Global Environmentalism and Local Politics

Transnational Advocacy Networks in Brazil, Ecuador, and India

Maria Guadalupe Moog Rodrigues

What is the role played by local organizations in transnational environmental advocacy networks? *Global Environmentalism and Local Politics* revisits this question by looking at transnational environmental activism in Brazil, Ecuador, and India. Rodrigues investigates the internal politics of these networks, focusing on their internal balance of power, choice of strategies, and distribution of resources among members at the international, national, and local levels. Contrary to existing assumptions, local organizations, rather than international or national non-governmental organizations, are the key players in these networks, while at the same time mere participation in transnational advocacy efforts does not necessarily lead to the empowerment of local organizations. Participation may, for example, impose unanticipated political and technical burdens, and despite their overarching common goal of environmental preservation, network members may have different understandings of what environmentally sustainable development is and how it can be best achieved.

"Rodrigues shows that participation of local groups in transnational activism does not always lead to their empowerment and can even threaten their material and physical safety."

— Jill M. Belsky, University of Montana

"While development literature, and some recent political science, has focused a good deal of attention on non-governmental organizations and global civil society, this book attends more closely to the key issue of the disposition of power within such networks. This is a substantial and valuable body of research."

— Stephan Schwartzman, Director,
International Program, Environmental Defense

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Introduction

> The organization Friends of the Earth bought our tickets to Washington, D.C. The occasion was the mobilization for the celebration of the fifty years of the multilateral financing institutions and the climax of the international campaign against them, known as "Fifty Years is Enough!" We went there to denounce irregularities with the World Bank–funded Planafloro project in Rondônia. I went, together with Luisinho, the executive secretariat for the NGOs' Forum of Rondônia, and Almir, a Surui Indian. We were to meet the representatives of Friends of the Earth and Oxfam. We lived the biggest adventure of our lives! Nobody was waiting for us in the Washington, D.C., airport. We managed to find the buildings where the meetings were happening, but I do not know how, since the only thing Luisinho could say in English was to ask if anybody spoke either Portuguese or Spanish. . . . When we arrived at the convention area, there were dozens of meetings happening at the same time, in a gigantic convention center. It was a madhouse in there! We were totally lost. We kept walking up and down the corridors and security was starting to ask us questions since we were the only different people around—we were wearing T-shirts that demanded the creation of extractive reserves and Almir was wearing a traditional headband decorated with colorful feathers. It was then that Patricia, from Oxfam, showed up. With her help, everything became easier. She and Smeraldi, from Friends of the Earth, arranged meetings between us and World Bank executive directors, and we were able to gain the support of a group of directors for the cause of protecting Amazonia's environment. (José Maria dos Santos, president of the Organization of Rondonian Rubber Tappers)[1]

The successful epilogue of the "adventure" of the president of the Organization of Rondonian Rubber Tappers (OSR) illustrates the strategies and processes of resource sharing that has characterized modern environmental politics. This type of politics is one example of the new trends in global environmental governance[2]

whose understanding has challenged traditional concepts and frameworks of analysis. State-centric perspectives, for instance, even when conceived in terms of interstate cooperation or regimes, have limited explanatory power to assess environmental management initiatives fostered by non-state actors, such as those attempted by the Organization of Rondonian Rubber Tappers, Friends of the Earth, and others.

Fortunately, since the 1990s, approaches to global environmental governance have broadened the scope of analysis to account both for non-state actors involved in environmental politics and for the transnational nature of environmental issues. These approaches have gone beyond the analysis of processes at the level of the nation-state, and looked both "downward," toward forces operating inside states, and "upward," toward the international system and the actors active in it—multilateral organizations, international corporations, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and social movements, and the global civil society.

The study of transnational environmental advocacy networks is particularly relevant precisely because the objects of analysis (the networks themselves) operate, simultaneously, at the local, national, and international levels. In addition, they have been responsible for many of the victories of the global environmental movement to date.[3]

The term *transnational advocacy network* has been common currency in international and comparative politics since the publication of the widely acclaimed and award-winning book *Activists Beyond Borders,* by Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink. In it Keck and Sikkink define transnational advocacy networks as networks of "relevant actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchange of information and services."[4] Of particular conceptual significance is the authors' justification for choosing "network" over coalition or movement. The choice was determined by the objects of study themselves, namely, individuals and organizations that participate in such initiatives.[5] Be that as it may, the concept of networks has a long tradition both in sociology and social movements theory as well as in international relations. Transnational advocacy networks' organizational flexibility, capacity to produce and disseminate information, and ability to operate across national borders are important assets in international environmental politics.

The literature on transnational advocacy networks evaluates their impact on global environmental management by focusing on two different arenas. On the one hand are the studies that assess impact on the nation-state and on International Governmental Organizations (IGOs). Some authors, for instance, look at the role that networks play in lobbying governmental officials toward the formulation of environmental treaties and domestic policies, and the creation of environmentally related international lines of credit.[6] Others

investigate how transnational advocacy networks have affected reform processes within IGOs leading to the formulation of social and environmental guidelines and safeguards procedures.[7]

The other arena of impact of transnational advocacy networks that existing literature addresses are larger collectivities throughout the world (or entities that participate in world civic politics).[8] In this case, analyses focus on the capacity of transnational advocacy networks to influence international public opinion or the electorate in a given country, and on their role in "translating" the different social meanings of particular struggles (for environmental preservation and indigenous rights, for instance) to stakeholders at different levels: local, national, and international.

Whether evaluating transnational environmental advocacy networks in terms of their impact on states and IGOs or on world civic politics, available literature perceives such networks as a constant. A network's strategies, the sociopolitical and economic contexts in which it operates, and the alliances it builds are variables that affect its capacity to influence its "targets." In this book, I propose a third avenue for the evaluation of the impacts of transnational environmental advocacy networks: the investigation of their impact on the level of empowerment of networks' local members, and as a consequence, on local politics. To achieve this goal, one must open the "black box" and look at transnational networks from the inside out. In this sense, the effectiveness of transnational advocacy networks is very much—although not exclusively—a function of their own internal dynamics, such as their internal politics, resources management, and degrees of cohesion and legitimacy.

When looking at such networks from the inside out, one confronts—and questions—two existing assumptions. The first is an obvious one: that participation in transnational advocacy networks empowers local network members.[9] Studies have claimed, for instance, that alliances and coalitions with international human rights and environmental groups have given "voice" and visibility to local grassroots groups, such as indigenous peoples or *campesino* associations, in national and international arenas. As a consequence, these groups' leverage vis-à-vis opposing forces has increased. A second and related assumption in the literature on transnational advocacy networks is that international and domestic non-governmental organizations play the determinant role in a network's effectiveness.[10] Among all network members (local grassroots groups, individual activists, concerned media), international NGOs, and to a lesser extent their domestic counterparts, possess most of a network's resources and are the ones who make them available to less resourceful network members. Their extraordinary institutional flexibility provides crucial mediation between "levels" or arenas of action.

Without disregarding the role of international and domestic NGOs, I argue that the effectiveness of a transnational environmental advocacy network

depends, primarily, on the role that local member organizations play in determining the network's goals and strategies. This discussion is futile unless one determines what counts as "effectiveness." Essentially, effectiveness is a function of goals. If the goal of a transnational environmental advocacy network is to change the behavior of states and international organizations, effectiveness means changing such behaviors. If the goal of a network is to engage the world in civic (environmental) politics, then a high degree of engagement determines effectiveness. There are other, more limited, "measures" of effectiveness. Transnational advocacy networks have been relatively effective in making the World Bank more publicly accountable, and have been successful avenues through which civil society groups can influence a powerful development agency.[11] Yet, none of these "measures" of effectiveness address what I consider the ultimate goal of environmental protection initiatives: the protection of the local environment.[12]

In this book, a transnational environmental advocacy network is effective if and when its members succeed in devising and implementing measures that promote local environmental preservation. These processes are heavily dependent upon the nature of a network's local membership base.[13] In turn, the nature of a network's local membership base is shaped by various processes of "localizing" transnational activism. These mechanisms may or may not lead to the empowerment of local network members. Rather than being an inevitable outcome, as it is widely assumed, the notion that local groups are empowered by participating in transnational advocacy networks requires qualification. Important steps in this process are to define empowerment in specific (local) contexts and to distinguish between political and technical empowerment (while remaining mindful of the relations between the two processes).

For the purposes of the analysis presented in this book, local political empowerment is a function of the establishment of institutionalized mechanisms for local groups' participation in environmental and development policymaking (such as an NGOs' forum or umbrella organization, or the election of groups' representatives to local or national decision-making arenas). It is also a function of their capacity to formulate a common local agenda of priority issues related to environmental protection and development, which implies reaching some level of consensus among different groups affected by a given policy or initiative. Finally, political empowerment is a function of the consolidation of local groups' autonomy vis-à-vis their own national and international network partners as well as in relation to other local political forces (the state and local economic elites, for instance). Because I am particularly interested in transnational environmental advocacy networks, local political empowerment correlates to the technical capacity of local members of a transnational environmental advocacy network to promote environmentally sustainable development. Technical

empowerment is thus a function of local groups' capacity to mobilize financial resources to attract (and retain) competent cadres and to make their work operational (access to domestic and international traveling, and to information technology infrastructure, for instance), to provide technical training on environmental and participatory issues to new and existing personnel, and to develop permanent mechanisms for information production and information sharing with other network members, their rank and file, governmental agencies, and the media.

By qualifying the potential role of transnational advocacy networks in empowering their local members I avoid the dangers of a circular argument (the effectiveness of environmental advocacy networks is a function of their local membership base, who is empowered by the network). In fact, while there have been many instances in which participation in transnational advocacy networks has contributed to the political empowerment of local groups in the short term, the absence of a corresponding level of technical and material empowerment has undermined these groups' political position in the long term. There is a perverse irony in the fact that, in many instances, transnational advocacy networks create conditions for the political empowerment of local civil society groups, only to see these groups lose ground under the technical and material burden of their own success.

The relationship between the performance (or effectiveness) of transnational advocacy networks and the level and nature of activism of their local membership base is still an underexplored area of research. Improved knowledge on such a relationship may contribute to a better understanding of the links between global and local civil societies, and on how institutions and processes established in one arena affect dynamics in the other.

Transnational Advocacy Networks, Civil Society, and the Environment: Defining Concepts

The study of initiatives that have bound together actors of different natures who operate at several levels (local, national, and international) has picked up speed since the late 1980s. The fall of the Berlin Wall symbolized the end of a bipolar world and consolidated trends toward interdependence and cooperation in the international system. These trends did not affect nation-states alone. In fact, they became increasingly evident in the dealings of non-state actors such as private corporations, multilateral agencies, and non-governmental organizations of various kinds (churches, trade associations, environmental and human rights organizations, among others).[14] Over time, transnational advocacy networks have become one of the most active sets of actors in certain areas of international politics, such as human rights, the environment,

health, and women's issues.[15] While I have defined transnational advocacy networks above, there are still some conceptual components of the definition that merit clarification.

The standard sociological concept of network refers to relations established among individuals to influence and constrain behavior on a certain issue or set of issues.[16] Usually, network members exhibit intellectual and emotional commitment to the issues at stake and share knowledge about them.[17] While expert knowledge and emotional commitment might explain why certain actors participate in an activist network,[18] I argue that they are insufficient to explain network participation by all types of actors. When it comes to understanding the participation of grassroots groups in transnational environmental advocacy networks, for instance, the notion of material interests has to be brought into the explanation. That is not to say that rural workers' associations, peasant cooperatives, and indigenous groups do not operate on principle or do not hold important knowledge on environmental issues. The point is that since they tend to be directly affected by changes in the local environment, they have a material interest in preserving their way of life and/or pursuing the betterment of their quality of life through environmental preservation.[19]

In the particular case of transnational environmental advocacy networks, I suggest that both ideal and material interests concur to explain the behavior of network members. They also help clarify conceptual differences among them. Transnational environmental networks are composed, primarily, of nongovernmental organizations.[20] There are, however, myriad definitions of NGOs. For some, they are "self-governing, private, not for profit organizations that are geared toward improving the quality of life of disadvantaged people."[21] For others, NGOs and interest groups are interchangeable terms, both defined as "private (i.e., nongovernmental) bodies organized for the purpose of directly or indirectly influencing public policy either on behalf of their members or on behalf of what they perceive to be the broader public interest."[22] Although these definitions are not contradictory, they emphasize very different aspects of what constitutes an NGO. In the first definition, NGOs are about improving the quality of life of sectors of the population, and we may assume that churches, and social assistance and self-help groups exhaust the categories in the concept. In the second definition the emphasis is on the political role of NGOs, and the fact that the term is equated to interest groups implies the inclusion of a broader range of private advocacy organizations (maybe even business associations and lobby groups).

The "overinclusiveness" of NGO definitions is detrimental to an accurate understanding of the composition and nature of activism in transnational environmental advocacy networks. In this book, I conceive NGOs (local, domestic, or international) as a different set of actors from grassroots groups.

NGOs are thus research or advocacy organizations that may provide support to grassroots groups at material and strategic levels but are not identified by the rank and file of such groups as co-participants in their political and material struggles. Several characteristics separate NGOs from grassroots groups: NGOs are usually professionally organized and have headquarters, communication resources, and permanent staff. They have specific mandates defined in statutes and cannot easily depart from them if, for instance, the objectives of a campaign in which they are involved suddenly change. Principles and values usually determine the priorities in their statutes. Despite the support they may provide to grassroots groups, NGOs rarely have a mandate to represent such groups. Examples of NGOs that participate in the networks discussed in this book are the Washington, D.C.-based Environmental Defense (EDF), and the Brazilian Institute for Amazonian and Environmental Studies (IEA). In contrast, grassroots groups may or may not have formal headquarters and paid staff. They are often (but not always) informally organized, and their membership tends to be restricted to those directly affected by the issue that originated concern and mobilization. Grassroots representatives have a formal mandate to represent a given population or social group.[23] While some grassroots groups may have statutes, these do not predefine issues or priorities for activism. Activism is determined by the needs of constituencies, which often change over time. Examples of grassroots groups are the various Amerindian regional associations and national confederations in Brazil and Ecuador, and the Organization of Rondonian Rubber Tappers. An important commonality between NGOs and grassroots groups is the one highlighted in McCormick's definition: both are political actors who directly or indirectly attempt to influence policy and politics at local, national, and international levels.

If the members of transnational environmental advocacy networks are of different natures, it is fair to assume that they have different relative impacts on a network's performance. I concede that international, and to a lesser extent, domestic NGOs tend to be the primary sources of material and technical resources for a network, and often take the crucial responsibility of producing and disseminating information.[24] Yet it is a network's local membership base that bears the responsibility of guaranteeing (through either direct implementation or monitoring) the eventual success of the network regarding the protection of the local environment.

As I give particular attention to the role of local groups in transnational environmental advocacy networks it is impossible to avoid an analysis of what such groups represent to the local civil society. Distinctions between local, national, and global civil societies, however, were not common in the literature until recently. Assessments of the degree of civil society activism were traditionally limited to nations. Alexis de Tocqueville, for instance, praised the role of peoples' associations and volunteer groups as constituting the backbone of

American democracy. Others highlighted the role of authoritarian political regimes in hindering the emergence and/or consolidation of national civil societies in Latin America and other regions of the world.[25] Minimally, civil society is always defined in contrast to the state. But beyond the boundaries of the family and clan and short of the state there is a good deal to be found: markets, voluntary associations, churches, interest groups, labor unions, nongovernmental organizations.[26]

This array of actors broadens even further when one releases the concept of civil society from its national confines. Such a process became inevitable in the last decades of the twentieth century due to the political, social, and economic trends that reshaped the world during that period. The expansion of free-market economy, the information technology revolution, and processes of political opening and democratization of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, have had direct effects in stimulating civil society organization at the local level, strengthening it at the national level,[27] and consolidating it at the global level. The very existence of transnational advocacy networks corroborates the notion that the phenomenon of a global civil society is real and is here to stay.[28] In fact, the globalization of information processes and technologies has been a crucial factor in the reorganization of power relationships at all levels of politics.[29] Social groups, traditionally marginalized by conventional (national) politics, have relied on information technology to project their plight and struggles beyond national borders. Thus, they have not only acquired allies and resources at the global level, but also transformed local demands into transnational ones. Identity-based movements, such as those of rubber tappers[30] and indigenous peoples,[31] have been particularly successful in using symbolic appeals and information campaigns as links between local and global activism.

In considering civil society at local, national, and international levels it is important to be mindful that "the concept of civil society does not make a smooth transition from the domestic to the international sphere if one expects them to have identical characteristics."[32] Thus, I must clarify what characteristics of civil society apply, equally, to all three levels. The first such characteristic is the diversity of groups and interests. The importance of transnational advocacy networks as a methodological tool is that they permit the identification of civil society groups that, despite their differences, obtain a certain degree of unity in pursuing a "common good." Other characteristics of civil society that transition well between levels of analysis include its being a space for the development of a community value system, and the fact that its functioning depends on association, communication, and information flows.[33] Finally, in an apparent but not actual contradiction to the two previous characteristics, civil society is an arena for conflict. At the local and national levels civil society is at odds with the state, attempting to assert its autonomy or

complete separation from it. At the global level, civil society confronts the interstate system and the global economy. In any case, the tensions between public and private realms do not prevent their interpenetration. In the end, the boundaries between state (or the interstate system) and civil society are elusive and porous and actions in one realm have consequences for the other.[34]

While I do not refer often to the "global civil society" in the book, it is important to clarify that my approach to transnational advocacy networks assumes the existence of a "slice of associational life that exists above the individual and below the state, but also across national boundaries."[35] I do refer often to "local civil society" and more specifically to "local civil society groups." The difference between these terms is particularly important for an accurate assessment of processes of empowerment. One can, albeit with difficulty, "measure" the level of empowerment of certain groups in society over time. It is much harder, however, to evaluate processes of empowerment of whole civil societies (local or otherwise).

Applied to the specific cases of this book, local political and technical empowerment directly correlates to the political and technical capacity of local members of a transnational environmental advocacy network to promote environmentally sustainable development. Specific indicators of this process derive directly from the definition of empowerment provided above. Thus, one must assess the extent to which local groups have achieved a position of legitimate interlocutors vis-à-vis the state and other political and economic elites who have privileged access to local environmental policymaking processes; the extent to which local groups have guaranteed their access to policymaking arenas through formal channels that do not depend on specific activists or enlightened politicians and have used such channels to effectively influence the design and implementation of policies; the extent to which local groups have access to information on public policy and capacity to disseminate it among their rank and file; and finally, the extent to which participation in transnational activism has contributed to an increase in local groups' material and technical resources at adequate levels to meet the demands of participating in the formulation, implementation, and monitoring of environmentally sustainable development policies.

At this point, the reader may legitimately ask: "Why, then, does one need to discuss the promotion of environmental sustainable development by transnational environmental advocacy networks rather than placing the investigation squarely within the realm of local participatory development?" Recent critical assessments of both the practice and the theory on development and environmental resources management provide the answer. Local empowerment and civil society organizations' capacities to affect environmental policy occur neither in a political vacuum nor in an isolated socioeconomic context. The tendency to romanticize the "local" has skewed analyses away from

acknowledging the inequalities and power relations inherent at that level, and from the broader national and transnational political and economic forces that affect local power imbalances.[36] Once again, the concept of transnational advocacy networks as a methodological tool, particularly when networks are investigated from the "inside out," sheds light on the interplay of power relations at various levels of analysis and on how these relations affect efforts to promote environmentally sustainable development.

Failure to elaborate on the tensions and cleavages that emerge among civil society groups, both locally and transnationally, may hinder the methodological relevance of transnational advocacy networks.[37] This is particularly true when one recognizes the need for activists to "negotiate over the terms of the story," or the "meaning" of their struggles and goals.[38] In the case of transnational environmental advocacy networks, the challenge of defining their struggles and goals is all the more complex due to the fuzziness of the concept of environmentally sustainable development.[39]

While the main "issue" binding together actors in the transnational advocacy networks discussed in this book is the promotion of environmentally sustainable development, not all network members approach this notion in identical ways. This should not be a surprise given that the term has been the object of debate in both academic and professional arenas, particularly since 1987, with the publication of the report *Our Common Future* by the World Commission on Environment and Development. The emphasis of the report was on the preservation of natural resources for future generations.[40] Such a broad definition had the somewhat positive effect of creating consensus among a wide array of actors. It played a role, for instance, in fostering a certain degree of unity among world leaders in the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), and in the formulation of guidelines for global action in areas such as biodiversity, water resources, and climate change. The major problem with that notion of sustainable development, however, was—and still is—its "fuzziness" or vagueness, and as a result, the difficulty in making it operational.[41]

A brief survey of the literature on environmentally sustainable development identifies at least three approaches to the concept. The first approach is less significant for the purposes of this book, since the environment is a secondary and implicit consideration in the larger context of "sustainable development." I will label this first approach "techno-economic." The other two approaches are labeled "mainstream" or "conservationist," and "socioenvironmental development."[42]

As its label indicates, techno-economic approaches to sustainable development rely on economic growth and technological advancements as key components of the process. In other words, "economic growth can create the capacity to alleviate poverty and solve environmental threats."[43] Such an

understanding has followed Norgaard's (1984) proposal of linking economic and ecological paradigms, whereby sustainable development would be a possible outcome of a "co-evolutionary" (and preferably parallel) improvement of both economic and environmental systems.[44] Not all definitions of sustainable development within the techno-economic approach rely exclusively on technology and economic growth for the achievement of environmental sustainability. Admittedly, they are the key tools for the implementation of sustainable development in poor societies, but have limits when it comes to ensure equity within and among generations.[45] One alternative is thus to introduce the notion of "long-term" in the economic analysis. The concept of natural capital stock[46] may be one tool in this process. It would help in attenuating the dichotomy between development and environmental preservation. Traditional economic principles prescribe that environmental degradation actually increases the economic value of the next unit of environment since scarcity raises prices. Poor countries in particular tend to compromise their future development and the well-being of future generations due to immediate pressures to speed up development at the cost of compromising their environment. If a "long-term" perspective becomes predominant in economic calculations, the value of conserving a nation's natural capital stock could increase.[47]

"Mainstream"[48] or "conservationist"[49] approaches to environmentally sustainable development are placed together here only for the sake of brevity. In fact, they represent the largest and most diverse group of definitions of the concept. What mainstream and conservationist approaches to (environmentally) sustainable development have in common is their rejection of technology and traditional economic growth as the primary solutions for problems of environmental degradation. Not all definitions within this approach, however, reject the emphasis on technology and economic growth with the same intensity. Most admit that the elimination of poverty (through these processes) is an essential condition for environmental protection. What characterizes mainstream and conservationist approaches to environmentally sustainable development is not only that, compared to techno-economic approaches, they underplay the role of technology and economic growth in the process, but also that they rely on other variables. In this sense, environmentally sustainable development is a process in which not only economic growth matters, but one in which the quality of growth is paramount. Quality of growth is dependent upon the control of population levels, the conservation and enhancement of the natural resources base, and the participation of all stakeholders in decisions regarding environmental preservation and sustainable development.[50]

Finally, socioenvironmental development approaches emphasize the ideals of equity, social justice, and political participation as inherent components of environmentally sustainable development.[51] One of the main assumptions of socioenvironmental development approaches is that "the way people

relate to their environment—as well as the way they understand it—is created by culture, and bounded by social relations, by structures of power and domination."[52] Hence, sustainability requires looking beyond the natural environment per se, and toward a political economy approach to environmental problems.[53] This is a significant departure from mainstream or conservationist approaches, which tend not to challenge existing social, economic, and political structures, but suggest reforms in the ways these structures affect the natural environment. Analyses of the environmental crisis from a socioenvironmental (or political economy) perspective are mindful of the need for poverty alleviation if environmental sustainability is to be achieved.[54] Yet, different from mainstream and techno-economic approaches to environmentally sustainable development, these analyses totally reject the notion that economic growth will eliminate poverty. On the contrary, economic growth is more likely to be a cause of increasing levels of socioeconomic and political inequalities.[55] Without a radical change of structures and processes that perpetuate socioeconomic and political inequalities, environmentally sustainable development cannot be achieved. It is interesting to notice that a socioenvironmental development approach to environmentally sustainable development seems to have left the more radical periphery of environmental analyses to become predominant among renowned students of environmental and development issues in Amazonia.[56]

As the stories in this book unfold, the reader will have the opportunity to observe how the different approaches to environmentally sustainable development influenced the actions of transnational environmental advocacy networks and of the different actors who participated in them.

Key Questions

The main part of this book consists of a comparative study across time of a particular environmental advocacy network, the Rondônia network. The Rondônia network emerged in the early 1980s and mobilized environmental and human rights international NGOs, environmental activists and consultants for environmental and Amerindian issues both in Brazil and abroad, the specialized media, and concerned individuals in multilateral and governmental agencies. These individuals and organizations had in common their concern with the environmental consequences of development policies then under implementation in the Brazilian state of Rondônia, in western Amazonia. The analysis of the evolution of the Rondônia network over a period of twenty years (1980–2000) illuminates, in an unprecedented way, the challenges and opportunities confronting transnational environmental advocacy networks.

Theoretical and practical motives determined the selection of the Rondônia network over other possible choices. For reasons that shall be detailed in the following chapters, the Rondônia network generated, from its onset, high levels of interest among the global environmental and human rights communities, and at specific moments, among the general public as well. As a consequence, it has become a landmark of transnational environmental activism. In addition, its time span (twenty years) allows for conclusions that address structural, rather than circumstantial issues. Finally, research on the Rondônia network was made easier by my personal and professional contacts in Brazil and fluency in Portuguese. For comparative purposes, I also studied, in significantly lower levels of detail, transnational advocacy networks in Ecuador and India (see chapters 6 and 7). The selection of these networks followed the theoretical rationale presented above, namely, the fact that they generated significant levels of interest worldwide and eventually became landmarks for transnational social and environmental activism, and their long time span (beyond the scope of specific campaigns). To focus the analysis I resorted to several questions about the nature of transnational environmental advocacy networks and the impacts of their activism.

Who participates in a transnational advocacy network and how do they participate?

At first glance, this is more an empirical than an analytical question. In truth, it is not. As one investigates the composition of a network he/she inevitably evaluates the relative weight of network members. Different political and material resources, differential access to political arenas, different sources of legitimacy, and different roles in decision-making processes affect relations among members of a network. These internal relations are determinant of a network's effectiveness. As this book unfolds, the reader will notice that local groups' membership in transnational environmental advocacy networks does not automatically guarantee their meaningful *participation* in them. Unless local groups devise or create avenues through which their priorities and "vision" are incorporated into a network's overarching goals, they risk becoming mere instruments of legitimation for international environmental activism.

At the onset of each chapter I list the organizations and groups of activists that were most active in the networks (noting when and if the relative weights of different players within each network change overtime). In doing so, I describe network members' characteristics, resources, and goals. As the chapters unfold, the reader will find answers to questions such as: How did network members negotiate the terms of their common struggle (the meaning and goals of their mobilization)? How did network members reach decisions about specific strategies? And what role did each member or group of

members play in this process? The internal political exchanges among network members may provide clues for an improved understanding of multilevel politics beyond that of specific transnational networks.

What are the strategies available to transnational advocacy networks? When are they successful and why?

The study of strategies devised and implemented by a network as a whole and/or by some of its members at specific junctures constitutes an important part of the explanation for a network's successes and failures. This aspect of the analysis is of particular interest for practitioners and activists. Evidently, a given strategy, used to pursue a specific goal, in a given moment in time, is a historical experience that cannot be replicated. Yet, understanding the conditions in which a given strategy was more or less successful may provide valuable insights for ongoing and future struggles.

In evaluating the strategies used by the members of the networks discussed in this book, I looked for answers to the following questions: What were the objectives of specific strategies and how did they relate to both the overall goals of the network and to the specific agendas of particular members? Who were the key catalysts for such strategies within the network? Who were the primary targets of specific strategies and how did such targets react? The case studies will reveal the effectiveness of locally devised and locally implemented network strategies, despite the tendency of network members to privilege initiatives that unfolded in the international arena.

What are the consequences of transnational advocacy networks' activism?

This question goes to the core of the theoretical ambition of this book. The consequences of transnational advocacy networks must be evaluated in three different areas. First, there are the consequences for network members themselves. How did their experiences and involvement in a given network affect their material resource base, political alliances, legitimacy vis-à-vis their constituencies, and assessment or reevaluation of goals? How did the evolution of a network over time affect the balance of political forces among its members, and conversely, how did changes in this balance of forces impact a network's effectiveness? Many of the answers to these questions turned out to be counterintuitive. They provided a foundation for my challenge to the assumption that the mere participation of local groups in a transnational advocacy network leads to their political and technical empowerment. In fact, the effort of joining transnational activism may, on occasion, lead local activists and local organizations to overstretch themselves, attempt to shoulder burdens beyond their technical and political capacities, and acquire a level of exposure that may prove detrimental to the long-term sustainability of their struggles.

The second area of consideration about consequences of transnational advocacy networks must address a network's specific goals. Were they accomplished as a result of network activism? Did they have to be redefined as a result of unforeseen obstacles (or opportunities)? At what costs? In the specific case of transnational environmental advocacy networks, what are the consequences of their successes or failures for theoretical and practical approaches to environmentally sustainable development? Here I hope to advance the notion that the concept of environmentally sustainable development is all the more useful as it is approached as context-dependent, rather than as a vehicle for uniformity and consensus.

Finally, what are the consequences of transnational advocacy networks for the political contexts in which they operate? The focus of this book is on the impact of networks on local politics, particularly to the extent that they affect the level of political and technical empowerment of local civil society groups. Yet the book also discusses the consequences of transnational activism at the national and international levels, such as changes in national and international policies and the creation and reformulation of international mechanisms for grievances (such as the World Bank–sponsored Inspection Panel).

Research Method and Organization of the Book

I used several research methods to conduct this study of transnational advocacy networks. The history of the networks was reconstituted both from secondary sources and open-ended interviews. For the evaluation of the environmental challenges that the networks confronted and of the specific environmental impacts of networks' strategies I relied on technical sources such as reports by independent consultants, environmental NGOs, national governmental agencies in charge of policy implementation, and the World Bank.

Networks' politics and impacts on members and on the local political context were inferred from the analysis of documents from the archives and websites of network member organizations (such as correspondence among activists, summaries of mobilization strategies, reports of field trips, and memoranda of meetings), articles in local and international newspapers, and open-ended interviews.

I conducted more than sixty interviews during a ten-year period (1991–2001) in Brazil, Ecuador, and Washington, D.C., with NGOs and grassroots activists, government representatives at local and national levels, World Bank staff, consultants for environmental and Amerindian issues, and officials in private sector associations. I did not attempt to obtain a numerical balance among the interviewees based on their institutional affiliation (government official, NGO/grassroots group representative, or staff at a multilateral organization)

or level of activism (transnational, national, or local). I looked for individuals that were most directly linked to—or affected by—the transnational advocacy networks focused upon in this study. I must confess that, except for the logistics of traveling long distances and for extended periods of time, I did not encounter any significant difficulty in conducting interviews. Initial fieldwork coincided with the preparation and immediate aftermath of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. I believe that this research benefited, in part, from the interest generated by that event. Whenever I presented the theme of this study, I was greeted with a positive response from the potential interviewee based on his/her own interest in the topic and acknowledgement of its importance. I was also favored by the fact that close to two-thirds of the interviews were conducted with the primary goal of obtaining data for my dissertation (of which this book is a by-product). My condition as a Ph.D. student engaged the sympathy (and sometimes the pity) of interviewees who had once experienced the trials of graduate studies (many World Bank officials, consultants and staff in research institutes and international NGOs). Being Brazilian most certainly contributed to the level of comfort of my conversations with Brazilian activists and government representatives and with leaders of Rondonian civil society groups (the point was explicitly made by more than one interviewee). Finally, most interviews were conducted in Portuguese and in English, languages in which I am fluent. The interviews in Spanish were conducted with the help of a research assistant fluent in that language.

Before initiating the analysis of transnational environmental advocacy networks in Brazil and beyond I provide, in chapter 2, a historical background on development and environmental protection initiatives in the Brazilian Amazon region. The chapter describes national and international policies devised for the region from the mid-1960s to date. Development in the state of Rondônia and the environmental consequences of this process is discussed in relation to this larger context. The chapter highlights how economic, financial, and political demands of the national and international contexts impacted on the local and regional environments.

In chapter 3 I describe the origins of the Rondônia network in the early 1980s to mitigate the environmental and social impacts of highway construction and colonization in the state. I explore the dissonance of goals and choice of strategies among international and national members of the network, and discuss how these problems affected the network's impact and evolution.

Chapters 4 and 5 describe the evolution of the Rondônia network in the 1990s. In chapter 4 I analyze the network's effectiveness in influencing the design of the Planafloro project, an internationally financed program to manage Rondônia's natural resources. I discuss how the network's effectiveness was affected by efforts to deepen its local membership base and the consequences of this process for both the network and the local environment. Finally, in

chapter 5, I evaluate the Rondônia network as it reached its political maturity. The chapter describes efforts to overcome legitimacy challenges that affected the network in the early 1990s, and evaluates the impact of specific strategies in this process. The main focus of the chapter is on the role played by local groups in the Rondônia network at the turn of the millennium and the consequences of local activism for local politics and the environment.

Chapters 6 and 7 offer an opportunity for comparison between the trajectory of the Rondônia network and those of Ecuador's anti-oil network and India's Narmada network (emphasizing this latter's campaign against the Sardar Sarovar hydroelectric project). The focus of these chapters is on the effects of participation in transnational activism for the empowerment of local civil society groups and the protection of their natural environments.

8

Conclusions

A transnational advocacy network's effectiveness in promoting environmentally sustainable development depends on the role that its local members have in framing network priorities and in devising and implementing its main strategies. The cases presented in this book reveal the internal politics of transnational networks' activism. They shed light on the dynamics and factors that foster—and hinder—local organizations' proactive role within transnational advocacy networks. In so doing, this study has challenged two existing assumptions, until now widely accepted by theorists and activists alike: that transnational actors, namely international and national non-government organizations (NGOs), are the key players in transnational environmental advocacy networks, and that participation in such networks inevitably empowers local groups. In fact, local groups are the ones who hold the key to a network's effectiveness and, unfortunately, their mere participation in transnational advocacy efforts does not necessarily lead to their empowerment. Such an outcome depends upon the process of "localizing" a network's activism and on how this process affects local politics, beyond the narrower confines of network politics per se.

For the last two decades, the phenomenon of transnational advocacy networks has been perceived, particularly in the areas of environment and human rights, as a positive development. Transnational networks have brought a variety of new actors, essentially representatives of the interests of different sectors of international and domestic civil societies, into international and domestic policymaking. Thus, they have contributed to an increase in democratic participation in these processes. In theoretical terms, transnational advocacy networks are helpful methodological tools in multilevel analyses. They contribute both to a better understanding of the role that actors of different natures play in policy design and implementation at local, national, and international levels, and to evaluations of the impact of such

policies on populations and on socioeconomic and political structures at these different levels. This is of no small value in an increasingly interdependent world, one in which actors, processes, and policies at once affect and are affected by factors that cut across national borders and challenge traditional notions of space and time. Yet as the concept and the activism of transnational advocacy networks approach maturity in global politics critical evaluations of these instruments become all the more relevant.

This study has demonstrated the importance of evaluating the effectiveness of transnational advocacy networks, those addressing environmental issues in particular, not only in terms of their impact on national governments, international organizations, and the global public opinion, but also on the local human and natural environments. The focus on the local level revealed that transnational networks tend to be more successful in affecting policies and institutions at the international and national levels than at the local level. This is not only problematic for local groups participating in these networks, but sometimes even threatening to the material and physical security of individual activists.

The political and technical empowerment of local organizations is essential to guarantee that network goals are accomplished locally. Different from what has been widely assumed, however, the mere participation of local groups in transnational activism does not lead to their empowerment. This outcome may or may not occur depending on a network's internal politics, distribution of resources, choice of strategies, and selection of priorities—for instance, how its members formulate and pursue measures leading to environmentally sustainable development. The process of "localizing" a network's activism has direct consequences for local politics. It is here, perhaps, that this book provides its main contribution. While addressing the advantages that transnational advocacy networks provide to local partners in terms of resource sharing and mutually reinforcing strategies, it highlights the limitations of transnational networks—at least as they have been conceived until now—for the institutionalization of local activism and the long-term empowerment of local groups. In the following section, a brief comparison between the different phases of the Rondônia network, and between it and Ecuador's anti-oil and India's Narmada networks, stresses some critical aspects of this process of localizing a network's activism and the challenges that it encounters. At the end of this chapter, I present some policy suggestions for those directly involved in transnational environmental advocacy efforts and indicate directions for future research.

Local Empowerment and Local Results

Rondônia was not even a state when environmentally concerned individuals and organizations in Brazil and abroad mobilized to protect the region's environment. Local civil society organizations were practically nonexistent in Rondônia in the early 1980s. This situation reflected the transient nature of the state's civil society, composed mostly of recently arrived migrants, with no roots to the region or understanding about its sociopolitical and ecological dynamics. Traditional populations in the area, such as indigenous groups and rubber tappers, were essentially nonentities in the local political spectrum due to their low levels of organization. In this context, transnational mobilization against Polonoroeste's environmental impact unfolded—geographically and politically—outside Rondônia.

The absence of institutionalized local spokespeople (despite the contribution of individual activists residing in the state) aggravated certain divisions that plagued the Rondônia network in its formative years. The most significant of these referred to the network's main goals and arenas of activism. Without interlocutors who could assess the local merits and consequences of—and mediate between—the different priorities of national and international network members, activism lacked general coordination and resources were dispersed.

In the early years of the Rondônia network, its international members used the environmental devastation caused by the Polonoroeste project as exemplary of the need for an increased level of accountability by multilateral lending institutions for the environmental and social consequences of their development projects. International environmental NGOs and activists directed network resources toward pressure strategies in international arenas, such as the World Bank, the U.S. Congress, and the European parliaments. Brazilian activists, however, were first concerned with the impact of the project on Rondonian Amerindian populations and their environment, and second with the environmentally and socially unsustainable policies of the military regime, then in power, for Amazonia's development in general. While lending resources to international strategies, Brazilian activists resented the network's international focus. They attributed to it the loss of many opportunities for influencing implementing agencies in charge of Polonoroeste's environmental and Amerindian components. It is not surprising that the Rondônia network's most significant impact during the 1980s was on the World Bank. Activism against Polonoroeste became a cause célébre within the MDB campaign, and was instrumental in leading the bank to reformulate some of its policies and lending priorities. In Rondônia, however, deforestation, unsustainable agriculture, invasion of Amerindian lands and of conservation units remained unabated.

Mindful of the constraints that the absence of a local membership base imposed on network activism, the members of the Rondônia network invested significant resources in building such a base in the early 1990s. The imminent signing of the Planafloro project, a follow-up project to Polonoroeste, gave

momentum to such efforts. In addition, Brazilian transition from authoritarian to democratic rule in the mid-1980s facilitated local mobilization in Rondônia. The creation of the Rondônia Forum in 1991 was the most significant consequence of this combination of a favorable political environment and the influx of external technical and material resources for local mobilization. The forum's mandate was to serve as a clearinghouse for initiatives by civil society organizations toward participation in Rondonian environmental and development policies. The forum's existence was, in itself, an asset to the Rondônia network. It constituted a valuable formal medium through which local grassroots groups could voice their needs and expectations vis-à-vis the network's initiatives. The forum was also welcomed by actors outside the network, such as the World Bank. The forum's involvement in Planafloro represented an opportunity for World Bank officials to stress their institution's commitment to participatory initiatives.

Through the early 1990s, despite the claims by the Rondônia Forum's leadership that its primary commitment was to the interests of its constituent members, namely, grassroots and advocacy NGOs in Rondônia, the forum remained primarily responsive to the agendas of the national and international members of the Rondônia network. The low levels of technical and political capacity of local groups as well as divisions between groups (for instance, between rural workers and Amerindians, who competed for the same key resource, land) limited their contribution to the network's activism. In hindsight, it was only natural that the forum's leading activists and organizations strengthened cooperation with network members that could provide them with the largest amount of support, namely, international environmental NGOs and their national allies in Brazil. These actors had been greatly empowered by previous successes of the MDB campaign and by favorable political circumstances in Brazil, such as higher levels of public environmental awareness as a result of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

Under the leadership of international environmental NGOs such as the Environmental Defense Fund, and strengthened in its legitimacy by the forum's existence, the Rondônia network achieved some of its goals, namely, the redesign of Planafloro in terms that were more environmentally sustainable than those of the project's initial version, and the selective incorporation of civil society organizations in the project's decision-making and implementing institutions.

As important as these conquests were in conceptual terms, they remained "on paper." They had no concrete effect on Rondônia's development path. As I have argued in previous chapters, the Rondônia network remained ineffective at the local level due to the weakness of its local membership base. The forum's formal existence, rather than attenuating this problem, aggravated it. As it struggled to participate in Planafloro and to keep the Rondonian government committed to the project's environmental goals, the forum relied increasingly on its international partners and emulated their activism. As a result, it unintentionally distanced itself from its affiliated organizations, with dire consequences for its own legitimacy within and outside the Rondônia network.

The forum's legitimacy crisis, culminating in 1994, represented a turning point in the evolution of the Rondônia network. It generated opportunities for revision of network strategies and priorities. It also forced the forum to reassess its institutional identity and commitments, a process that brought the organization's leadership closer to its members and to the populations they represented. An unprecedented level of political cohesion among local civil society organizations emerged from these processes, leading to a natural rise in their political assertiveness vis-à-vis other network members, the Rondonian government, and World Bank officials. In this atmosphere, the proposal by international environmental NGOs to take the Planafloro project to a newly created international grievances mechanism, the inspection panel, fell on fertile ground.

The success of such a strategy in terms of its concrete gains for Rondônia's environment, the reactions it generated from the Brazilian and Rondonian governments and the World Bank, and the political visibility that it granted to local groups in domestic and international arenas, further empowered Rondonian organizations. The restructuring of the Planafloro project and the formulation of the Program for the Support of Community Initiatives were among the most important consequences of these parallel processes of local network members' internal reassessment of priorities and consensual decision to embrace an innovative strategy.

One of the most interesting aspects of the story of the Rondônia network starts where many assumed it was close to the end. The Planafloro restructuring process and the "upper hand" that local civil society organizations had in its outcome evidenced the level of political empowerment that these groups had achieved as a result of their participation in a transnational advocacy network. But the project restructuring was not the end of the story. Local groups' political empowerment shifted the balance of forces within Rondonian politics and among the actors that participate in local environmental and development policymaking.

It is here that transnational activism acquires implications still not fully addressed by theorists and activists alike. In the three cases evaluated in this book the political empowerment of local groups as a result of their participation in a transnational advocacy network had immediate consequences. Most network members, however, were unable to envision the possibility of such consequences having negative impacts (as well as positive ones). As such, they

were unprepared to minimize such negative impacts. In the case of Rondônia, the very success of the network's activism brought upon local groups new responsibilities for the formulation, implementation, and monitoring of policies that they were not always prepared to shoulder. In addition, the concrete environmental gains achieved by the network in the context of Planafloro generated a political backlash on the part of sectors of the government and of local economic and political elites. In recent years, opposition forces have reiterated efforts to roll back some of the environmental gains obtained by the Rondônia network.

In India, the backlash against local groups has been even more pronounced than in Rondônia. The Narmada network has obtained an unprecedented level of success both at the international level, influencing changes in international organizations, and within India, where it has formulated solid critiques of the nation's democracy and development model. Yet network activism has been unable to stop the flooding of villages in the Nimar valley and to shelter villagers and displaced populations from state repression. In part, these difficulties can be attributed to the incapacity of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, the main catalyst for local activism, to cope with the demands and expectation placed upon it (at local, national, and international levels) as a result of the Narmada network's successes throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

In Ecuador the challenge to the process of "localizing" transnational activism has specific nuances. Several arenas for local groups' participation in decisions about oil development in the *Oriente* have emerged as a result of the network's activism, combined with the growing assertiveness of the country's indigenous movement throughout the 1990s. Yet the level of capacity for a meaningful participation in these arenas varies greatly among local groups. An unexpected challenge to local activism is the downsizing of oil operations by large corporations and their replacement by smaller, less well-known companies spread throughout the *Oriente*. While transnational activism against oil giants such as Texaco and ARCO is not the only factor explaining such a trend, it definitely has had an impact in the declining level of interest by "brand name" corporations in conducting oil activities in Ecuador's Amazonia. But shouldn't the diminishing interest of corporate giants in oil exploitation in Ecuador be considered a major achievement of the anti-oil network? Yes and no. Yes if one assumes that oil development in the *Oriente* may slow down and be restricted to smaller areas due to the more limited financial and technical resources of smaller companies when compared to those controlled by the oil giants. No, if one realizes the difficulties that local activist groups may face in gathering information and monitoring the activities of several smaller companies, which are often unconcerned with the potential impact of environmental activism on their corporate image.

The fact that activism in transnational advocacy networks often generates unexpected political and technical challenges to local civil society groups should not overshadow the merits of such initiatives. For instance, despite political backlashes and technical hurdles, participation in the Rondônia network has created conditions for local groups to formulate their own approach to environmentally sustainable development. Such an approach was fully developed in the context of the Program for the Support of Community Initiatives. This approach has already produced a positive impact on Rondonian human and natural environments as selected PAIC projects have fulfilled their objectives. In light of these findings, I risk a prediction: in the (near) future, the approach of Amazon groups to environmentally sustainable development—a process that integrates environmental protection with the improvement of communities' socioeconomic well-being and political participation—is likely to prevail in policy initiatives in Rondônia.

The role of local groups in formulating an integral approach to the concept of environmentally sustainable development, one that considers environmental protection a process inherently linked to the improvement of populations' material and political conditions, is a common trend among all the networks studied in this book. If one accepts the argument that the effectiveness of a transnational advocacy network at the local level is a function of the role that its local membership base plays in the mobilization, then one must also accept that local environmentally sustainable development will only occur when defined and implemented according to local groups' visions and priorities.

Indigenous and settlers' populations in Ecuador's *Oriente* have attempted to formulate a vision of what environmentally sustainable development means for a region endowed with significant natural resources, crude oil among them. They have succeeded to different degrees. Political participation of grassroots groups in larger development policies for the *Oriente* is a notion that is now accepted, at a rhetorical level at least, by most sectors of Ecuadorian politics. It is still not clear, however, how this issue will evolve and to what extent grassroots groups may be able to strengthen their role in regional policymaking. What has become evident is that the activism of Ecuadorian groups at the national and local levels within the framework provided by the anti-oil network has generated spaces for dialogue and consultations among government officials, oil companies, and affected populations. This dialogue has created opportunities for the formulation of instruments for the compensation of affected populations and for further research on the area's ecological characteristics, among others.

Despite the gains that local populations may obtain through the formulation of a consensual approach to environmentally sustainable development, one should remain mindful of the complexity inherent to this process. Such a

complexity has remained a threat to the effectiveness of the anti-oil network's efforts. It risks undermining the unity among claimants in the lawsuit against Texaco and between claimants and their supporters (national and international environmental groups). In the case of the campaign against ARCO, the challenge is even more striking. Despite years of negotiations with the company, indigenous organizations representing the affected population have been unable to formulate a common plan for the company's support of a socioeconomic development plan for the region.

In India, the contribution of the Narmada Bachao Andolan to the formulation of a powerful critique of the country's development model is undeniable. Most important yet is the contribution that the NBA and its allies have made to the process of reevaluating the role of large hydroelectric projects in global energy policies. One concrete result of such a contribution was the commissioning of the work of the World Commission on Dams and the publication of its report in 2000. Another is the ongoing discussion in India about a national policy for resettlement and rehabilitation of populations affected by large dams. Unfortunately, this research was unable to identify (or isolate) the specific role that grassroots groups in the Nimar valley have had in these processes. This difficulty is in part related to both the nature of local groups' organization and of their insertion in the Narmada transnational advocacy network.

The comparison between the Rondônia, the Ecuador anti-oil, and India's Narmada networks reveals the importance of formal channels for the organization of local groups and for their insertion in a network's activism. In Rondônia, this role was performed by the Rondônia Forum. In Ecuador, regional and national indigenous federations and confederations and national environmental groups were instrumental. In the case of the Narmada valley, the Narmada Bachao Andolan is undoubtedly the main catalyst for local mobilization. While the existence of umbrella organizations or clearinghouses are essential to structuring local groups' participation in transnational advocacy networks, the nature of such organizations varies widely and so does the type of mediation that they perform between the interests of their affiliated groups and those of other network members.

The Rondônia Forum was essentially conceived and made operational by international and Brazilian NGOs involved in the MDB campaign. While it was welcomed by local groups, they remained in the background of initiatives during the forum's formative years. Eventually, the forum's leadership—individuals and local NGOs closer to domestic and international network members—assumed a proactive role in the Rondônia network. Such a role, however, did not always translate the level of commitment or engagement of other forum-affiliated organizations to the network's priorities and strategies. Inevitably, this situation led the forum to an "identity crisis" that affected its

legitimacy as a valid interlocutor of local groups' interests within and outside the Rondônia network. As Rondonian civil society groups resolved the forum's legitimacy issues and reassessed its mission, they changed the nature of their engagement in the Rondônia network. In becoming proactive players within the forum, grassroots groups such as the Organization of Rondonian Rubber-Tappers and the Federation of Agricultural Workers of Rondônia came to have a decisive voice within the network as a whole. This process reflects a dual dynamic: participation in the forum led to a gradual increase in grassroots organizations' capacity; and their increased capacity eventually constrained the forum's role. At the turn of the millennium the forum has become less a catalyst organization for local groups' activism and more a source of resources to support grassroots' initiatives. This change is significant in that it allows a clear assessment of the role of local groups in transnational advocacy networks.

The role played by grassroots groups in shaping strategies and defining the priorities of the Narmada network, on the contrary, is less evident. The extraordinary success of the Narmada Bachao Andolan as a catalyst for local groups' activism may have hindered these groups' ability to develop a more proactive behavior within the network. As a consequence, it is difficult to distinguish between the contribution of the NBA's leadership and that of its individual affiliated organizations. This should not lead one to infer that the NBA is any less committed and accountable to the interests of its affiliated groups than the Rondônia Forum, for instance. The issue here is how the organization has mediated between the priorities of its very diverse constituency and how this process has impacted on the evolution of the Narmada network. Data suggest that the NBA has been more responsive to concerns of groups that prioritize changes in environmental and development policies that are national in scope than to the demands of groups that have a narrower, localized agenda. This situation is at least partially explained by the limited capacity of local groups (who do not seem to have been empowered by their participation in the Narmada network in the same proportion that the NBA has) and by the Andolan's need to focus its efforts on a subset of issues to avoid overstretching its resources.

The nature of the NBA's mediation between local grassroots groups and other members of the Narmada network is further illuminated by contrasting it to the mediation performed by Ecuadorian national organizations in the context of the anti-oil network. While the relation between the Andolan and the Narmada network's international partners was clearly defined, with the NBA asserting its financial and political autonomy and leadership role in determining the network's priorities and strategies, the nature of the organization's relations with its national and local partners is less evident. This is in part due to the Andolan's own ambivalence vis-à-vis its identity, that is, whether the

organization is a grassroots one, representing the interests of specific populations, or whether it is a coalition or umbrella organization that mediates between the interests of different groups and facilitates their activism.

In Ecuador, on the contrary, the relationship between local grassroots groups, national organizations (indigenous federations and environmental NGOs), and their international partners has unfolded according to clearly defined patterns of interaction at all levels. Local indigenous groups, for instance, formally declare their affiliation to regional and national indigenous confederations and give them a mandate to represent their interests at the national and international levels. In local matters, however, these groups tend to assert their autonomy. The nature of relations between groups at different levels is even better defined in the case of local indigenous and settlers' groups, and their links with national environmental NGOs. Partnership is defined in very specific terms and environmental groups were never given a mandate to represent local populations. National NGOs and indigenous confederations do assume the largest part of the responsibility for mediation between local and international interests, with different degrees of success. National organizations are thus key elements in the process of resource sharing that characterizes transnational networks. For instance, in the anti-oil network, they were the main channels of articulation between local and international actors within the Amazon Coalition. The coalition was created with the goal of institutionalizing processes of sharing and exchanging political, technical, and material resources among actors concerned with environmental and indigenous issues in Amazonia. It has fulfilled its mission well and avoided challenges to the legitimacy of its initiatives to a large extent because its members have been mindful of the boundaries that constrain the actions of actors operating at different levels.

The members of the Narmada network, more specifically the Narmada Bachao Andolan, however, are not the only ones plagued by the porous boundaries of multilevel activism. Compared to the success of Ecuador's anti-oil network in this area, the shortcomings of the Rondônia network are even more striking. In the twenty years in which the Rondônia network remained mobilized, there were very few occasions when national actors actively participated in its efforts. For the most part, the Rondônia Forum played the role of mediator between the interests of international and grassroots groups, not always successfully. Activism in Rondônia was characterized, from the early 1990s on, by direct interactions between international and local organizations, in complete disregard for the potential advantages of mediation by national advocacy organizations. As a result, the process of resource sharing among network members was constrained. This has had negative consequence for local groups, particularly in the years following the restructuring of the Planafloro project. As the network's priorities became essentially local,

international interest in it decreased. The resources once available to Rondonian groups from their international partners have since diminished. Historically, the lack of a systematic participation of national organizations has prevented the Rondônia network from institutionalizing avenues for resource sharing between local and national activist groups. This partially explains the difficulties that local groups have had in addressing issues related to the low technical capacity of their cadres (national organizations could play an important role in efforts to increase the technical capacity of Rondonian organizations—as they have at specific junctures, such as during the negotiations for Planafloro's restructuring, for instance). Yet the failure of local groups to reach out to and participate in national arenas for civil society environmental and development activism has perpetuated this problem. The irony is that part of the explanation for why local groups have failed to strengthen links with their national partners in Brazil is their limited capacity. They have lacked human and financial resources (such as competent cadres who understand issues debated in national meetings and financial resources to send representatives to conferences and rallies) that could enable them to fully engage in national activism. The consequence is the perpetuation of a vicious cycle in which lack of engagement and closer cooperation with national groups prevents gains in local groups' technical capacity, and limited capacity constrains local-national cooperation.

The paragraphs above summarize the commonalities and relevant differences among the transnational advocacy networks discussed in this book. In the next section I highlight certain lessons and recommendations that have emerged from this comparative study. My hope is that they may be valid contributions for future efforts to promote local environmentally sustainable development and effective empowerment of local civil society groups throughout the world.

Lessons and Recommendations

I. The formation or identification of local umbrella organizations or clearinghouses to support local groups' organization and mediate between them and national and international network partners should be a priority for activists. In light of the experiences narrated in this book, all efforts should be made to guarantee that umbrella organizations remain a participatory forum where different local groups may reconcile their differences and reach consensus vis-à-vis their goals and expectations as network members. In addition, the leaders or members of an umbrella organization's executive secretariat should remain mindful of the importance of not overshadowing the autonomy of local groups. Umbrella organizations

should be arenas for resource sharing between network members and for the facilitation of members' initiatives. They should not control such resources or be the sole catalyst or initiator of local activism.

II. The existence of local umbrella organizations should be no substitute for well-established lines of cooperation between network members at all levels. Members of a well-structured transnational advocacy network, while engaging in activism at local, national, and international levels, should be mindful of the political boundaries of their actions. While such concerns may increase the burden of communication and information diffusion among members and make network decision-making processes slower and more cumbersome, they solidify a network's structure and integration. In the long term, this may benefit efforts to increase local groups' technical and political capacity beyond the specific confines of network activism (Ecuador's anti-oil network is exemplary of this possibility).

III. Both the establishment of local umbrella organizations and the processes of resource sharing and information diffusion typical of transnational advocacy activism are likely to affect the balance of power among local political actors. Network members at all levels should be mindful of the consequences of this process, particular for local civil society organizations and activists. This issue should be of particular concern for international network members. The cases discussed in this book demonstrate that transnational activism inevitably affects local politics. To what extent are international network members willing or able to become involved in domestic and local politics? What are the consequences for such actors' legitimacy and accountability to their global constituencies? To what extent do their resources allow them to commit to struggles that are inherently long-term, since they involve structural change? How may international network members best cope with the political responsibility of committing to transnational socioenvironmental activism and campaigns?[1] These issues should be fully addressed by network members, preferable at the onset of a given mobilization. The risk here is the tendency of international NGOs and activist groups to prioritize action on immediate crises, which prevents their long-term involvement with processes of strengthening local civil society organizations. This behavior may be explained by several factors: 1) the Anglo-Saxon "work ethic" that pressures organizations to "move on with business," that is, to define goals and accomplish them in the shortest possible time and at the lowest cost; 2) Northern groups' pursuit of accountability and responsiveness to their constituencies and their expectations of a "successful" ending to a given mobilization effort or "crisis response"; 3) bureaucratic and time constraints imposed on Northern activist groups by large donors and funding sources.

IV. Another challenge to the relationship between international and national/local network members refers to their choice of strategies. Given the superior resources of international groups, transnational networks have had a tendency to concentrate advocacy efforts on international arenas. Yet this practice generates at least two risks for a network's effectiveness. First, successful strategies, conceived and implemented by international NGOs in industrialized countries, do not necessarily fare well when reproduced by activist groups in the South. The latter should evaluate the potential impact of emulating Northern NGOs' strategies and the extent to which these may affect their own capacity. They should also be sensitive to the impact of certain strategies on their local political and cultural context. All networks studied in this book presented examples of the complexities and potential for internal divisions entailed by the choice of inserting local activism into preestablished international leverage mechanisms such as institutionalized lobbying structures or campaigns. A second risk of an excessive reliance on international strategies is the possibility of its constraining the emergence of endogenous and often innovative channels for activism. A key example is the potential that local and national lawsuits have had for accomplishing specific network objectives. Yet, court actions have remained, at least for the three networks studied here, an occasional rather than a systematic channel for activism. Given the potential for long-term and structural change that this avenue entails (as indicated by concrete examples in Rondônia, Ecuador's *Oriente*, and India), network members should devote further material and intellectual resources to the consolidation or institutionalization of this route.

V. The priority to locally devised strategies within the context of transnational activism, and an emphasis on the institutionalization of legal measures as an avenue for the promotion of structural change are inherently linked to another key process, that of defining environmentally sustainable development. Network members must encourage the formulation of an approach to environmentally sustainable development that truly represents the needs and expectations of local network members. A network's strategies (legal, educational, political) and goals should remain faithful to such an approach. The essence of this process is to define what specific actions, projects, and policies must be pursued—at different levels—in order to foster environmentally sustainable development in a given region. Such actions' and policies' contribution to national and global environmental sustainability, while a desirable outcome, should remain secondary goals in the agendas of network members.

VI. Members of transnational environmental advocacy networks should be mindful of their potential role in redefining (or better defining) the concept

of environmentally sustainable development. As I discussed in the Introduction, dominant approaches to the notion have underplayed the need for structural changes in processes aiming at environmental sustainability. The activism of local communities in Brazil, Ecuador, and India has demonstrated that if issues of distributive justice and meaningful political participation are not addressed, effective environmentally sustainable development will remain an elusive goal.

VII. Network members must be prepared to respond to demands generated by the success of their transnational activism. Part of this issue was addressed in item III above, where I highlighted the political implications of engaging in transnational advocacy networks. In addition, increased technical and material demands on network members are likely to result from a network's increased political assertiveness. Network members may be called upon to participate in the design of socioenvironmental policies, as was the case of Rondonian civil society groups and the formulation of the Program for the Support of Community Initiatives. They may also be requested to cooperate in environmental impact assessments, as OPIP did when it joined ARCO's technical environmental committee. It is important for all network members to devise policies for their long-term engagement in decision-making arenas, which may become available to them as a result of successful activism. Network members should be cautious against the temptation to embrace responsibilities beyond their capacities, or to accept tasks that traditionally fall under the competence of the state or oil companies, for instance. While NGOs (domestic and international), research institutes, and grassroots groups should be open to cooperate with state agencies and corporations, they should limit their role to independent advising. In very well-defined and limited cases, network members may assume implementation responsibilities for small, locally based initiatives. By assuming large-scale executive roles in environmental and development projects and policies network members may be misidentified by their constituencies as being in charge of delivering goods and services. When such goods and services are not provided, network members may see their legitimacy challenged.

Final Thoughts

Shedding light on the scope of action of transnational advocacy networks and on their internal processes of mediation among actors operating at local, national, and international levels is at least one way of addressing the limitations of existing theories on international environmental relations and global

interdependence. As it has been noted elsewhere,[2] existing theories lack the capacity to fully address the role that actors of different natures play in processes and policies that unfold and have simultaneous consequences at local, national, and global levels of analysis. Problems such as environmental degradation have implications at all of these levels, affect stakeholders at all of these levels, and demand solutions at all of these levels. Yet neither theories that emphasize the importance of the nation-state for global environmental management nor those that emphasize international institutions—such as regimes, treaties, or international organizations—have the breadth to address all the variables that affect such a process. This is simply because most approaches are unable to account for the impact of local politics on national and global processes. The study of transnational advocacy networks from the inside out is a valid contribution to efforts toward integrating domestic and international analytical realms.[3] Its originality, however, lies in "deepening" the analysis of domestic variables, highlighting the relevance of local actors and local processes for global politics on the one hand, and, on the other, forcing analysts and policymakers alike to consider the implications of domestic and international initiatives for local populations, local civil societies, and the local environment.

Despite such contributions, the study of transnational advocacy networks is still wide open to further inquiry. Evidently, this book has not answered all the questions that the topic raises, either in empirical or in theoretical terms. While it has drawn attention to the role that local actors play in transnational efforts to promote local and regional environmentally sustainable development there is still room for further research on the contribution of local approaches to the formulation of national and global environmental protection initiatives. We do know that abstract and general definitions of environmentally sustainable development, while often generating consensus among national and transnational actors, have done little to promote that kind of development in practice and particularly at the local level. To what extent may inductive approaches to the concept fare better?

Finally, many of the arguments made in this book should benefit from future studies that assess their validity beyond the realm of socioenvironmental policies. Transnational activism in the areas of human rights, women's rights, and the rights of refugees and populations in exile should provide interesting material to enhance one's understanding of the role of non-state actors, and particularly of those operating at the local level, in dynamics and processes that have national and international implications.