

Green Talk: Comparing the Discourse on Climate Change and Sustainable Development between Environmental NGOs and the State in Vietnam and Bolivia

Samantha Schipani
Earth Institute
Columbia University, New York City, New York
ss4121@columbia.edu

Abstract

Environmental non-government organizations (NGOs) and national governments are key players in the political sphere surrounding issues of climate change and sustainable development. The relationships between the discourse on “climate change” and “sustainable development” and NGOs and the state in both Vietnam and Bolivia provides a critical look into the ways in which these issues are approached in two highly-vulnerable countries with different political regimes. Live & Learn, the Centre for Marinelife and Conservation, and PanNature were interviewed as ENGO case studies in Vietnam; and Grupo de Trabajo de Cambio Climático y Justicia and Proinpa were interviewed as ENGO case studies in Bolivia. Comparing the discourse from the ENGO interviews and websites depicting the Socialist Republic of Vietnam’s Law on the Protection of the Environment and Bolivia’s 2009 Political Constitution of the State elucidates the gaps left by state policies with regards to the needs of civil society in the context of climate change and sustainable development. The analysis also demonstrates the ways in which different regimes shape the culture of NGOs and how this impacts climate change and sustainable development initiatives and action.

Author’s Note

I became interested in the relationship between environmental civil society organizations and government regimes while studying abroad through the School of International Training’s International Honors Program on Climate Change. As a self-proclaimed politics geek, I feel that for any significant movement, the relationship between government and civil society is essential to understanding how the different facets of the policy itself are shaped. In areas where the impacts of climate change are immediate and salient, particularly in the developing world where regimes are different from the United States, this relationship will be critical in the coming years for the process of adapting and responding to a changing Earth.

Keywords: NGOs, environmental NGOs, Vietnam, Bolivia, sustainable development, government.

1. Background

Both the state and non-government organizations (NGOs) are leading decision-influencing bodies in any given nation. However, the two groups have

distinctive origins, agendas, and motivations that lead to each framing issues using different rhetoric. The relationship between active environmental non-government organizations (ENGOS) and the state in terms of the discourse on “climate change” and “sustainable development” reveals the ways in which the needs of the populace with respect to these issues are being addressed. Moreover, the varying discourse surrounding these ideas reveals how non-government groups behave within different regimes with regards to these issues. Further comparing these discourses and their disparities between the countries of Vietnam and Bolivia elucidates not only the predominance of specific issues over others in the environmental discussions of each country, but also how the relationship between different governmental regimes and their civil society actors responds to the shifting ecological tides in some of the world’s most vulnerable areas.

Though the United Nations (UN) originally delineated the term “NGO” in 1945 for international bodies engaging within the context of the UN itself, the modern connotation has evolved to encompass private groups united under a mutual objective whose members do not “include official members, such as governments, governmental representatives, or governmental institutions”, and are non-profit oriented and independent from the government because they operate primarily on private donations (Martens, 2002). For the purpose of this research, an ENGO is considered to be a group of civil society members not funded or represented in part by government actors that pursues a common goal mainly related to issues of ecological protection, or issues related to natural resource management, such as agriculture, water, and energy.

However, ENGOS may have agendas that do not necessarily work towards a broad social benefit, and it is thus important to be critical of the motivations of ENGO actors. Large, international ENGOS do not necessarily encompass all of the grassroots social movements surrounding environmental issues, as the “radical ecology movement argues for a reorientation of economics, replacing competitive free trade and export led development with self-sufficiency and minimal energy and material throughput” (Isla, 2009). ENGOS have conflicted with social needs particularly in issues of forest conservation and carbon offset ENGOS, which have been known to remove indigenous people from their lands for the sake of preserving “natural” areas (Landell-Mills & Porras, 2002). Therefore, it is essential to understand the origins, the sources of funding, and the motivations of ENGO actions in order to properly understand their role in the environmental discourse.

The relationship between ENGOS and the state reveals how civil society prioritizes environmental issues and how environmental civil society behaves comparatively across different political regimes. The discrepancies between the priorities emphasized by the government and those by ENGOS often reveal areas in which the government has failed to sufficiently address the needs of its people. NGOs are essential mechanisms for mobilizing civil society politically when “traditional mechanisms like voting are blocked or seen as ineffective” by providing resources that can be used for organizing or by facilitating interaction between members of a community (Boulding, 2010). In many regimes, environmental movements can claim their roots in social movements from grassroots groups, dynamic environmental networks, and public pressure lobbies (Ho, 2001). The comparison of the relationship between ENGOS and the government across different states provides insight into the effects of different regimes on civil society

actors with regards to environmental issues. In China, for example, the “altering politics of toleration and strict control of social organizations” largely shaped the government’s approach to environmentalism, marked by gradual development, a lack of immediate urgency to confront the environmental costs of development, and a general inability of ENGOs to openly confront the government on environmental issues (Ho, 2001). This deviates from the behavior of ENGOs in Western democracies, where the environmental movement rose as a specific crisis of quality of life in a post-industrial setting, initially recognizing the need to improve environmental efficiency in a free market economy, and to “enhance a pluralist, democratic political system if long-term economic growth is to be secured” (Ho, 2001).

The comparison between Vietnam and Bolivia are particularly informative considering the vulnerability, state regimes, and history of civil society in the two regions. Vietnam and Bolivia are the 6th and 35th, respectively, most vulnerable countries to climate change according to the Global Climate Risk Index (Harmeling and Eckstein, 2013). However, based on the varying geographies of the regions, each nation will be affected differently. Vietnam will likely suffer most prominently from the effects of sea-level rise, such as saline intrusion and coastal erosion. As a land-locked country, Bolivia will be less impacted by sea-rise than its coastal counterpart across the Pacific. Nevertheless, Bolivia will be affected by glacial retreat in the mountainous areas, which affects domestic and agricultural water supply. Both countries face agricultural challenges as the shifting climate transforms ecological conditions in their primary growing areas.

Vietnam and Bolivia are also both currently led by socialist heads of state, though the structures of the two governments are dissimilar. Vietnam is a single-party socialist republic where the President of Vietnam is the head of state, and the Prime Minister of Vietnam is the head of government in a one-party system led by the Communist Party of Vietnam. The executive branch is responsible for the implementation of the state’s political activities, but the legislature is, according to the constitution, the highest organ of the state (Van & Cooper, 1983, p. 56). The constitution of Vietnam is largely based around Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh thought, which are also considered to be the “official ideology” of the Communist Party of Vietnam (The Socialist Party of Vietnam Government Portal, 2013). Though the government actors are by no means homogenous, this “official ideology” serves as a unifying factor within the government, and while the president himself is never held up as a figurehead in Vietnamese culture, Ho Chi Minh iconography is present in public spaces throughout the nation.

In contrast to Vietnam, the government of Bolivia is a presidential representative democratic republic, whereby current president Evo Morales serves as head of state, head of government, and head of a pluriform multi-party system. Evo Morales is a member of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) Party, as is current Vice President Álvaro García Linera. With Evo Morales’s rise to power as the first democratically-elected President from an indigenous population, the government underwent a constitutional referendum in 2009 that granted more power to indigenous people, allowed President Evo Morales to stand for re-election, ensured state control over natural gas, and limited the size of land ownership (Constituent Assembly of Bolivia, 2009). Morales’ presence as a culture icon is prevalent on billboards across the country, though public opinions of his politics are by no means

uniform. With similarly socialist-minded leaders in vastly different regime structure, there should be some similarities between the way governing bodies approach issues of climate change and sustainable development between Vietnam and Bolivia, but the differences in comparison will reveal how the different government structures perceive these ideas as well as how they respond to civil society.

Vietnam and Bolivia also both have contentious histories of civil society with regards to their relationship to governing bodies. In Vietnam, terms such as “civil society” and “NGO” are “not widely used in academic and official discourse in Vietnam” (Thayer, 2009). Generally, the term “civil society” in Vietnamese “has two distinct meanings” with complicated connotations in relation to the state. The first is “an economic meaning that views civil society in terms of service delivery by local development NGOs,” which is viewed mostly negatively by the state as “being closely linked to international benefactors and their agendas...because in Vietnam's mono-organizational system there is no domestic civil society sector that is independent or autonomous from the direct control of the state” (Thayer, 2009). The second meaning, which emerged in the 1990s, is largely political, whereby “dissidents have appropriated the term civil society in order to promote liberal democracy” and create spaces “where Vietnam's one-party state can be challenged by the non-violent political mobilization of ordinary citizens” (Thayer, 2009). In a political context, “Vietnamese NGOs began to emerge to deliver services that were no longer provided by the state,” though increasingly, “this space has been occupied by INGOs [international non-government organizations] at the expense of local development NGOs” (Thayer, 2009).

Civil society organizations have an equally contentious relationship with the state in Bolivia. According to a study conducted by Boulding regarding the role of NGOs in Bolivian political participation, “NGOs facilitate collective action and political participation,” though “how that political participation is exercised...is contingent on the larger political context in which NGOs are operating” (2010). As Bolivia is considered a weak democratic setting “where institutions are viewed with deep distrust and skepticism, new political participation can also take more contentious forms, such as political protest and demonstrations” (Boulding, 2010). Boulding finds that, in Bolivia especially, NGOs are linked to protests in such political regimes, which is not only important for the political character of Bolivia itself, but emphasizes “the importance of political context” to how civil society works in less democratic settings (Boulding, 2010).

2. Methodologies

In order to compare the state and ENGO rhetoric within specific limitations, in-depth interviews were conducted with ENGO leaders as well as close readings of online resources from both ENGO and government webpages. The specific limitations of the research included language barriers and discrepancies in translation, particularly in Vietnam; inability to speak candidly with government employees about their perceptions of state environmental discourse in relation to ENGOs; and a relatively non-random sample of ENGOs, all of which were selected to present for the IHP Climate Change program this semester. However, leaders of the ENGOs were interviewed at length to gather qualitative research. Interviews were constructed

conversationally, centered around the main questions of “What does climate change mean for your organization and how has it impacted your projects?”, “How does your organization approach sustainable development? How is this similar or different from sustainable development as conducted by the state?”, and “What is the relationship between the state and your ENGO?” After the interviews and any follow-up emails, the ENGOs’ websites were browsed for official mission statements, distributed literature, and other relevant information. Finally, English translations of the Vietnamese environmental policies and both English and Spanish versions of the Bolivian constitution were reviewed for relevant information as to the ways in which “climate change” and “sustainable development” were defined and used in the discourse. In order to attempt to factor issues of ENGO efficacy out of my research, eliminated INGOs with primarily international leadership were eliminated from the case studies. The only NGO studied with an international headquarters was Live & Learn, headquartered in Australia, because the group’s leaders were all native Vietnamese and claimed veritably no connection to the Live & Learn headquarters aside from some funding and name recognition.

The discourse analysis focuses on both climate change and sustainable development to not only highlight the tensions between economic development and the inevitable impacts of the changing environment in these decision-making and public action bodies, but also to emphasize the inherent variability associated with these phrases in environmental discourse. A study conducted by Weingart, Engels, and Pansegrau (2000) on the discourses of climate change divides the discourses into three distinct spheres of science, politics, and mass media, with serious disparities between the three in the level of complexity, uncertainty, and alarm. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the term “climate change” is defined as “any change in climate over time, whether due to natural variability or as a result of human activity” (2007). However, this usage differs from that in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which defines “climate change” as “a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods” (2014).

Similarly, “sustainable development,” first used by the Brundtland Commission in its 1987 report *Our Common Future*, is defined at its most basic level as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” However, oil companies such as Shell have co-opted terms like “sustainable development” in order to improve their public image, and its engagement with the sustainability discourse is linked to the “changing social practices of sustainable development” and is revealing to the “power-knowledge dynamics at play in this discursive field” (Livesey, 2002). Some scholars even argue that the phrase “sustainable development” itself is an oxymoron, as ecological and social sustainability is necessarily in conflict with the current paradigm of economic development (Redclift, 2005).

3. Vietnam

The Vietnamese ENGOs interviewed as case studies include Live & Learn, the Centre for Marinelife and Conservation, and PanNature. Live & Learn is an international NGO headquartered in Australia with branches all across Southeast Asia. Live & Learn aims for a “sustainable and equitable world free from poverty” through educating communities about climate change in “action-based, effective and creative learning models and teaching methodologies” (Live & Learn, 2013). The Vietnamese branch of Live & Learn underwent two years of development to build a “passionate and enthusiastic human resources of full-time staff and collaborators with in-depth experience and knowledge in sustainability education and good governance” (Live & Learn, 2013). The Live & Learn branch in Vietnam focuses mainly on educating the public by distributing climate change educational materials to classrooms, particularly the ABC Education Book on Climate Change publically available on their website.

The Centre for Marinelife and Conservation (MCD) is a non-profit, non-government organization devoted to marine life conservation and sustainable development in Vietnam’s coastal areas. MCD strives to become, “by 2015, a pioneering Vietnamese civil society organization that harmonizes the effective management of coastal resources and improvement of coastal community livelihoods by localizing international knowledge and experience into practical adaptive models in Vietnamese context” (MCD Vietnam, 2014). MCD operates mainly in impoverished communities surrounding national parks and marine biosphere reserves, as well as wetland ecosystems in the Red River Delta, Mekong Delta, the central coast, and coastal islands. MCD provides technical consultancy about resource management and livelihood improvement as well as writes proposals to improve relevant policies.

PanNature is a Vietnamese not-for-profit organization dedicated to protecting and conserving biodiversity and improving human wellbeing in Vietnam by promoting the good governance of natural resources; raising public awareness; building a network for Vietnamese environmental groups; and fostering participation and transparency of public policies (PanNature, 2014). PanNature implements environmental awareness and education activities in various sites throughout Vietnam, as well as seeking feasible solutions for better governance of natural resources to balance the goals of nature conservation with improving rural livelihoods (PanNature, 2014). The organization focuses on the role of community participation in sustainable development. PanNature also conducts research about conservation and sustainable development (PanNature, 2014).

The Vietnamese government largely views the environment as a means for development. The English translation of the Laws on the Protection of the Environment, enacted in 1992, was used to discern state rhetoric surrounding sustainable development and climate change. The laws heavily emphasize the importance of environmental “protection”, requiring “any organization, family household or individual causing environmental pollution or degradation...to remedy it and to compensate for loss and damage” (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1992). However, the government views “investing in protection of the environment as investment for development” (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1992). Such protection must, therefore, “must conform with the law, with natural, cultural and historical characteristics and with the level of socio-economic development of the country from time to time” (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1992). References to “climate

change” are absent from the constitution as a whole, though there is mention of rising temperatures and “greenhouse gases”, though only in direct reference to “selling of greenhouse gas emission quotas between Vietnam and foreign countries” and encouraging “manufacturing, business and services establishments to minimize greenhouse gas emissions” (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1992).

Though the ENGOs in Vietnam addressed climate change through many different avenues, there was a prevailing focus on adaptation and resilience across all three. Unlike the state, all three ENGOs refer directly to “climate change” throughout their environmental discourses, usually coupled with a “response” that involves adapting lifestyles or ecosystems to the inevitable impacts. The Live & Learn ABC Education Book on Climate Change continually mentions the importance of “adaptation,” both with regards to the actions of the Vietnamese government and in “What You Can Do” in “Responding to Climate Change” (ABC Education Book on Climate Change, 2012). The Live & Learn website describes its “Child-Centered Climate Change Adaptation Project” as “building the resilience of children, young people and their communities for future climatic risks and impacts...with skills and knowledge to identify disaster and climate change risks and initiate the solutions to cope and adapt with” (Live & Learn, 2013). The MCD leaders emphasized the need to build the “resilience” of marine ecosystems and coastal communities in the face of climate change, including projects such as the “community communication campaign promoting climate change adaptive livelihood models” and tools for “natural resources management and climate change adaptation in the coastal biosphere reserve in Vietnam” (MCD, 2014). Though PanNature makes no specific reference to “adaptation” or “resilience,” its mission similarly emphasizes the importance of individuals and communities adapting more “sustainable livelihoods” in response to climate change (PanNature, 2014).

However, the rhetoric surrounding “sustainable development” by both the state and the ENGOs emphasizes the role of environmental resources in the economic growth of Vietnam. The laws define “sustainable development” as “development which satisfies the needs of the present generation without prejudicing the ability to satisfy the needs of future generations on the basis of tight and harmonious coordination between economic growth, guarantee of social progress, and protection of the environment” (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1992). The emphasis on “social progress” and “economic growth” differs from the original Brundtland report definition, emphasizing the Vietnamese government’s commitment to economic growth in the context of managing environmental resources. Furthermore, such rhetoric regarding “sustainable development” is echoed by the ENGOs, who emphasize the “environmental sustainability of the development path” as an issue with regards to “economic growth” and “environmental planning as a part of socio-economic development” (Live & Learn, 2013; PanNature, 2014). Even MCD, which is focused on environmental conservation, strives primarily to “balance the needs of coastal communities with the needs of the marine environment to ensure a sustainable future for all” (MCD Vietnam, 2014). Though the mention of sustainability is less explicitly economical, there is still a prevailing sense of needing the environment primarily to support the development of the communities.

Furthermore, all three ENGOs viewed their relationships to the state as specifically supplementing laws that were already put in place by the government.

The leaders of Live & Learn described their relationship with the government as contingent on the topic – education on energy production and conservation, for example, is most heavily monitored – but generally cooperative. With specific regards to climate change, the government already has the policies in place for “promoting dissemination of information, education...to build awareness and discipline in environmental protection activities,” but the ENGOs have more financial resources (The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1992). According to their website, MCD strives to “manipulate multilevel policies of nature resources management in coastal areas” (MCD Vietnam, 2014). The leaders of the MCD echoed this rhetoric in conversation, emphasizing the importance of ENGOs in mobilizing existing conservation policies. PanNature’s policy program aims to build the capacity of Vietnamese civil society to “monitor law enforcement and implementation,” as it recognizes that Vietnam has “a good system of environmental and conservation laws,” but “implementation and enforcement of these laws are still considered to be weak and inefficient” (PanNature, 2014). PanNature provides “government agencies with reference models and recommendations for better environmental management and planning for sustainable development” (PanNature, 2014). Vietnamese ENGOs, therefore, serve to fill the gap between policy and action.

Nevertheless, all three Vietnamese ENGOs maintain rhetoric of seeking “transparency” from the government. Though provinces and municipalities are centrally controlled and managed by the national government, towns are locally accountable through some degree through elected people’s councils (The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1992). The local governments play an important role in Vietnamese environmental laws, as Article 112 of the Laws on the Protection of the Environment outlines the “responsibilities of the people’s committees at all levels for State administration of protection of environment” (1992). However, because of the varying levels of bureaucracy, the Vietnamese government is prone to corruption, particularly at the local level (Fritzen, 2006). Subsequently, Live & Learn has a specific project related to pursuing a “Transparent and Sustainable Society.” The project is designed in order to bring to light the issues of corruption in the daily lives of the nation’s youth (Live & Learn, 2014). One of PanNature’s five main goals is “transparency of government policies” (PanNature, 2014). The ENGOs discourse on filling the gaps between government policies and action likely stems from the inefficiencies perpetuated by the decentralized local governing bodies, which are technically in charge of implementing the government’s environmental policies.

4. Bolivia

The Bolivian ENGOs used as case studies for the purpose of this research were the Grupo de Trabajo de Cambio Climático y Justicia and Fundación Proinpa. Grupo de Trabajo de Cambio Climático y Justicia (GTCCJ), or “Working Group for Climate Change and Justice,” is a social group consisting of several Bolivian nonprofit institutions “working on the issue of climate change from the perspective of ecological ethics and justice” (GTCCJ, 2014). The organization manages a CLIMATE Fund for GTCCJ member institutions, which is “intended to perform actions and/or research, systematization on the implementation of micro-projects in

rural and urban areas, related to the topics of prevention, adaptation and mitigation of climate change” (GTCCJ, 2014). The ENGO strives to act as a bridge between the people and the government on issues of climate change and environmental justice.

Fundación Proinpa’s mission is to “promote the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources” through researching and increasing agricultural biodiversity (Fundación Proinpa, 2014). The impact area of Fundación Proinpa spans across Bolivia, from the Altiplano to the Valles Sur, as the organization seeks “to strengthen community structures and protect the environment” (Fundación Proinpa, 2014). The ENGO views crop varieties and increasing agricultural biodiversity as one way to combat climate change, conducting research and experiments with different varieties of tubers, roots, grains, cereals, legumes, vegetables, and fruits able to grow in Bolivia. The foundation also conducts research with regards to climate change adaptability and rural community vulnerability across the country.

The 2009 Bolivian Constitution recognizes the rights of communities to environmental resources, but only insofar as they assist the development of the country as a whole. The 2009 Bolivian Constitution, like the Vietnamese Laws on the Protection of the Environment, makes no mention of climate change, but recognizes the right of people to have to environmental resources. Section I of the Social and Economic Rights section includes that, “Everyone has the right to a healthy, protected, and balanced environment. The exercise of this right must be granted to individuals and collectives of present and future generations, as well as to other living things, so they may develop in a normal and permanent way” (Constituent Assembly of Bolivia, 2009). However, the discourse of the constitution is rife with internal contradictions about the environment and development. Article 9 with regards to the principles, values and purposes of the state includes promoting and guaranteeing “responsible and planned use of natural resources, and to stimulate their industrialization through the development and strengthening of the productive base in its different dimensions and levels, as well as to preserve the environment for the welfare of present and future generations” (Constituent Assembly of Bolivia, 2009). Therefore, though people have a right to the natural environment, environmental resources must be “planned” and industrialized for a “productive base.”

Bolivian ENGOs are focused on “adaptation” to climate change, specifically with regards to vulnerable communities. The main goal of the GTCCJ network in the face of climate change focuses on “prevention, adaptation and/or mitigation” through “a number of initiatives through the support of micro projects that complement or help create knowledge which others can learn” (GTCCJ, 2014). The Climate Fund specifically targets vulnerable urban and rural areas, identifying “local initiatives being implemented to prevent and confront the effects of climate change adaptation, mitigation and prevention” (GTCCJ, 2014). Fundación Proinpa presents their projects as building socio-ecological resilience to climate change through agricultural biodiversity. The foundation prioritizes their focus in areas “in which its residents are affected by poverty but have natural or economic potential has not been tapped” (Fundación Proinpa, 2014). Furthermore, Fundación Proinpa is currently working on a project to evaluate the vulnerability of communities to climate change alongside developing an adaptation program to improve the resilience of their agricultural biodiversity projects.

Amongst the Bolivian ENGOs, there is also a prevailing sense of associating climate change issues to social equity, both domestically and internationally. At a domestic level, GTCCJ demands that the Bolivian government make “clear gesture of commitment to the environment and ecosystem”, which “should promote local, regional and national policies to promote the preservation of water resources, food security, health, particularly the most vulnerable” (GTCCJ, 2014). As one of the leaders of GTCCJ described, Bolivian ENGOs are less focused on mitigation because their impact is relatively little. One of the organization’s main principles is the “requirement to pay the ecological debt of the poorest developing countries, not as a form of compensation or exchange or market mechanisms, but as a real way to amend the irreversible damage that generated huge consumerist economies, opposed to a fair and balanced development” (GTCCJ, 2014). Another includes “the commitment of developed countries to fulfill their responsibilities; while effective efforts are made to reduce deforestation in developing countries” (GTCCJ, 2014). GTCCJ thus coordinates “processes and actions on adaptation to climate change from the perspective of justice” (GTCCJ, 2014). Fundación Proinpa focuses less specifically on issues of justice and social inequality, but recognizes the impacts of climate change on the resilience of rural communities with limitedly distribution resources, thusly focusing the energies of the projects on the communities most in need. The state also focuses on inequalities, but little with regards to issues of climate change. In fact, the state only refers to inequality specifically with regards to the “reduction of inequality of access to productive resources” and “equitable distribution of wealth and of the economic resources of the country, for the purpose of preventing inequality” (Constituent Assembly of Bolivia, 2009).

Sustainable development discourse in Bolivian ENGOs is holistic, but critical of implications of the phrase itself. Fundación Proinpa is committed to a “system of life” approach to development, whereby the ecosystem in its entirety is considered when making any changes for the benefit of economic gain. Within their paradigm of agricultural systems, Fundación Proinpa also recognizes that “organization of science and technology with a flexible and agile structure, known in Bolivia and abroad for its excellence...has also achieved its institutional and financial sustainability” (Fundación Proinpa, 2014) Fundación Proinpa integrates the “genetic heritage of Bolivia and technological innovation within a concept of sustainable farming systems” (Fundación Proinpa, 2014). Similarly, GTCCJ also recognizes that “the transfer and the development of clean technology without debt should be a key to enter and sustainable mitigation processes, real and concrete adaptation pillar” (GTCCJ, 2014). The leaders of the ENGO consider development to be a balance between living with and using nature without removing everything from it. However, the leaders of the group were also quick to point out the internal contradictions with the word “sustainable development” and question its efficacy at length. They claim we must either visualize or make visible alternative forms of lifestyles. With the incorporation of concepts like “vivir bien,” development in the eyes of GTCCJ should include education and access to opportunities without marginalization, not building economic markets.

In contrast, the Bolivian government’s discourse on sustainable development is focused on strategy, authority, and, ultimately, production, largely for the proclaimed benefit of the nation at large. According to the constitution, “natural assets are of public importance and of strategic character for the sustainable

development of the country,” and, therefore, “their conservation and use for the benefit of the population shall be the responsibility and exclusive authority of the State, and sovereignty over natural resources may not be compromised” (Constituent Assembly of Bolivia, 2009). The state emphasizes the “industrialization” of natural resources “to overcome dependence on the export of raw materials and to achieve an economy with a productive base, within the framework of sustainable development in harmony with nature” (Constituent Assembly of Bolivia, 2009). Similarly, protected environmental areas constitute a “common good” in that “they perform environmental, cultural, social and economic functions for sustainable development” (Constituent Assembly of Bolivia, 2009). The Bolivian state even goes as far as to stretch sustainable development beyond the bounds of environmental issues, discussing the “defense, security and control of the zones of border security” as essential duties of the Armed Forces to ensure “comprehensive and sustainable development of these zones, and shall guarantee their physical presence in them” (Constituent Assembly of Bolivia, 2009). The discourse surrounding sustainable development by the Bolivian state is largely focused on the capacity for natural resources to achieve power through production in the markets. The rationale behind such ideas is to benefit the people of the country as a whole, but such a vision contrasts with the holistic vision of development outlined by the Bolivian ENGOs.

Bolivian ENGOs view their relationship to the government not as a supplement to existing policies, but as a vehicle through which new policies can be created. The leaders of the GTCCJ claim none of the topics on the government agenda are important to the people. Subsequently, one of the GTCCJ’s main objectives is to “generate proposals concerted between actors from the information, awareness, training and advocacy processes and policies to adapt to climate change justice perspective” (GTCCJ, 2014). With regards to the government, Fundación Proinpa is currently participating in a program of bioculture that involves participants of both public and private entities. Though the project itself is in part associated with government entities, the leaders of Fundación Proinpa hope their participation in creating a strategy for a unified image of climate change will be taken into consideration with policy changes.

5. Comparison

The similarities and differences between the environmental discourse of Vietnam and Bolivia elucidate the multi-faceted nature of ENGOs in framing important environmental issues of climate change and sustainable development with respect to the regimes in which they operate. The primary difference between the Vietnamese and Bolivian regimes is that Bolivia operates democratically with many parties while Vietnam is a single-party socialist republic. Though separate from the ENGOs themselves, such ideas of democracy and pluralism permeate the discourse of the ENGOs with regards to climate change issues. Both the Vietnamese and Bolivian states are, perhaps unsurprisingly, more focused on promulgating economic development through means of so-called “sustainable development” than directly addressing issues of climate change, but the differences between the state discourse demonstrate how the two regimes approach individual responsibility versus individual rights with respect to the environment. Furthermore, the differences

between the ENGOs in the different regimes with respect to the state demonstrate the way environment civil society is shaped by the political regime in which it occupies, and what role it subsequently plays in the political-ecological sphere.

With regards to civil society in the two nations, there is a prevailing discourse about adaptability with regards to ENGOs. Such adaptation in Bolivia, however, is focused primarily on the most susceptible rural populations, while adaptation in Vietnam is generally broader. GTCCJ and Fundación Proinpa both emphasize their focus on “vulnerable” agricultural populations. Live & Learn’s educational programs are intended for use across Vietnam, and while PanNature and MCD both focus on a specific type of community in rural and coastal areas, respectively, the rhetoric of “vulnerability” is absent from the discourse, except with regards to specific species or ecological zones. The discourse of ENGOs in Bolivia is also more focused on social equity and environmental justice than that of ENGOs in Vietnam. The rhetorical differences with respect to climate change adaptability where no one population is considered more “vulnerable” speaks to the universality and prevalence of climate change effects in Vietnam, as the Southeast Asian seaboard nation is ranked much more vulnerable to climate change than that of the landlocked South American state. On a political level, however, such a difference also speaks to the impacts that the presence of an officially democratic regime has on portraying climate change issues, specifically with a stronger focus on the impacts on people.

With regards to environmental discourse, both the Vietnamese and Bolivian states are more focused on economic prosperity with regards to “sustainable development,” but also rhetorically construct different relationships with respect to humans and their environment. Vietnam places a strong emphasis on individual action in mitigating and adapting to climate change. The 1992 laws encourage “all organizations, communities, family households and individuals to participate in environmental protection activities,” even going so far as to require “communities and people to bury their dead in already planned graveyards and cemeteries; to practice hygienic cremation; and to abandon burial practices which cause pollution” (The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1992). Such an approach permeates the ENGOs, as Live & Learn’s educational program devotes an entire section of their handbook and whole projects to what individuals can do in response to climate change (Live & Learn, 2013). ENGOs in Bolivia, in contrast, are more focused on the structural changes regarding climate change. On the other hand, the Bolivian state is more focused on individual rights with respect to the environment. Chapter Four of the 2009 Constitution, entitled “Rights of the Nations and Rural Native Indigenous People,” specifically designates the right to “live in a healthy environment, with appropriate management and exploitation of the ecosystems” for all peoples in the nation. This key differences perhaps point to an attitude within the socialist and democratic regimes, whereby the former is more focused on the well-being of the collective and thus the responsibilities of the individual thusly while the latter focuses on individual rights.

The ENGO and state relationships in Vietnam and Bolivia solidify the role they have in the political system. With regards to issues with the government, Vietnam is more focused on corruption and the transparency of existing political action while Bolivia is more focused on changing the policies put in place. Likewise, Vietnamese ENGOs see themselves as supplementing the state, reinforcing the idea of the socialist collective. Bolivian ENGOs, on the other hand, view civil society as a

means by which the democratic voice can rise up with greater force to change government policies. Though corruption is a prevailing issue in Bolivia as well, the priorities of the ENGOs with regards to what the state means for their actions is different based on the structure of the state. Such differences could also speak to the legacies of civil society in the two nations, or the ways in which the government is handling climate change and sustainable development issues specifically. Regardless, culture of ENGOs is affected in part by the state regime that they occupy.

6. Conclusion

The dynamics between the state and ENGOs with respect to issues of climate change and sustainable development create a steady give and take, not only with regards to the discourse put forth by the different entities, but also the implementation and actualization of environmental action. The disparities between the ENGOs and the state reveal the ways in which the state falls short with respect to civil society with regards to environmental issues. Likewise, the differences between ENGO and government discourse call to question not only the relationship of civil society entities to the state, but also the ways in which national political regimes permeate environmental decision-making, even at non-governmental levels. Within Vietnam, ENGOs act to supplement existing policies in Vietnam, which focus primarily on resilience and sustained development. In contrast, Bolivian ENGOs assume a more confrontational role to the state with grander policy-making goals emphasizing the social equity and vulnerability of certain disenfranchised populations. When comparing the two, the discourse on adaptation amongst ENGOs and that of economic development between governments is prevailing, though the differences in the ways individuals are treated as either culpable actors or recipients of rights reveals how the nature of the political regime shapes the climate change and sustainable development discourse across both ENGOs and the state.

Bibliography

- Boulding, C. E. (2010). *NGOs and political participation in weak democracies: Subnational evidence on protest and voter turnout from Bolivia*. *The Journal of Politics*, 72(02), 456-468.
- Brundtland Commission (1987). *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*. United Nations.
- Climate Change (2014). In *Glossary of Climate Change*, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Retrieved May 5, 2014, from https://unfccc.int/essential_background/glossary/items/3666.php.
- Climate Change (2007). In *Annex I Glossary*, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Retrieved May 5, 2014, from <http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/glossary/ar4-wg1.pdf>.
- Constituent Assembly of Bolivia (2009). *Political Constitution of the State, 2009*. Retrieved May 5, 2014, from http://www.forensic-architecture.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Bolivia_Constitution_2009-Official-Translation.pdf.
- Fritzen, S. A. (2006). *Probing system limits: decentralisation and local political accountability in Vietnam*. *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration*, 28(1), 1-23.
- Fundación Proinpa (2010). Retrieved May 4, 2014, from <http://www.proinpa.org/>.
- GTCCJ Ante El Cambio Climático: ¡Justicia! (2014). Retrieved May 4, 2014, from <http://web.ccjusticiabolivia.org/>.
- Harmeling, S., & Eckstein, D. (2013). *Global climate risk index 2013: who suffers most from extreme weather events*. Germanwatch.
- Ho, P. (2001). *Greening without conflict? Environmentalism, NGOs and civil society in China*. *Development and Change*, 32(5), 893-921.
- Isla, Ana (2009), "Who Pays for the Kyoto Protocol? Selling Oxygen and Selling Sex in Costa Rica"; Ch. 11, "Eco-Sufficiency & Global Justice: Women Write Political Ecology," Ariel Saleh (Ed). Pluto Press, London.
- Landell-Mills, N., & Porras, I. T. (2002). *Silver bullet or fools' gold?: a global review of markets for forest environmental services and their impact on the poor*. London: International Institute for Environment and Development.
- Live & Learn (2013). Retrieved May 2, 2014, from <http://www.livelearn.org/>.

- Livesey, S. M. (2002). *The Discourse of the Middle Ground Citizen Shell Commits to Sustainable Development*. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 15(3), 313-349.
- Martens, K. (2002). *Mission impossible? Defining nongovernmental organizations*. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 13(3), 271-285.
- MCD Vietnam (2014). Retrieved May 2, 2014, from <http://mcdvietnam.org/en/>.
- PanNature (2014). Retrieved May 2, 2014, from <http://www.nature.org.vn/en/>.
- Redclift, M. (2005). *Sustainable development (1987–2005): an oxymoron comes of age*. *Sust. Dev.*, 13: 212–227.
- Socialist Republic of Vietnam (1992). *Law on the Protection of the Environment*. (National Assembly No. 52/2005 – QH11). Retrieved May 5, 2014, from <http://www.vietnam-redd.org/Upload/CMS/Content/Library-GovernmentDocuments/52-2005.QH11.pdf>.
- Socialist Republic of Vietnam Government Portal (2013). *About Vietnam*. Retrieved May 5, 2014, from <http://www.chinhphu.vn/portal/page/portal/English/TheSocialistRepublicOfVietnam/AboutVietnam/AboutVietnamDetail?categoryId=10000103&articleId=10001578>.
- Thayer, C. A. (2009). *Vietnam and the challenge of political civil society*. *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs*, 31(1), 1-27.
- Weingart, P., Engels, A., & Pansegrau, P. (2000). *Risks of communication: discourses on climate change in science, politics, and the mass media*. *Public understanding of science*, 9(3), 261-283.