar and Kichwas face serious challenges in terms of negotiating the future of their territories with powerful external actors.

## BACKGROUND

Ecuador's indigenous movement has been praised by many authors as the most powerful indigenous movement in the Americas. An important distinction must be made between the Amazonian indigenous movement and the indigenous movement of the highlands. The two have very distinct trajectories, goals, and visions based on historical differences between the highlands and the Amazon regions. The main objective of the Amazonian indigenous movement has been autonomy and the establishment of "Circunscripciones Territoriales Indígenas" which would promote this autonomy. The critical issue has been oil resources in the territories.

The origins of the Amazonian indigenous movement can be traced back to the 1960s. Missionaries influenced by the theology of liberation were the first catalysts in the process of indigenous organising in the Ecuadorian Amazon. The Shuar was the first group to organise. Historically, they had an autonomous, disperse and nomadic lifestyle (Silva Charvet 2003). Furthermore, difficult access to these territories kept them rather isolated.

In the Ecuadorian Amazon the responsibility of ‘civilising’ the Indians was given to the religious missions. As Ponce (2000: 83) states, it was not uncommon for Latin American governments to delegate authority in areas far from its center. In 1935 the Ecuadorian government created a Shuar reserve and gave the authority for its administration to the Salesian order. This authority over the territory was given in exchange for educating the Shuar and converting them into Ecuadorian citizens (Rubenstein 2005). The Salesian missions established the first schools and clinics in the Amazonian provinces of Morona Santiago and Pastaza. The Instituto Linguístico de Verano (ILV) also played a key role in opening communication with the indigenous groups by teaching and learning indigenous languages (Ponce 2004).

The land reform law passed in 1964—called the ‘law of empty lands’—opened up lands for colonisation in the Amazon which were considered unoccupied. This spurred a process of resistance from indigenous groups to defend their lands, supported by the Salesian missionaries who reacted negatively to colonisation which they believed could mean the potential displacement of indigenous communities. Since indigenous communities were nomadic, the Salesians attempted to make the communities sedentary by establishing centers. The Salesians worked to obtain legal recognition for each center and then legalised the lands in the name of each Shuar center to avoid indigenous lands from being encroached upon (Rubenstein 2005). In order to prevent the lands from being considered unoccupied, the Shuar—with advice from the missionaries—started cattle grazing on the lands.

In response to the aggressive expansion of the agricultural and productive frontier, the Shuar were forced to take refuge in centers and communes as the only effective legal mechanism to guarantee their right to stay on the land and own it. These new forms of organisation and land tenure affected traditional institutions and ways of life, but they were the only way to prevent displacement. Together, the various centers, associations and communes established the Shuar federation, which became a model for the Amazonian indigenous movement. This movement was the first confederation of federations, which evolved into the formation of other federations in which the Shuar joined with other similar organisations, like OPIP—the Organization of Indigenous People of Pastaza—which later established CONFENAIE—the confederation of indigenous nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon.

## THE AMAZON IN THE AGE OF GLOBALISATION

In his in-depth discussion on globalisation Bonaventura Sousa Santos (2002) refers to the external influences on shaping local spaces as ‘transnational interactions have intensified dramatically’. Furthermore, he quotes Giddens’ definition of globalisation: ‘as the intensification of worldwide social relations, which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa’. In his account Sousa Santos speaks of hegemonic globalisation and of antiglobalisation or counterhegemonic globalisation, referring in particular to social movements. The Amazon has not been able to escape globalisation, be it corporate globalisation and multinational oil corporations or counterhegemonic globalisation (including the environmental movement and global civil society). The Amazon is now part of the digital age: the Amazonian indigenous movement has used the internet as a tool to establish links with global solidarity networks.

Globalisation has introduced new powerful actors into the Amazon, creating tension and resistance. Touraine (2000) identifies indigenous movements as communitarianist regimes that emerge with the objective to defend a historical community or a cultural, linguistic or religious being. Modernisation, industrialisation and finance capitalism pose a threat to national or regional societies and cultures (Touraine 2000: 211). According to him 'traditional societies are now almost non-existent, yet communitarianisation has emerged in response to modernisation' (ibid.). The defense of territory and culture in the Amazon precisely seeks to preserve the ancestral cultures of the Achuar, Shuar and Kichwas. The defense of territory implies preserving indigenous language, spirituality and knowledge, which are all intricately related to the jungle. The defense of the traditional way of life of the Achuar and Kichwas is supported via internet-based solidarity networks. Tradition is not replaced but re-affirmed by the advance of modernisation, evidenced by two opposing ideological forces: liberalism and communitarianism. Communitarian views in counterhegemonic social movements reflect how youths in Italy, Germany or the United States reject liberalism and capitalism, with its sectarian culture and individualism, preferring instead an ideal community which holds something that is still sacred, something that has been lost as a result of rational 'modernity' in the West. Those that have been in contact with the magic of the Amazon and its culture fight to preserve it.

These global civil society networks have provided a stage for the Achuar and Kichwas to shed light on their way of life, which is threatened by oil companies. Critics, however, state that western supporters lack information and have stereotypical conceptions of 'the happy savage' and view the 'Amazon as the lost garden of Eden immersed in the western subconscious', reproducing purist and romanticised representations of reality.

In its search for sustainable alternatives to capitalism the Amazonian movement has awakened the imagination of many people. Several seminars have been held on the issue, and interesting proposals have been made, including the proposal to keep oil underground to preserve the Yasuni rainforest. Critics, however, argue that the environmental movement has gone too far encouraging 'individuals and communities to distance themselves from both government and corporate capitalism, in putative attempts to create an alternative political economy relying on self sufficiency' (Dryzec 1997: 19). Critics like Walker (2004) question community forestry that reproduces generic representations of 'forest friendly' indigenous people and concludes that as a result of power relations, foreign NGOs impose conservation on indigenous people while at the same time undermining their claims. In addition Wainright (2003) cautions against 'conservative communitarianism' that promotes self-help and self-reliance, which implies accepting that the state does not need to invest in the communities. Self-reliance reaffirms the status quo of fiscal conservatism and neo-liberalism where the state shakes off responsibility by not responding to the needs of the communities. 'Community self help means leaving the structures of inequality untouched' (Wainright 2003: 37). Particularly in the Amazon, where servicing the communities is expensive because of transportation costs, self-reliance provides a justification to the local government not to attend to the communities' needs. In parishes like Sarayaku, 99.2% of the population has unsatisfied basic needs<sup>2</sup> (SIISE 2003).

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<sup>2</sup> SIISE calculates unsatisfied basic needs based on households with persistent lack of basic services. The calculation includes lack of services such as health, education or employment. It takes into account housing with precarious physical characteristics, lack of services such as potable water, sewage, latrines, electricity, one or more household members over 10 who are illiterate. SIISE



The continuous demands for autonomy expressed by the indigenous leadership towards local government have resulted in a situation where local officials simply shrug their shoulders and state that ‘they do not want development’.

The global significance of the Amazon has undermined the needs of its local population. Power relations and external intervention have created a gridlock and fueled conflict between those who promise progress and those who promise conservation. The conflict has reached a point where ‘defense of territory’ has translated into physical defense of borders, which has resulted in indigenous organisations becoming physical guardians of their territories. This mirrors Touraine’s observation of communitarian regimes that ‘give defense of a collective identity a political or military strength that leads to the rejection of everything that is foreign’ (Touraine 2000: 163). Indigenous leaders have expressed their lack of trust towards outsiders, those who represent corporate globalisation as well as foreign conservationists (Chapin 2004).

## CIVIL SOCIETY FOR WHAT?

The debate about the future and administration of the Amazon’s resources demands the active participation of empowered local leaders. The Amazonian indigenous movement has been the breeding ground for Achuar, Shuar and Kichwa leaders, although disagreement amongst leaders has been discouraged. They are expected to maintain a united front.<sup>3</sup> One key question that surfaces is: what role should civil society organisations have, and how are we interpreting civil society? According to the inclusive approach (see Biekart 1999), civil society provides a space for local leaders to voice their demands and to debate about possible alternatives.

The ambiguity and conflicting interpretations about civil society and its role are mirrored in the Amazon. The different interpretations of donors as to what CSOs should do makes it necessary to clarify their role according to different ideological readings. These include: (1) CSOs in terms of their relation to the state, (2) whether CSOs are instruments to promote social cohesion or to be platforms for contestation and protest, (3) whether their role should be advocacy or service delivery, and (4) whether they should support an issue or simply exist as spaces to promote dialogue.

## Civil society in relation to the state

Civil society is, according to Van Rooy, an ‘analytical hat stand suitable for any political agenda’ (Van Rooy 1998: 6). The term ‘civil society’ is commonly linked to the pluralist interpretation that defines civil society as “an intermediate associational realm between

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measures lack of material conditions as well as lack of capabilities. The rural average of unsatisfied basic needs in Ecuador is 79%. The incidence of unsatisfied basic needs in indigenous communities is persistently the highest. However, there is a tendency to say that these measures don’t apply to indigenous people because of their use of natural resources, creating a double standard for indigenous people and non-indigenous people.

<sup>3</sup> At the time of the research in 2006, the Achuars, Shuars and Kichwas joined forces through the interfederation committee, stating that they all unite in their stance against oil companies, emphasizing that their position is non-negotiable. Disagreement with this stance or discussing possible negotiations with oil companies would signify betrayal. Several leaders spoke of a break in the movement, as several leaders are accused of having been co-opted or bought by oil companies.



state and family populated by organisations which are separate from the state, enjoy autonomy in relation to the state and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or extend their interests or values” (White 1994). For Crook (2000) civil society “refers to all types of self chosen group[-]based activity which has grown out of interest divisions in society and which are not formally part of the state”. The pluralist definition emphasises the need for autonomy from the state based on the idea that “for democracy to function there is a need for the emergence of public spaces that are independent of the institutions of government, the party system and state structures” (Martin 2004: 38).

In contrast, the inclusive approach of civil society building seeks to incorporate marginalised sectors and deepen democratisation. This approach to civil society building seeks to strengthen political society from below (Biekart 1999: 97). Civil society groups are observed as instruments of bottom-up pressure to open up spaces of political contestation, and as intermediary channels that mediate between citizens who are weak or not represented, and the state.

### **CSOs to promote social cohesion and to offer a platform to speak and protest**

In terms of civil society being an instrument to promote social cohesion or being a platform for silenced voices to speak up and protest, Howell and Pearce (2001) provide a useful dichotomy of two interpretations of civil society: the mainstream and the alternative genealogies. The mainstream view has developed from a liberal genealogy, tracing its origins to Rousseau, de Toqueville, Ferguson, Weber and Durkheim. It emphasises the need for the break-up of traditional bonds and solidarities, replacing them with modern values for a stable social order. Development and change is perceived as being directly related to the emancipation of the individual from the tyranny of kings, kinship and rituals. The mainstream views ‘social capital’ as the key non-economic factor that provides social cohesion by creating a certain level of social order through apolitical bridges and linkages across society that provide a social glue that contributes to good governance. These networks create trust and lubricate the operation of society.

The alternative genealogy, in contrast, is based on a European tradition of radical reflection, drawing its lineage from Marx and Gramsci. It emphasises power relations that make development a conflictual rather than a consensual process. It takes into consideration that societies are not homogenous and that power differences exist which lead to different voices being heard. Gender, race and ethnicity determine the distribution of benefits in society. Civil society is understood as a space for the construction and staging of counter-hegemonic views and spaces to subject public bodies to greater popular control. It also provides a space to make the voice of the underprivileged heard by giving them political spaces for participation (Howell and Pearce 2001: 54), and to reflect on alternatives, with the emphasis on self-determination.

### **CSOs for advocacy or for service delivery?**

The question can be posed: Should the role of civil society organisations, in practice, be service delivery or advocacy? This is a debate dealt with in NGO literature (see Korten 1992, Salomon 1994, Edwards and Hulme 1995). NGO critics state that NGOs are a response to the withdrawal of the state and a consequence of structural adjustment and

neo-liberal policies (Hillhorst 2003, Edwards and Hulme 1995). Service provision by NGOs has been criticised, as NGO clients receive as charity what is supposed to be a citizen's right.

Donors, in response, shifted support directly towards social movements and campaigns, as popular social movements demonstrated their capacity to influence the wider political system and to democratise politics (Edwards and Hulme 1995). Direct donor support to popular organisations, however, has been discouraged by Bebbington and Riddell (1996), as direct contact with donors diverts local priorities. Fowler's (1992) study also warned of the danger of over-funding grassroots organizations in the south (Edwards and Hulme 1996: 965).

## CIVIL SOCIETY BUILDING IN THE AMAZON

The current research looked at donor support to the indigenous movement of the Ecuadorian Amazon. It is important to understand where Hivos (the donor) stands on the civil society debate. Hivos has a political approach to development, established in the policy document 'Access to Power' (1998) that states that poverty and marginalisation are caused by unequal power relations.

Hivos' vision on poverty in its broadest sense is that injustice, poverty, gender inequality as well as the marginalization and exclusion of large groups of the world population, are basically caused by unequal power relations at all levels of society: from political and economic relations at the international level to personal relations at individual and household levels. These unequal power relations determine – directly or indirectly – which interests are being represented, which voices are being heard and who is in the position to make claims in decision-making processes. (Hivos 2002: 18)

Hivos aims to achieve structural changes in power dynamics, empowering marginalised groups by giving them a voice.

The local counterpart organisation centers its activities on accompanying the indigenous movement of the South Central Amazon region of Ecuador. This work of 'accompaniment' means supporting the historical process carried out by the indigenous organisations of defending territory and culture. An NGO's intended role, in this view, is to support community or grassroots organisations and accompany historical change processes (Molyneux and Lazar 2003: 51). Support to social movements is justified, as empowering them can make them capable of transforming society, of extending citizenship rights to excluded groups (Hickey and Mohan 2005: 248), and altering the way a society perceives itself.

The research findings based on interviews with the indigenous leaders gave a negative picture of external funding, which has been found to create multiple accountabilities. According to an NGO staff member, "the leaders are busy attending to projects from different donors, involved in national politics, working with networks and alliances, fighting oil companies, and administering economically productive activities. These multiple demands prevent organisations from having a clear role".

Evidently the indigenous organisations in the Amazon are involved in advocacy and service provision simultaneously. Critics state that an organisation that is supposed to represent the

interests of its members should not be a project implementer (like an NGO). The indigenous organisations, nevertheless, perceive as logical their role in project implementation, as well as fundraising and project initiation for the benefit of their communities. Another NGO staff member pointed out that the organisations' agendas are overbooked and the leaders are exhausted. In fact, as one leader said: "what we have seen is over-funding to indigenous organisations, which has been very damaging". Donor funding has actually created chaos in the Amazon and fragmented the movement, according to an Achuar leader. The lack of a clear role makes that the organisations are responding to too many demands (see Wallis 2006).

Donors may underestimate the gap between theory and practice in terms of civil society building. Wils argues that theories cannot be used as templates that can be applied universally without giving serious consideration to local factors and variables. NGOs are "unavoidably influenced by theories. In practice, however, things are more complicated" (Wils 2001: 18). NGOs and their empowerment scenarios "are faced with complex and multiple affiliations, often more complex than those envisaged in the theories that influenced them". The capacity of an NGO to problematise and manage an empowerment strategy depends on human resources, networks and connections that influence the NGO's intervention strategy and consequently an NGO's problem analysis. These are part of a "configuration of variables that have a marked influence on the choices that shape an NGO intervention strategy in the field of empowerment" (Wils 2001: 20). In the case of the Amazon, its unique state of affairs points to the importance of the local context.

## **LOCAL VOICES IN THE GLOBAL(ISED) AMAZON**

Given the global significance of the Amazon, powerful actors compete for control over the territory and its resources. As a result, the indigenous movement struggles to defend their ancestral territories, be it from multinational corporations, or from large conservation NGOs. The desire for control over the resources of the Amazon has made this a zone of conflict. The indigenous movement and its defense of territory has allowed the Achuar and Kichwas to maintain control over these lands. Consequently any activity that is carried out in these territories must be done in consultation with the indigenous leadership. The voice of the Achuar and Kichwas of Pastaza is now not only taken into account, but is the voice that determines what takes place in Achuar and Kichwa territories. Because of the power and responsibility vested in the leadership and its decisions, it is critical that indigenous leaders respond to the needs and demands of the base communities and that they be held accountable for their actions.

One mechanism to keep the leaders close to their constituents has been the establishment of local assemblies. Local assemblies provide a space for consultation with the communities where community members can voice their opinions and demands and where they can communicate with their leaders. According to a Kichwa leader, the assembly is the major strength of the organisation, and is where the bases make their decisions, as "every plan, project or decision is consulted with the base communities".

Conversely, according to a high-ranking local government official, empowerment in the case of the Amazon has corresponded to empowerment of certain family groups, which do not necessarily represent the interests of the communities. Critics argue that indigenous leaders are far removed from the bases. They are driven by the agendas of donors and

NGOs, and are unable to negotiate on behalf of their communities because of the relationship they maintain with local government.

Despite such harsh criticism, the Amazonian indigenous movement—its leaders and organisations—have opened up critical spaces for the active participation of the Achuar and Kichwa citizens of the Ecuadorian Amazon. In terms of political representation, Achuar and Kichwa leaders have a strong voice in national and regional politics. Another important change as a result of the ongoing process of decentralisation is that indigenous organisations have access to new spaces at the local level upon invitation of local government. The Municipality of Pastaza invited indigenous organisations to participate in the design of the strategic plan. However, the invitation did not result in increased participation of indigenous groups, who did not respond as expected. The initiative was a failure. According to local government officials: ‘people were not receptive and were skeptical towards this type of work’. Critics call this ‘participatory planning on paper’ in response to donor pressures.

Participatory planning at the local level is difficult to achieve, given the complex historical gap that exists between indigenous people and the state. Interaction between conflicting ethnic and political groups can promote understanding, but participation can also do harm and even fuel conflicts (Rombouts 2006: 41). Participatory planning at the municipal level involving the indigenous organisations is a new and important process that needs reinforcement. It is nevertheless a process that will require time in order for social relations to change.

## **EMPOWERMENT AND CITIZENSHIP PARTICIPATION IN THE AMAZON**

The Amazon region of Ecuador now has articulate, empowered and sophisticated indigenous leadership with a large network of international connections and supporters. Some have gained international notoriety due to their fight against oil companies. These networks and contacts have helped make indigenous voices heard and have helped to defend their human rights in the struggle against oil companies. The Amazonian indigenous movement has been strategic in establishing an impressive system of international communication where they showcase the Ecuadorian government as a human rights violator (*Hoy*, July 7, 2004). This is evidence of how transnational advocacy campaigns can contribute to democratisation of everyday life as they ‘connect ordinary citizens to global regimes and empower local voices’ (Gaventa 2001: 277) creating a transnational democratic space

Global citizen action via solidarity networks, however, may “bypass national governments in favor of applying direct pressure to global institutions, while undermining national citizenship in favor of a form of global citizenship that remains unattainable to most people in poor countries” (Hickey and Mohan 2005: 247). According to one key informant, the indigenous movement’s participation in transnational advocacy campaigns has exacerbated the already complex relations of distrust and tension between the communities and the Ecuadorian state. This is not to deny that international support to the Amazonian movement has given leaders leverage and power. Furthermore, the Kichwas and Achuar have internalised the notion of rights. Today indigenous citizens in the Amazon make claims to the state for services that have historically been denied to them. Moreover,

communities have developed their own life plans or 'planes de vida' (literally translated as life plans), that are plans made by the indigenous organisations where they describe how they want to see their communities in the future.

Due to new invited spaces, such as participatory budgeting and planning at the local level, indigenous leaders can now promote the local government's response to their needs. The gap in perspectives between indigenous nationalities and the government is a historical problem that cannot be overlooked. The state's lack of understanding of the vision and demands of Amazonian indigenous communities is reflected in the difference between the communities life plans and the local governments' local development plans. "When the government builds schools they don't feel our needs", according to a Kichwa leader. "The government wants to build concrete houses and pave roads. Yet they don't understand our reality." The basis of the Life Plan of Sarayaku (a Kichwa community) consists of the following concepts: *Sacha Ruma Yachay* knowledge of the jungle; *Sumak Allpa*, good land; and *Sumak Kawsay*, good living in harmony with the jungle. Participation by indigenous leaders and citizens in participatory budgeting and planning can contribute towards transforming the state so that it accepts this different logic.

Donors have also changed as they "are shifting from emphasising human rights abuses to promoting active citizenship" (Biekart 2004: 14). The "emphasis on practicing citizenship is closely related to the focus on local governance with the aim of increasing citizen participation at the local level stimulating collaboration among civil society and municipalities" (Biekart 2005: 16). New forms of local governance—like participatory budgeting, that have come as a result of decentralisation—are strongly encouraged by donors.

The existence of indigenous organisations, however, creates an additional level of institutions that contributes to overlapping without a clear definition of roles. There are institutions of the Ecuadorian government and indigenous institutions (Santana 1995: 73). The ideal situation would be for indigenous organisations to work with the local government and communicate what the communities' needs are. Furthermore the global networks and leverage of the indigenous organisations can help scale up efforts to achieve this goal. Empowerment strategies, according to Wils (2001), should aim at the institutionalisation of the results of empowerment, which should include incorporation in procedures, planning (inclusion in platforms, participatory planning) and funding (eligibility to receive public finance) leading to sustained inclusion of the long-excluded communities at administrative planning and funding levels (Wils 2001: 23). The Achuar, for instance, have designed their own bilingual education and health programmes but do not receive funding from government; instead they are funded by NGOs and foundations. The Achuar have 60 teachers, but the Ministry of Education does not pay them. One representative of the local development department of the Municipality of Pastaza stated that although the Achuar have their own bilingual educational programme, they lack didactic materials, evidencing the need to work with the government. One attractive option available is thus to create a system of service provision under the control of the grassroots organisations themselves (Wils 2001: 19) where they can become recognised by the state as valid institutions for the delivery of services. "Communities don't have basic services, sanitation or quality education, yet the demands we get from the indigenous leaders often don't reflect these needs". This statement highlights a common concern that empowerment of indigenous leaders has not translated into improved living conditions for the communities.



Even though indigenous organisations have created parallel education and health programmes to service their communities, they have not been able to secure public financing for these programmes. A basic notion of local development is the need for cooperation between the public, private and civil society, to create synergies, as a collective effort.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Civil society support to the indigenous movement of the Amazon has received its share of criticism: donor funds create multiple accountabilities; donors impose their agendas; the organisations lack a clear role and objective, and have taken on more responsibilities than they have been able to handle. Nevertheless, the indigenous movement of the Amazon has been a vehicle for change and has led a historical process of transformation in the region.

Most important of all, it has given a voice and a say to the Achuar and Kichwas over a territory that has been the object of interest of multiple powerful actors. Even if it goes against their desires for autonomy, the Shuar, Kichwas, Achuar, Cofan and Hauorani are no longer isolated. They are in fact well connected. In this age of global communications, the Amazonian indigenous movement has been able to face extremely powerful players and tell them that they will decide what happens in their territories backed up by international treaties and collective rights in the constitution. Finally, the inclusion of local voices onto local, regional, national and global platforms can help re-shape and transform local development policy so that it is responsive to communities' special needs. One issue to keep in mind, however, is the strong influence of external actors. The Amazon is a place where powerful interest groups have traditionally spoken for the less powerful. As a result of the historical process of organisation, indigenous nationalities of the Amazon have a say in the future of their local space. One thing that is clear is that with power comes responsibility and accountability. Civil society building support in the Amazon has provided resources to sustain a historical change process, shifting power relations and transforming the way we understand and perceive the Amazon. It has also opened up a central debate on how to balance social and economic development with environmental conservation in an ecologically sensitive region, while attending to the rights of citizens who have been historically marginalised.

Many westerners who have had contact with the indigenous cultures of the Amazon have admired their different way of life, which they want to defend from the perils of capitalist existence. This meeting of cultures has certainly shown us that we have a lot to learn. The indigenous movement has been an inspiration to thousands of supporters who have stood beside them in their struggle to preserve their territory and way of life. They are now global citizens, but also Ecuadorian citizens.

This historical process of inclusion shows the major challenges and dilemmas presented by the inclusion of previously excluded groups into society. This is particularly true as, historically, inclusion has been understood as assimilation or integration, which implies adapting oneself to the standard, which in turn means giving up difference. Melucci (1989) in *Nomads of the Present* states that in complex societies, democracy consists of enabling individuals and groups to affirm themselves and be recognised for what they are or what they want to be. In contrast to the idea of inclusion as the desired end, Melucci points out

that excluded groups have the right to belong or to withdraw from belonging (Martin 2004: 37).

Empowerment, furthermore, is a matter of participation in decision-making on matters important to the empowered. Wils looks at decision-making power in terms of choosing among alternatives even if more powerful groups don't like or disagree with these decisions (Wils 2001). In the case of the Ecuadorian Amazon, the Achuar and Kichwas have a voice, thanks to a historical process of organisation that dates back to the 1960s. Their clashes and interaction with government, multinationals, and other powerful actors, have given them a clear understanding of the value and wealth of their territories. As a result they now have a voice in determining and shaping the future of the Amazon. They have also contributed to awakening our imagination of development.

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