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# **Implementing Eco-Social Policies: Barriers and Opportunities**

*A Preliminary Comparative Analysis*

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## Acronyms

<b>CO<sub>2</sub></b>	Carbon dioxide
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of Congo
<b>FONAFIFO</b>	Fondo de Financiamiento Forestal de Costa Rica (Costa Rican Forestry Finance Fund)
<b>GDP</b>	Gross domestic product
<b>ICCN</b>	Institut Congolaise pour la Conservation de l'Environnement (Congolese Institute for the Conservation of the Environment)
<b>ITT</b>	Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputin
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>PES</b>	Payment for Ecosystem Services
<b>PSA</b>	Pago por Servicios Ambientales (Payment for Ecosystem Services)
<b>REDD</b>	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation
<b>SDI</b>	Social Development Index
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNEP</b>	United Nations Environment Programme
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNFCCC</b>	
<b>UNRISD</b>	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
<b>UNWTO</b>	United Nations World Tourism Organization
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>USD</b>	
<b>WCED</b>	World Commission on Environment and Development
<b>WWF</b>	World Wide Fund for Nature

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## Summary

Despite the global consensus on the importance of shifting to a model of sustainable development, identifying pathways that can simultaneously and equally fulfil social, economic and environmental goals remains extremely arduous. This paper analyses opportunities for and barriers to the effective adoption of eco-social policies in national programmes by undertaking a comparative analysis of three case studies: Payment for Ecosystem Services in Costa Rica, the Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputin (ITT) proposal for Yasuní National Park in Ecuador and the Virunga Alliance in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The three programmes had varying degrees of success. The Payment for Ecosystem Services was a successful national programme that led to unprecedented forest recovery in Costa Rica. On the contrary, the ITT proposal for the Yasuní National Park was a governmental policy initiative that failed due to various national and international issues. The promising Virunga Alliance, a development project implemented in Virunga Park is at risk due to regional insecurity and a fragile national economy.

The author looks at the different approaches taken in each country, analysing the benefits and trade-offs as well as the factors that led to their adoption or defeat. She then examines how the actors involved, the economic agenda, the national and international contexts, and the national policy framework influenced the success or failure of eco-social policies. Drawing from this, she identifies topics for future research on the topic.

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## Introduction

Climate change, financial crises, rising inequalities both between and within countries, and increased conflicts and disasters present unprecedented challenges to humankind and call for global intervention (UNRISD 2010). Various international organizations have hosted key discussions in the last decades, aimed at identifying effective strategies to move toward more inclusive and equitable global development (UNRISD 2012a). Notably, the need of a shift toward a “people-centred and planet-sensitive” development model (Bali Communiqué of the High-Level Panel 2013:2) is stressed in various UN documents released ahead of the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>1</sup> as well as in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development itself. Despite the global consensus on the importance of shifting to a model of sustainable development, identifying pathways that can simultaneously and equally fulfil social, economic and environmental goals remains extremely arduous. Significant progress has not yet been achieved.

This paper is part of exploratory research that looks at the potential of eco-social policies to contribute to a more balanced implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Eco-social policies are understood as public policies that simultaneously pursue environmental and social goals. More specifically, the paper analyses key barriers for the integration of such policies in national plans.

After briefly tracing the evolution of the concept of sustainable development to its central place in current international development debates, the paper will elaborate on what is understood by eco-social policies. It will then conduct a comparative analysis of three selected case studies to illustrate how eco-social policies have been developed, their benefits and main challenges faced. This comparison will help identify some areas for future research.

## In Search of Sustainability

Sustainability currently seems to be the most popular term within the international community. With climate change as one of the most pressing manifestations of unsustainable development and the increasing pressure from civil society, the recently adopted 2030 Agenda takes a comprehensive approach in pursuing economic, social and environmental goals.

However, the term sustainable development has been around for much longer. First used in 1980 in the World Conservation Strategy (IUCN 1980), it was popularized by the “Brundtland report” of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987 (WCED 1987). On that occasion, sustainable development was defined as meeting “the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (WCED 1987:43). According to the report, it “is impossible to separate economic development issues from environmental issues” (1987:12): many forms of development erode the natural resources upon which they are based, and environmental degradation can undermine economic growth. In addition, it states that poverty is both a major cause and a major effect of global environmental problems, thus highlighting the interdependence of environmental integrity and social well-being. Finally, it argues that poverty must be addressed if we are to live in a more

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<sup>1</sup> For instance: Zero draft of the outcome document for the UN Summit to adopt the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2015); *The Future We Want* (2012); *Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing* (2012), *The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet* (2014).

sustainable world—for only in a planet free of poverty will ecological and other catastrophes come to an end (WCED 1987).

The WCED approach spearheaded debates in highlighting the complex interrelations between environmental integrity, economic growth and social well-being, and called for a reconsideration of the mainstream approach to development. Nevertheless, there are several shortcomings in the way in which it framed the linkages between poverty eradication and environmental degradation. While poverty reduction is undoubtedly crucial and necessary to improve human development and social sustainability, there is no evidence that economic growth per se will improve environmental outcomes, nor that it will reduce inequality and lead to sustained improvements in social well-being (UNRISD 2010). On the contrary, progress in poverty reduction based on the carbon economic growth has direct environmental consequences.<sup>2</sup>

Although the original definition of the Brundtland Commission did not distinguish clearly between the three pillars of sustainable development, sustainable development was perceived as encompassing the environmental, social and economic spheres. Since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, this three-tiered description has been at the basis of most definitions of sustainable development and has provided the foundation for the efforts to integrate sustainability criteria across these dimensions. This integration is aimed for by the UN, as well as many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the business sector.

More recently, greening the economy has emerged as the predominant concept for transforming the global economy toward sustainability (UNRISD 2012b). The approach emerged as a response to the 2008 triple crises of food, finance and fuel, and spread quickly across the globe as a means of combining environmental protection and economic growth. In spite of its valuable outcomes on these two fronts, green economy failed to realize its potential as it failed to address the social component (Cook et al. 2012). As foreseen by many scholars (see Lehtonen 2004; Lélé 1991), the economic dimension has driven most efforts and channelled more investments and attention, whereas environmental integrity and social well-being have often been subordinated or neglected.

Achieving a balanced emphasis between the three dimensions of sustainable development is challenged by the fact that they “are not qualitatively equal, but occupy different positions in a hierarchy” (Lehtonen 2004:201). In order to achieve a more balanced approach to sustainable development, “a more ambitious development agenda needs to shift the normative hierarchy for decision making away from social and

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