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Modern, Indigenous, Woman: Female Agriculturalists, Sustainability, and Development in the Highlands of Ecuador

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Modern, Indigenous, Woman:
Female Agriculturalists, Sustainability, and Development in
the Highlands of Ecuador



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Abstract

The country of Ecuador, while it possesses rich societal and environmental diversity, is challenged by political instability, economic crises, and areas of severe environmental degradation. For many reasons, including global economic flows, agricultural change, and economic collapse within the country, the participation and recognition of indigenous agricultural groups in rural areas of Ecuador has been transformed such that the roles, actions, and goals of women in many rural areas of Ecuador have evolved. This project examines changing agricultural systems in a highland region of Ecuador, focusing on the participation and experiences of indigenous agriculturalists, especially the participation and experiences of women in this group. The project considers the sustainability of this region's human/environment relationships and alternative development strategies that take into account changes in agriculture practices and participants.

Key Words: Agricultural change, alternative development, gender, indigenous groups

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I. Introduction

The following development story takes place in Northern Ecuador. Cotacachi, Imbabura (Figure 1) is a county situated to the north of the capital city of Quito. The visibility of indigenous activity in this county has stimulated economic and academic interest in the future of this region. Bordering nature reserves, Cotacachi has invested in the preservation of the natural environment and the indigenous connection to the land. But, this area faces economic and environmental pressures, increasing out-migration to urban areas, and social disintegration. Members of local indigenous organizations have made efforts to restore the indigenous social fabric through a reactivation of Andean agriculture. The methods they employ challenge current development paradigms that advocate either traditional subsistence agriculture or neoliberal economic development. This area, therefore, can serve as a case study to investigate and complicate existing development narratives and propose alternative strategies that are more participatory and sustainable.

Because of the current out-migration of men to urban centers, women are becoming more visible in rural development programs in this region. This investigation seeks to answer the following three questions concerning the process of rural development in Cotacachi. First, how is economic change affecting the role of Indigenous Ecuadorian women in agriculture and more broadly in rural development programs? Second, how is the changing role of Ecuadorian women in agriculture influencing the sustainability of agricultural livelihoods? And third, how can the human/environment relationships in the case study region reaffirm or challenge development discourse?

This paper will provide a view of the history and current realities facing indigenous community members in this region, drawing upon existing literature on the

subjects addressed in this paper. The analysis chapter will address the relationship between development paradigms and the case study area of Cotacachi. In the case study area, community actors, especially women, are maintaining a sense of indigenous social fabric through the appropriation of modernization, creating alternative methods of confronting agricultural change and globalization. This paper will conclude with a consideration of how such a case study could figure in future development planning and will examine how this project shows an alternative middle path in development thinking. I will end by considering how this investigation has altered my outlook on rural development.

II. Methodology

My interest in this project stemmed from a concern over the divide between the developed and the underdeveloped worlds. Development work, although it is something that interests me, has, through much of my reading and experience, been revealed to be problematic (Escobar 1995; Pete and Watts 1996). This can be due to the promotion of relationships that are based on systems of dependency or that are exclusionary; development programs often aid some while marginalizing others. I am interested in how development could be more successful, and in this pursuit I am looking at more marginal actors, scales, and discursive intersections. I am driven in this project to explore alternatives that are more just, sustainable, and participatory.

Yet, my endeavor is necessarily colored by my position in relation to development thinking and notions of women and the environment (Spivak 1988; Pulsipher 1997). While my interest in women and development extends from my own interest in the environment as a woman, this connection is complicated by the intersection of this identity with my race and class as a white, student of geography in the United States. I am unable to be fully objective because of the effects of such a relationship. I can expect, though, that my results or conclusions are most likely different from those of either an indigenous woman or a white, academic male. I feel it is important to state my intentions as interested in the promotion of women's voices in development discourse, voices which have not been acknowledged as often in the past.

I believe that exploring this dialogue between indigenous women agriculturalists and myself is an important perspective on the promotion and subsequent implications of development thought. Pulsipher (1997) describes my combined reticence and impulse to proceed nearly perfectly: "I feel that despite all my connections to the people of Galways

Mountain, my attempt to tell their story in whatever form will inevitably remain inadequate. And yet, it seems important to try” (304).

For the purpose of this investigation, political ecology has served as the guiding theoretical framework. I found this lens appropriate and informative in its attention to scale, marginalization of environmental actors and populations, and to distinct chains of human/environment relationships. Robbins (2004, 12) describes political ecology as

...empirical, research-based explorations to explain linkages in the condition and change of social/environmental systems, with explicit consideration of relations of power. [It], moreover, explores these social and environmental changes with a normative understanding that there are likely better, less coercive, less exploitative, and more sustainable ways of doing things.

Considering this, I set forth to explore the case study of the highland region of Ecuador with an understanding of the socio-political and economic flows that generally interact with local and national environmental actors and with the realization that these relationships are influenced by pre-established inequalities and power dynamics. This is to say that the materiality of the situation (agricultural systems, output, resources) is related to and affected by more non-material, theoretical notions (woman, space, marginalized actors), such that political ecology has become a necessary tool in which to evaluate the issue.

Considering that this investigation focuses on the role of women in rural Andean development, a feminist political ecology framework was applied because of its specific attention to the participation and marginalization of female actors in human/environment relationships. Diane Rocheleau et. al. (1996) distinguish feminist political ecology through its treatment of, “...gender as a critical variable in shaping resource access and control, interacting with class, caste, race, culture, and ethnicity to shape processes of ecological change, the struggle of men and women to sustain ecologically viable

livelihoods, and the prospects of any community for ‘sustainable development’” (4).

While many different actors in the region are seeking alternative development methods, women hold a unique, but often under-valued, relationship to environmental development and sustainability.

Through this lens, this project is further informed and brought into focus by brief fieldwork, academic literature, and the work of NGOs, political and indigenous organizations in the highland region of Ecuador. Brief field data, two weeks of experience, was collected in situ in the form of informal interviews with members of the local indigenous organizations, agriculturalist in the region, and academics (Hay 2005). Magdalena Fueres and Fausto Gualsqui Flores served as my main informants, with whom I conducted more formal, prepared, and recorded interviews. Magdalena Fueres is the current director of *Jambi Mascaric*, a woman’s health organization. Fausto Flores directs Runa Tupari, a locally based tourism agency and works in connection with agricultural development projects. Other experiences in the field were very informal: visits to nurseries and farms, discussions with various rural families, including the children, attending midwifery workshops, and discussions with my professors. These experiences were recorded through photographs and brief notes. The fieldwork served as a catalyst for further exploration both in theoretical readings and more in-depth case studies conducted by academics such as Bebbington (1997), Hamilton (1998), Becker (1999), etc. The authors have done lengthy and extensive field work in the region, focusing on indigenous land movements, development alternatives, agricultural change in Ecuador, and gender and agriculture in the region.

Apart from published academic material, my investigation relies on information published, in print and via the Internet, by local non-governmental organizations and

international NGOs participating in development projects in the region. Because of the nature of their work, these sources concentrate less on the collection and analysis of empirical data and apparently more on promoting each NGO's specific agenda. For my study, attention was also paid to statistical information on migration, urbanization, gendered economic participation, health statistics of rural communities, and environmental degradation statistics.

Historical and Social Realities

Ecuador is a country of intense environmental diversity and dynamic politics. The last twenty years have been an era of rapid political change, rising indigenous power, and growing poverty. In 2001, the Ecuadorian economy was dollarized in the hopes of reducing out-of-control inflation. While inflation was suppressed, dollarization had negative effects on the growing poor class in rural and urban areas. With a high concentration of the population in rural areas, rural poverty has become a serious issue in Ecuador as it is many Latin American countries.

	Rural Population as % Total population	Rural Poverty as %total poverty	Indigenous population as % total population	% indigenous population below poverty line	Share of agriculture in GDP	Rural Labor force as % total labour force	%land with no soil constraints
Bolivia	41	55	57	90	18	40	14
Ecuador	43	60	30	85	12	35	8
Peru	29	39	41	79	11	34	12

Based on Data from Bebbington 1997

According to USAID (2006), income distribution is highly unequal in the Andes, where 80% of income shares of GDP are held by 20% of the population. A high rate of rural poverty and the industrialization of urban centers have spurred rapid out-migration into the cities and an abandonment of Andean agricultural production.

Much of this paper considers current agricultural practices and rural development issues in the highlands of Ecuador. Multiple social issues have contributed to the present human-environment relationship in this region, including land and agricultural resource access, political mobilization, and state agrarian policy. The following section will explore the historical formation of the Andean indigenous communities in relation to

their land, as well as the governmental policies that have contributed to land distribution and use. The unique human/environment relationship in the Ecuadorian Andes was created through a colonially constructed feudal system, internationally influenced structural adjustment programs, and a mobilized indigenous population. The following section will focus on the Hacienda system which dominated rural land holdings throughout the early and mid 20th century, land reform policies of the 1960s and 70s, and the landscape change associated with the indigenous movement of the 1990s

The Hacienda System

The Hacienda system of land ownership characterized large sections of agricultural land and agricultural practice in Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia until the mid-twentieth century. The system of agriculture developed out of Spanish colonial land policy in which land was awarded to the colonists by the crown. The awarded land included the communities of indigenous people that occupied the area. The *Pennisulares* (Spanish-born colonists) were given an in-situ labor force, referred to as *Hasuispongos*. These indigenous laborers were sharecroppers; they received a plot of land from the landowner and in exchange they worked four to six days a week for the hacienda. Indigenous men and women worked for the landowner, either on the land or in the house as a domestic servant.

Although the *huasipongo* received tracts of lands to work for their own familial subsistence through a sharecropping relationship, it was often marginal, less productive land in relation to other areas of the hacienda: “Sierra haciendas extended from valley floor to mountain crest. The fertile valley bottoms were assigned to hacienda production whereas the steeper lands went to *peons*” [(Hanratty 1991, 1) Italics my own]. For the indigenous laborers, providing adequately for their families was difficult because of the

large amount of required work for the landowner and the fairly unproductive, marginalized lands that they were relegated to. Such marginalization in relation to the landowners created a system of dependence that negatively impacted the *huasipongo* farmer. Because of the lower productivity of the indigenous lands, indigenous laborers were often characterized as less knowledgeable and productive agriculturalists. The discourse that developed around the inferiority of indigenous agricultural systems persisted, making it difficult for indigenous agriculturalists to enter the agricultural market and served to dissuade production and consumption of highland agricultural products. For instance, many native highland foodstuffs are still underutilized because urban residents associate these foods with “indigenous” products, which are inferior and backward. (Interview Flores). This is an example of the influence and pervasiveness of colonial narratives in shaping rural agricultural practices.

While indigenous agriculturalists were considered as slow and ineffective, the *mestizo* counterparts were fairly unproductive when compared with agriculturalists in more low lying areas of the country such as the *Costa*. Interestingly, agricultural production was secondary in the large tracts of land encompassed by the hacienda. In many cases, the land was more of a symbol of wealth than an actual source of it. Contrastingly in the Coastal region production was high because the export orientation and industrialization of much of the land. Towards the mid-twentieth century, the highlands were suffering from their low output and a countrywide move towards the modernization of agriculture in the 1950s and 60s caused many hacienda owners to consolidate their land efforts. In some cases, the landowners sold their marginalized lands to indigenous inhabitants. But, the beneficiaries were only those indigenous families that could afford to purchase their land (Issacs 1993).

External and internal factors contributed to the dissolution of the hacienda system and redistribution of land in the highlands. While notions of equality played a part in this change, on a state level the industrialization of agriculture in the coastal lowlands of Ecuador and this regions growing participation in the global market, illuminated the lack of agricultural production in the highlands. The growing indigenous dissent, combined with the efforts of urban leftists, propelled Ecuador into a stage of agrarian reform. (Becker 1997).

Land Reform

The hacienda system created a highly polarized landscape between heavily land-rich *mestizo peninsulares* and *huasipongo* who were marginalized in both quantity and quality of land. According to Blankstein et.al. (1973), “The 1954 National Agricultural Census showed that 56.7 percent of the agricultural land was concentrated in only 3,704 units, or barely more than 1 percent of the total number of farms” (73). The much smaller farm units belonging to indigenous families were insufficient to support family needs. Blackstein et.al. (1973) find that, “73.1 percent of the landholdings were less than 5 hectares each and comprised only 7.2 percent of the total land area” (74). The stark inequalities in land distribution became central to the indigenous movement, especially as their affiliation to larger worker organizations, such as the World Federation of Trade Unions, strengthened. (Minorities at Risk 2006).

In 1964, the Land Reform, Idle Lands, and Settlement Act was created, spurred by a desire to industrialize agricultural production and raise highland output that could become a presence in the market economy. Issacs (1993) in reference to the hacienda system, finds that, “[t]he monopoly of land has been responsible for the expulsion of

peasant labour power leading to the creation of pockets of urban poverty that force salaries down... The move away from a predominantly agrarian economy towards a petroleum and industrial economy requires special measures to be taken in the countryside so as to facilitate and support this process of transformation..." (47). The original draft of the Land Reform Act focused on both increasing rural productivity and addressing land tenure inequalities through redistribution of land to peasant farmers. But, clashes with influential landowners resulted in a greater focus upon an increase in agricultural activity and subsequent output for the market.

The Act outlawed the feudal *huasipongo* system and created the Institute of Agrarian Reform and Settlement (*Instituto Ecuatoriano de Reforma Agraria y Colonizacion*—IERAC), which was created to facilitate the redistribution of agricultural lands and spur agricultural productivity. The Institute limited the size of land holdings to 800 hectares in the Sierra, 2,500 in the Costa, and 1,000 pasturelands in both regions. It also outlawed absentee ownership in an attempt to improve land use and production. The minimum amount of land grants would be 4.8 hectares (Zamosc 1994). IERAC was responsible for purchasing and redistribution of hacienda land as well as the colonization of unused land. The original design behind these reforms was that they would give purchasing power to more marginalized groups. Blankstein et.al. (1973) comment that initially, "[t]he price of land was to be fixed in accordance with its productive capacity and was to take into account the beneficiaries' ability to pay. The beneficiaries of the expropriation in turn were to pay to IERAC the full purchase price of the land, generally over a period of 15-30 years with interest rates of 6 percent or less" (80).

Although IERAC attempted to enact its initial goals, the Institute lacked the funding, societal access, and influence to complete their objectives. At the time, oil exploitation and export was a rising and lucrative government project, marginalizing the importance of and resources for highland agricultural development. The process of land redistribution and production slowed. The stagnation in rural agricultural development meant that only those with monetary resources could proceed in larger scale production. For instance, credit went to those who had greater access to funds and power to engage with distributors. Isaacs (1993) finds that “[b]etween 1973 and 1976 as much as 75 percent of total credit went to the Coast which produced primarily for the export market” (49). The lack of encouragement for domestic crops caused landowners in the highlands to invest in non-agricultural sectors. Few invested agricultural credit in more intensive farming that required more machinery and less labor. Much of the rural populations were unable to participate in this kind of agricultural development.

Land reform in the 1960s did little to affect the spatial structure of agricultural lands: “In 1977, plots of less than 10 hectares accounted for 80 percent of all agricultural units, a percentage share unchanged since 1954—despite the passage of two agrarian reforms” (Isaacs 1993, 51). In many cases, the reform policies furthered marginalized indigenous workers, and without having access to land, many elected to seek wage labor either on the plantations in the coastal region or in the industrial sector of the large cities.

The Indigenous Movement and Agricultural Change

The indigenous movement in Ecuador has been important in the formation of the current political, economic, and social system of Ecuador. This power is obvious when

considering recent events in the country: the election of a leftist president, stagnation in the signing of the Free Trade Agreement, and the reclamation of indigenous oil rights. Becker (1997) comments that, “[t]hroughout the twentieth century there has been a dramatic shift in indigenous consciousness and ethnic identity in Ecuador. A powerful movement for social change has emerged out of a population the dominant classes have traditionally viewed as backward and docile” (Becker 1997, 1). Through mobilization, demonstration, and negotiation, the indigenous movement has gained a place politically, electing officials into state positions, and economically, through rural development programs.

The indigenous movement has gained strength and visibility throughout the later parts of the twentieth century, especially in land redistribution efforts; agrarian land reform difficulties continued throughout the 1970s and 80s. Indigenous agriculturalists, many of which were former *huasipongos*, were greatly affected by the reform process because of the concentration of indigenous populations in rural areas and their connection to the land and agricultural practice. Indigenous mobilization was fairly suppressed throughout the 80’s until the election of Rodrigo Borja who recognize the legitimacy of the indigenous group CONAIE (*Confederacion de Nacionalidades Indigenas del Ecuador*). The *Confederacion* came into being in 1986 and attempted to join indigenous groups from throughout the country: the highlands, lowlands, and the Amazon.

In 1990, CONAIE organized a countrywide strike. Indigenous groups marched on Quito and delivered a petition to President Borja. The demands focused on land reform and the legitimating of an indigenous identity in national socio-political discourse. The visibility of this movement internationally encouraged Borja to negotiate with the

members of CONAIE. The participation of the state in negotiations with the indigenous movement strengthened the movement's legitimacy nationally and internationally.

According to Zamosc (1994) this mobilization was impressive in its, "... sheer magnitude, which revealed a widespread mood of discontent among the rural people or the highlands...[it was] the defining of the event as an Indian mobilization, which opened the eyes of all Ecuadorians to the Indians' return as protagonists who are placing the national question back on the political agenda" (Zamosc 1994, 38).

Although land reform was a priority in the 1990s, especially with the mobilization of the indigenous community, many of the reforms continue to concentrate on the privatization of land to increase agricultural production. A new Agrarian Reform Law was passed in 1994. The law was met with protest by indigenous groups who wanted to preserve community owned land: "For indigenous groups, the law is controversial because it allows communally held plots of land to be divided and sold, or mortgaged. Fifty-eight percent of Ecuador's rural land belongs to peasant communities, primarily indigenous, and 41 percent is privately or state-owned" (Minorities at Risk 2003, 5)

Comunas were a remnant of the 1937 *Ley de Comunas*, which granted communal status to indigenous communities occupying an area of land. As *comunas*, communities were able to represent themselves to the State. According to Norona (2006) "due to indigenous people's direct and indirect economic dependency on the Haciendas, it is not until after Agrarian reform when organization of indigenous families in *comunas* [increased]" (3).

Comunas functioned as a bridge between rural communities and the state. For indigenous communities, maintenance of such methods of participation in rural politics was important.

The indigenous community mobilized mass protests, using blockades they cut off food supplies from arriving to city centers. Military troops were dispatched, reacting violently against protestors. Internal, in non-indigenous populations, and external pressures led the president to negotiate with the protestors. The law was changed to maintain communal land, water, and indigenous representation. Ecuador maintains a tumultuous political arena, but the events in the 1990s led to greater representation of indigenous identity in national policy and a budding international voice for indigenous groups in Ecuador.

The land reform process has been slowed and challenged by an economic downturn in 2000. Currently, many rural areas must negotiate a scarcity of land and water resources. In Cotacachi, the case study area, local indigenous organizations continue to work towards gaining more productive land from the state and large landowners. But, in many rural areas dwindling land resources and a lack of sufficient arable land has complicated rural livelihoods, leading to perceived social disintegration.

IV. Literature Review

This paper examines the indigenous reactivation of agricultural livelihoods and grassroots development as well as the participation of indigenous females in this movement. The topic is formed around the escalating debate on the nature of development, especially on how it pertains to agricultural output and sustainability. Also, considering the gendered focus of this paper, literature pertaining to women and the environment and gendered development issues was examined. I will begin by addressing the literature base surrounding the development debate and how it is affected by or affects indigenous knowledge systems and forms of social and environmental sustainability. Finally, this section will review the relationship between women and the environment especially as it pertains to agricultural development.

The Development Debate

Within the country of Ecuador it is possible to witness the effects of multiple development practices, spanning a wide spectrum between mainstream, top-down development and “traditional” development (Bebbington 1996). This investigation was informed by the growing literature on the efficiency/sustainability of these different development schemas. The history of development discourse has been varied and controversial. It is a field that has been a meeting ground for First as well as Third World academics, including, for example, Borlaug (1995), Boserup (1970), Shiva (1999), and Bhagwati (2004).

The classic development paradigm takes root in the 1960s with the expansion of First to Third World aid; it emphasized industrialization of the global South. Policies concentrating on developing large-scale industrial agricultural systems and urban

industry ignored large blocks of rural populations, leaving them unable to access development aid. A desire for more equal access and distribution in the 1970s ushered in a more humanitarian outlook, which emphasized “basic needs” over pure economic progress. The third world debt crisis encouraged a move from more aid-based development to structural adjustment in the 1980s, which focused on privatization and was characterized by its disregard for social welfare programming. As discussed by Braidotti et. al. (1994), the structural adjustment approach is criticized for its top-down adjustment which led to further poverty and marginalization of many civil actors. Under structural adjustment, “[g]overnment expenditures for social services were severely reduced with serious consequences for poorer peoples of the South as well as the natural environment. It is widely documented how poor women in particular had to compensate for the cuts in social services by an increase in their work” (Braidotti et. al. 1994, 18). With the failure of many adjustment projects, the 1990s saw a return to humanitarian-focused development or “structural adjustment with a human face” (Braidotti et. al. 1994, 18). Mainstream development remains a highly contentious topic among academics who seek greater success in boosting the third-world economy and in increasing access to resources and development aid.

Most often, the development debate has been split between neo-liberal discourse and “traditional” development focused on local or indigenous knowledge systems. Lefebvre (1998) discusses market-based development, stating that “...the neoliberal position places an all-pervading emphasis on trade orientation. Export based development is assumed to have a trickle-down effect, which would naturally benefit the working population and lower income classes” (6). Large development actors such as the World Bank and the U.S. government often espouse this perspective. In contrast, local, and often

indigenous, development, characterized by a return to subsistence livelihoods, is promoted as a more just and equitable method of development (Bebbington 1996). “The assumption of much alternative development writing is that ‘alternative actors’ such as indigenous peoples’ organizations will carry forward these ‘alternative agendas’” (Bebbington 1996, 85).

What Bebbington describes above is often viewed in contrast to mainstream development techniques. Yet, according to Bebbington and Bebbington (2000), “...[t]he lack of specificity on economic alternatives is often accompanied by similarly general assertions that a basis for alternative rural livelihoods can be found in indigenous natural resource management practices” (9). The authors go on to discuss how those assumptions are not always correct. In fact, indigenous groups can often occupy a middle space, blending traditional and modern techniques. “This is particularly the case for Indian federations, whose agrarian programs have at different times incorporated modernizing approaches to agricultural development to promote a form of social change aimed at reinforcing indigenous culture and society. This suggests that what gives a strategy its alternative, indigenous orientation is not its content (i.e. that it uses indigenous technologies, etc.) but rather its goal (i.e. that it aims to increase local control of processes of social change)” (Bebbington 1993, 287). The idea of alternatives will be discussed further in the analysis section.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Bebbington et. al (1993) describe the controversy surrounding notions about indigenous knowledge systems when considering rural development and change. Many academics have associated indigenous agricultural livelihoods with traditional,

subsistence techniques, which they believe should either be converted into market-based production or maintained as a beacon of sustainability. “[I]nterest in the roles [of indigenous organizations] in sustainable resource management is related to the increasingly orthodox argument that the technological and managerial practices embedded in traditional environmental knowledge and resource use are ecologically sustainable” (Bebbington 1993, 179). The constructed alliance between indigenous knowledge and subsistence agriculture furthers the dichotomy within the development debate between mainstream and traditional forms of agricultural development. By creating indigenous knowledge as subsistence based, indigenous organizations are marginalized from entering market-based development discourse.

Perramond (2005) discusses this marginalization of indigenous agriculturalists further, examining the Zuni Pueblo in the Southwest United States. The disenfranchisement of native people in the Zuni Pueblo was fostered by a similar discursive construction of indigenous knowledge as inefficient and uneconomical. Perramond finds that, in the case study area, discursive pressures can have very real societal implication both in relation to the environment and to social relationships.

[T]he new dam was to be the tool of changing the traditional Zuni practices of land tenure and uses. The plan was to turn Zuni into a ‘patriarchal, patrilineal society of farmers, with households under the control of fathers.’ While physical changes in the landscape were the immediate reflection of ideology, this reordering and reshaping of gender were also clear interests in changing the social relations at Zuni (Perramond 2005, 10).

The above exemplifies the inability of indigenous groups to occupy a middle space, one that blends market-based development and traditional practices, in rigid development programs. Development planners in Zuni Pueblo pushed for a reordering of both rural practice and the area’s social framework. In the case of the Zuni Pueblo, white

development practitioners marginalized women actors from economic and environmental change, discounting their role as environmental actors. A change to market-based development affects not only the participation of indigenous actors on a whole, but also it often further marginalizes women to the domestic sphere.

Women and the Environment

Women and the environment as a field of study is large, involving academics from geography, women's and gender studies, biology, and economics (scholars such as Shiva (1988), Elson (1992), Cuomo (1994), and Hamilton (1998)). Ecofeminism, which predates feminist political ecology, espouses the parallel domination of women and nature (Warren 1994). Feminist political ecologists, on the other hand, look more closely at the role of female actors in human/environment interactions as part of broader economic and political systems. Academics in this field like Rocheleau (1996) and Sachs (1996) have examined how women are often marginalized in environmental discourse, discounting their agency in the creation of sustainable projects. For the purpose of this paper, I am interested not only in how patriarchal constructions affect women, but also, in how female environmental actors are affected by this system in connection with global economic and political flows.

Dankelman and Davidson (1988) discuss the importance of women as environmental actors in a global sense. "Because women are at the center of world food production—producing more than 80 per cent of the food in some countries—any analysis of land resources must include an appreciation of their central role" (4). While women seem to occupy a large space in rural environmental relationship, their work is often under-counted or disregarded in rural development planning. The authors go on to

say that, "...[u]nderestimating the amount of agricultural work done by women is very common, for statistics most often measure wage labour, not unpaid kitchen-garden work. Moreover, in some cultures men do not wish to admit that their wives, mothers and daughters do agricultural work" (6).

This perspective on the marginalization of women within rural economic development is reinforced by Braidotti et. al. (1994), who emphasized the problematic perception of women as part of the home and not as productive members of the economy. "Women were mere beneficiaries of development within their reproductive role in the economy, while their productive roles, for example in agriculture, were disregarded" (78). This disregard for women's work may have led to a lack of involvement/participation of female actors in the environmental development debate and planning. According to Sachs (1996), "...[w]estern science and capitalist development agendas often devalue, disregard, or usurp rural women's knowledge of the natural world" (6). Sachs go on to describe this process more specifically, "...[p]ublic policies are thus critical in determining women's relationship to land. Land privatization, land reform and titling that does not specifically include women, and policies that encourage the separation of land ownership from management are all examples of land policies that decrease women's options in agricultural production" (7).

Agarwal (1988) reaffirms the problematic relationship between mainstream development and women in her study on the effects of agricultural strategies on rural women in India. Agarwal posits that, "...in addition to the effect of development strategies on women as members of a socio-economic class, there would be differential effects by gender with each class" (84). From Agarwal's perspective, one can see that indigenous women must negotiate marginalization based not only of their race and social

class, but also based on their gender. In many cases, mainstream development has excluded women from participating in change, placing women on unequal ground economically, socially, and politically.

Within the above-discussed areas of literature, the social and political constructs that affect the maintenance of environmentally and socially sustainable development programs are often problematic. Policy makers and academics have created dichotomies between First versus Third World, mainstream versus indigenous development, and male versus female participation. In the case of the highland region of Ecuador these dichotomies must be negotiated in the construction of alternative forms of development discussed by Bebbington (1996), Hamilton (1998), and Becker (1999) in the following section.

V. Analysis

In traditional development discourse, the word “indigenous” is situated contextually as the opposite of modernization. Similarly, “indigenous” is associated with civil components of society such as, say, peasant uprisings and social movements (Korovkin 2001). Within this framework of understanding, a modernized and globalized state and/or market is juxtaposed with the more primitive, and also more sustainable, indigenous civil society. In a traditional development discourse, in contrast to a neoliberalist economic interpretation, indigenous livelihoods are construed as revolving around subsistence agriculture systems and lack an involvement in market economy (Bebbington 1996). Following this line of thinking, the notion of “indigenous sustainable development” is often considered synonymous with subsistence livelihoods and antonymous with mechanization, modernization, and a globalized economy. The traditional model shows a clear dichotomy between static rural indigenous communities and dynamic urban populations. Unfortunately, this binary view can be instrumental in perpetuating the marginalization of rural indigenous communities in economic interactions, politics, and development programs. Case studies from the Andean region of Ecuador suggest that many rural communities are challenging the traditional model of development. Modernization has not supplanted deep connections to the land, historically held cosmologies and belief systems of indigenous communities; rather, modernization has become a method to maintain these indigenous societal pillars.

Indigenous communities in Ecuador, which historically had been marginalized economically as well as socio-politically, have begun noticeably to occupy both traditionally indigenous spaces, through the retrieval of land rights and the reactivation of traditional practices, and also, less traditional spaces through the appropriation of aspects

of modernization such as the market economy. Indigenous communities, therefore, have created new discourses and a new model, rewriting classic development paradigms that emphasized neoliberal agricultural policies that focused on urbanization and industrialization or that promoted poststructuralist subsistence narratives.

The consequent alternative model for development is not merely economic, or production based, nor is it solely political or social. Andean economics, politics, and social desires are interdependent, and have become the nexus from which indigenous development programs evolve. Such development is not merely based on the reclamation of territory or the struggle to secure viable livelihoods but also on the assertion of social and political agency (Interview Flores). The fabric of this alternate development model is material necessity interwoven with symbolic production through the promotion of cultural events and political presence. With agricultural practices that blend the modern with the traditional and the fight for land ownership, indigenous groups are beginning to occupy space within the governmental sphere, remodeling the notion of indigenous participation and development into that which is not merely an attribute of the civic sphere.

The following sections will discuss indigenous communities and agricultural practices in an Andean area of Ecuador, the Cotacachi district in the Imbabura province, drawing on theoretical notions of civil society and the state, modernization and sustainability, and development discourse to illuminate alternative development strategies that are evolving in the Andes.

Inspired by the reaffirmation of traditional forms of indigenous society and in response to the increase of male-based migration, indigenous women's role in rural development in the case study area has become more visible, adding to, and perhaps

complicating, the existing literature on women participants in development. The concluding section will examine how women participate in alternative development strategies being employed in the Highlands, and how the roles they play comment on pre-established development paradigms about women's roles in relation to the environment. The notion that indigenous people in the Andean Ecuador function within an alternate model is especially applicable to women in rural development projects as civil, state, domestic, and economic actors.

Migration and Urbanization in Rural Development

Processes of migration and urbanization have played a formative role in the shaping of agricultural interactions in the Andes, having both negative and positive effects upon indigenous communities and rural development planning. Out-migration has a significant effect on the demographics of rural areas. Statistics on migration suggest that migration and urbanization are varied by region, specifically as it pertains to gender, age, and class (Arboleda 2006). For the purpose of this investigation, the focus here will be on out-migration in Imbabura province, a phenomenon that is highly dichotomized between indigenous men and indigenous women.

A lack of access to sufficient land and agricultural resources (especially credit) has encouraged many indigenous rural farmers to migrate to cities or other agricultural regions. Inter-country migration is a serious threat to many communities; communities themselves identify it as a cause of social and cultural disintegration. (Interview Flores). While migration to urban centers brings cash income into rural areas that have been impoverished by low agricultural output, it has the adverse effect of drawing younger generations, both men and women, away from the land, divorcing them from participation in rural development and the maintenance of community well-being. Many

alternative development programs pursued within the highlands, especially those created or supported by local indigenous organizations, are undertaken in response to the threat of migration upon the rural social fabric. (Interview Flores). I mean to draw a distinction between migration that provides income to maintain rural livelihoods and community connection and migration that disconnects rural residents from the land and their social connection to the area. The later has been the source of anxiety for rural leadership.

With the “Oil Boom” in the 1970s, industrial employment became a player in off-farm employment: “[b]y the mid-1970s, wages, not agricultural products, had become the largest proportion of small farmers’ income. As nonagricultural employment expanded during the oil boom, peasant laborers increasingly chose urban employment over agricultural work” (Hanratty 1991, 78). Yet, most potential income-earning employment in urban areas was, and remains as such, mainly available to men and younger women. Thus, women, elderly individuals, and children have traditionally stayed in rural areas while migrating males and young people return to their homes on weekends or during key agricultural periods throughout the year.

In Ecuador, urban governmental bodies have been unable to meet the growing need for services and employment. Squatter settlements have developed outside Guayaquil and Quito where the poorest inhabitants reside. The settlement around Quito represented 10 to 15 percent of the population of the city in the mid-1980s (Hanratty 1991, 2). Such conditions have become catalysts in the fight for viable rural livelihoods by indigenous communities. Although rural to urban migration provides a cash flow into rural areas, constant outflow of community members makes it difficult to maintain a cohesive community (Interview Flores).

Community leaders' desire for rural social preservation reflects on theoretical notions of social capital and rural viability. Social capital, which has been praised by the World Bank, for example, has become an important aspect of development discourse, especially in reference to rural areas. Social capital as a theoretical construct focuses on indigenous groups as able and viable communities, problematizing traditional notions of these communities as victims of modernization. In reference to this shift in development thought, Rhoades comments that, "[s]ocial capital...focuses on the positive aspects of social groups and emphasizes assets rather than deficits, abilities rather than needs. In the case of indigenous peoples, who have strong social and cultural values, it helps highlight their tremendous potential for improving their own life conditions" (Rhoades 2006, 10). Through the notion of social capital, indigenous communities have emerged in Western development thinking as actors with agency in designing and allocating projects. There is an awareness of the need to preserve social capital in order to be in the running for available funding.

There are identifiable methods that indigenous communities are employing in the search for a reduction in out-migration and social and cultural dissolution. In considering these methods, we will see that an alternative model to the traditional model exists in rural agricultural development. This new model uses both modern and indigenous knowledge systems and crosses social and political boundaries, creating a larger scope of human/environment interactions that spans through civil society, the market, and the state. From this vantage, I will examine the particular presence of indigenous women actors in a new model of agricultural development, and how the women are challenging their supposed roles and traditional spaces in development discourse by crossing boundaries and encompassing seemingly incongruous spaces.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Modernization

In their investigation of land and community in Andean Ecuador, Moates and Campbell (2006), identify a strong connection between the indigenous community in Cotacachi, Imbabura and their land and natural environment. This connection has been challenged repeatedly by migration, economic and political marginalization, and the scarcity of natural resources. In order to confront these issues and strengthen their connection to the land, communities are utilizing indigenous “traditional” knowledge systems along with exogenous modern techniques, technologies, and inputs, especially in the form of fertilizers (Robbins 2004). The use of such dichotomous agricultural knowledge systems in this region problematizes existing development paradigms that construct indigenous communities as static environmental actors and creates new notions of “indigenous” as well as dynamic structures of rural development.

Anthony Bebbington (1991), whose research focuses on rural development in Chimborazo, a highland region that is south the Imbabura province, finds that alternative development strategies, which have grown from the interaction between indigenous knowledge and modernization, are necessary because “... processes of land sub-division are so advanced that traditional technologies cannot generate sufficient local income to prevent periodic out-migration to urban areas” (Bebbington 1991, 20). He finds that although these communities continued to be challenged by environmental and economic inadequacies, the presence of social capital, in the form of interconnected organizations, provided a framework in which challenges, resources, and access can be mediated: “[s]everal second order organizations in Chimborazo are managing seed and agrochemical distribution systems, along with programs of technical support to their

members in order to foster the selective modernization and commodification of local production technologies” (1991, 20).

In his study on rural development in Cotacachi, Rhoades (2006) states that, “Cotacachi’s Andean territory is a setting in which indigenous people are increasingly defining the local ‘rules of the game’ for globally initiated development agendas” (7). According to Rhoades, local communities in the Andes have “resemantized” development through the appropriation of selected aspect of global development strategies, such as modern technologies and inputs, which become localized in their use and purpose. In fact, these “modernizations” serve as a *means* of reestablishing a firm connection to the land and to the indigenous social and spiritual vision that follow from this connection. Modern inputs and technologies become tools of social agency instead of tools of domination. Bebbington (1996) states that, “[t]he challenge therefore is not to resist modernization, but to control it, take it further, and increase indigenous peoples’ abilities to negotiate market relationships, administer rural enterprises, and agro-industry, and compete in a hostile market” (419). The relationship between modernization and indigenous knowledge can clearly be seen in the combined use of tractors and traditional plowing methods in agricultural production. Agriculturalists usually rent tractors for short periods of time of intense tillage. Traditional oxen plows are also used, but require more time and labor investment than tractor tillage. Campbell (2006) finds that in many communities in the region, tractors and yuntas (traditional plows) are in combined use. The use of the tractor (figure 2) exemplifies the notion of selective modernization in which indigenous agriculturalists combine modern technologies with indigenous plant knowledge and planting methods. This combination is central to increasing agricultural production and rural viability. Thus, the tractor combined with indigenous knowledge is

about, echoing Bebbington (1996), being selective, controlled, and transcending the modern/indigenous divide.

Bebbington (1999) discusses issues of access within rural communities: He suggests that the struggle to gain land and the application of modern technologies and inputs have become formative goals within highland communities that want to reduce their high levels of migration and/or combat the institutionalized marginalization and lack of access that has created barriers in social and cultural development. He finds that social capital, or the networks that have already been fostered in many areas, are key to the promotion and distribution of modernized techniques and inputs. “The organizations and networks formed in Guamote [in the province of Chimborazo] over the course of time have played a vital role in widening the ability of households and communities to access different types of capital either directly or via other actors” (Bebbington 1999, 408). One can infer, therefore, that local indigenous organizations have become the mechanism by which groups, including groups that are more marginal voices because of age, class, or gender, gain access to resources.

In Cotacachi, Imbabura, the *Union de Organizaciones Campesinas de Cotacachi* (UNORCAC), a local indigenous organization¹, promotes access to rural development in the 44 surrounding communities. The organization facilitates political and economic rural projects through, for example, the coordination of agricultural workshops conducted by community leaders as well as outside national and international organizations.

UNORCAC also grows and distributes native Andean plants from small-scale nurseries

¹ UNORCAC is a second-level organization under the national indigenous, farmer, and black organization FENOCIN. The two organizations organize on the fight for rural agricultural livelihoods. UNORCAC concentrates on local organizing as opposed to national. They are both affiliated with the national indigenous organization CONAIE, which focuses more on promoting indigenous issues, which are not necessarily tied to agriculture; although, these two issues are often tied to one another (Arboleda 2006).

(Figure 3) and aids in the development of agricultural infrastructure projects, especially those related to water access (Interview Flores).

A recent project, aimed at resolving land and water disparities in the region, exemplifies the melding of rural agriculturalists with the political sphere and the use of modern channels of change, in this case legal channels, in



Figure 3: Nursery sponsored by UNORCAC (Jacky 2006).

promoting rural viability. The project has worked to integrate agricultural actors into legal negotiations with the local government and large landowners, empowering these actors in the reclamation of land and the economic livelihoods associated with it. Land, therefore, is not bestowed upon these agriculturalists, but rather, they are engaging with the governmental sphere in order to claim access to rural resources. This project is being conducted in connection with the International Labour Coalition (ILC). The ILC emphasizes the need for legal and negotiation power in the process of resource reclamation, which is essential to rural agricultural development. For instance, “[o]ne example is the case of a local community group having access to 120 hectares of communal farmland but being denied the legal right to use it because the farmers lack titles” (ILC 2004, 1). Women’s groups, part of the UNORCAC organization, were important actors in this project because, as the ILC characterizes it, “many women have

become de facto heads of households due to rural out-migration” (ILC 2004, 1). I will return to the presence of women in these projects later on in the chapter.

The majority of fees associated with the establishment of these legal land actions are provided by income generated through organizational projects. One such project, which serves as a source of income for UNORCAC, is a locally based tourism program, *Runa Tupari*, which aims to promote internal economic growth and the support of indigenous culture and traditions. Visitors to the region are able to interact with local families and tour farms and natural sights such as el Lago Quicocha. The revenue from tourists is reinvested into community projects. According to *Runa Tupari*, “UNORCAC, the indigenous communities it represents together with the Native Guides Association and the Rural Lodges Association are co-owners of the agency. This means that RUNA TUPARI directly helps rural development with intercultural identity, in a balanced fashion” (Runa Tupari 2007, 1). The promotion of tourism in the region has drawn attention to local goods such as leather, weaving, and Andean crops like quinoa, corn, beans, and potatoes.

In Ecuador, in 2006, I spoke with Fausto Gualsaqui Flores who runs *Runa Tupari* and participates in agricultural development programs in the area. Flores commented that the land (*la tierra*) is central in promoting community development within the region. For Flores, the reactivation and reclamation of land and agricultural systems is essential. Flores believes that an increase in productivity and a resultant boost to the rural economy can decrease agricultural abandonment and disintegration of the social fabric of the community. While participation in the economic market is essential to the promotion of rural livelihoods, for Flores, maintenance of indigenous knowledge systems is necessary

to the reinvigoration and viability of rural livelihoods. The hybrid development program, therefore, is a function of both modernization and traditional knowledge.

Civil Society, the Market, and State Sphere

In some communities the appropriation of modern agricultural technologies serves as a “sign of a new society,” one that is able to reject the historic economic and political marginalization that has characterized much of the relationships between indigenous communities, the state and the market. (Bebbington 1991). Bebbington describes this process in that, “[t]o embrace modern technologies is to make a statement about Indian social equality and the rights of indigenous in demanding access to benefits (including technological resources) that historically were the preserve of whites and mestizos” (Bebbington 1993, 287). Selective modernization of agriculture (the tractor alongside the traditional methods), therefore, becomes a means of claiming citizenship rights (Bebbington 1991). There is an important connection between livelihood challenges and change and the socio-political situation that many indigenous groups are currently occupying. This is to say that participation in rural development has shifted from solely political participation or economic intensification to a melding of the socio-political sphere with the economic (Bebbington 1997). Livelihood struggles are an aspect of a greater political struggle; economic empowerment is a form of indigenous activism. The blending of different spheres of participation is especially striking in the rise in indigenous state actors, involved in the indigenous movement through the political sphere. Indigenous actors are, therefore, not confined to the civil sphere of influence from which their movement began, lending a greater sense of legitimacy to rural development programs (Arboleda 2006).

Bebbington et. al (1993) respond to the interaction of different spheres of social participation, stating that, "...any attempt to mount a resource management strategy for these lands must address political and economic conflicts that arise both nationally and locally. The sustainable development of fragile lands and the consolidation of rural civil society are therefore part of the same problem" (192). Following this, one can see that while rural Andean development can be approached from specific areas of study (politics, economics, women, indigenous), it is important to understand the interactions of multiple societal spheres at work within a non-traditional model of development. As such, like the diverse roles played by Fausto Gualsaqui Flores, indigenous development actors can act in political, economic, community, and state roles.

Women and Andean Development

While most rural to urban migration in the Andes as a whole has included migration by both men and women, although usually younger women, some areas, within the province of Imbabura for instance, have seen migration that has been almost exclusively male. In these areas, women either stay within the rural communities or seek employment in the floriculture industry within the province. The process of male-only urbanization occurs in many developing countries with the proliferation of industrialized urban centers within a globalized economy (Deere 2005; Sachs 1996). Rural to urban migration can have multiple affects on women in rural areas. In the case of the highlands of Ecuador, women are faced with an increase in their visibility in agricultural labor, which entails either more work for her or less total output for the family. Yet,

simultaneously, the absence of men has created vacancies in leadership roles, which women have filled, presenting a greater economic presence as well as a greater socio-political one.

Discourse surrounding the feminization of rural areas has tended to focus on the increased work load that women must adopt with the migration of their male counterparts, either through their exit from the home to the fields or an adoption of new forms of labor, which have previously been foreign to them (Hamilton 1998; Braidotti et.al. 1994). In both cases in traditional discourse, women are viewed as victims of globalization, who are forced to enter a new area of participation whether it is an entry into the field and exit from a purely domestic sphere or a change in their agricultural tasks. For example, Griffiths (2006) states that, “[m]ale migration increases the work burden on women who must provision the family without help from spouses and male kin” (2). Rural women are characterized as abandoned in the countryside, with new, double workloads that are divided between the home and the field. The situation in Cotacachi suggests that while male out-migration has led to lower agricultural productivity, it has also created greater access for women agriculturalists in the local economic market and, as a result, in local politics and organization (Arboleda 2006).

According to Hamilton (1998), male migration has not significantly increased women’s participation in farm activities; women already participated in much of the agricultural work in rural areas, sharing many of the activities with their male counterparts. Hamilton (1998), in her study, interviewed women agriculturalists from the central highlands. One interviewee, Mariana from the province of Chimborazo, states that,

...the work I do with the crops does not change when he is not here. I work all day—every day—whether he is here or not. There

is always something I have to do—every day—with the crops. It is true that we do more work and better work when he is here. He sharpens the tools very well. He cleans the ditches. I don't have time. And he works very hard in the fields (Hamilton 1998, 155).

This example suggest that the level of work accomplished during the men's absence does indeed change, which alters the amount of income that a family unit can gain from agriculture, but it does not necessarily mean that there is a reversal in the actual role that women play in agriculture.

But, because of the absence of men, women are faced with greater agricultural decisions. Hamilton (1998) finds that, “[u]rban wage differentials for men and women are such that male labor can be more profitably invested in off-farm work than female labor. Thus, adult men are more likely to work away from home... women must either perform more labor themselves, pay for it, recruit it through kinship and other reciprocity networks, or organize work parties” (Hamilton 1998, 26). Although the workload has increased, the traditional development paradigm that suggests that women enter new areas of work is not necessarily applicable to the Andean region of Ecuador. Rather, women are perhaps gaining more decision making power through recruitment, hiring, and organization of *mingas* (work parties) than they have before, combining the domestic sphere of household production and the public, market sphere. In other words, instead of being victims of economic development and change, women in these regions have become important decision makers and planners in such change.

Korovkin (2003) similarly finds that although male migration has led to an increase of workload for many women in rural areas, the absence of men has had a positive effect on the role of women in rural development. Work done by Korovkin suggests that migration has created new space for women within leadership positions.

Indigenous women have begun to occupy spaces in the local indigenous organizations that were previously dominated by males. The increase in leadership positions held by women has afforded them a greater voice in rural program planning and development decision-making, subverting notions of male-centric agricultural development.

Female leadership now depends on a combination of factors like education, revalorization of their ethnicity, the guidelines of the organization [UNORCAC], and public interventions. The leaders, affirms Mercedes Prieto, are all bilingual women, who manage the sources of traditional power and modern power...like the relationships with the state and development agencies.¹ (Arboleda 2006, 165).

Women as actors in rural development, as opposed to recipients of its policies, is seen most strikingly in the evolution of women's health programs, which are highly tied to the reactivation of indigenous plant knowledge and agricultural practices. Arboleda (2006) finds that attention to midwifery and women's health programs has increased, drawing attention in general to issues of women's health, sexuality, and childcare. In Cotacachi, indigenous women leaders have formed the organization of *Jambi Mascaric*, a women's health clinic and organization, which has promoted the role of *parteras* or midwives and traditional forms of medicine that not only promoted women's presence within the community on a whole, but also, their relationship with the land and the medicinal tools it provides (Arboleda 2006).

Magdalena Fures directs *Jambi Mascaric* in Cotacachi. She organizes the development of midwifery programs, leading workshops for younger women with the intention of extending the network of midwives and female health practitioners within the

¹ Translated from: El liderazgo femenino dependeria ahora de la combinacion de factores como la educacion, la revaloracion de su grupo etnico, el manejo de las pautas de la vida organizacional y las intervenciones publicas. Las lideras, afirma Mercedes Prieto, son todas mujeres bilingues, que manejan las fuentes de poder tradicionales y modernas...la relacion con el estado y las agencias de desarrollo (Arboleda 2006, 165).

region. I met Magdalena twice in the spring of 2006, and have pieced together the understanding from her workshops and interviews of the changing role and force of women in rural development programs. She, herself, has become a powerful member of the regional indigenous organization, UNORCAC, who advocates a return to traditional knowledge in relation to women's health. She refers to this as a reactivation of the "knowledge of our grandparents." When I spoke to Magdalena, she commented on the important relationship between women and the land. She said that "women and the land are of the same sex" and that a relationship based on similar needs and identities should be cultivated to promote sustainable development. She does not see the appropriation of tools and structures of modernity as a capitulation to globalization but rather as a means to sustain autonomous communities. Any strategy or model of development must acknowledge the overthrow of the traditional model and acceptance of a modern indigenous, such as is described by Fures and enacted by UNORCAC, for example.

The organization of UNORCAC has played an important role in the development of a "Modelo Integral de Salud" (Integrated Health Model), which promotes a system that seeks "harmony with the wisdom and traditional indigenous practices with public western practices and the principles of universalism, equity, quality, efficiency, participation, and social control"² (Arboleda 2006, 168). This hybridized system of health, which blends indigenous knowledge with modern technologies, echoes back to Bebbington's rural development paradigm.

Magdalena found that food security was an important issue in sustaining rural development, and especially to women who are providing for their children. The

² Translation from: "armoniza con los conocimientos y practicas tradicionales indigenas con las practicas occidentales publicas y cuyos principios son la universalidad, equidad, calidad, eficiencia, participacion y control social" (Arboleda 2006, 168).

promotion of small gardens next to the family home has become an important tool in rural development and nutrition. Finerman (2003) find that, “the home garden [in the Ecuadorian highlands] embodies a family’s health needs, and stands as a tangible and conspicuous affirmation of a woman’s identity as family health provider” (459). The home garden is an example of the middle space that many women occupy; they are both involved in domestic activities like home gardens as well as very public roles. And, activities from both spheres, public and domestic, reinforce one another. This is to say that by working to develop home gardens and provide for their families, combined with legitimizing organizations like Jambi Mascaric, women are able to reinforce the importance of women’s issues in the area. Based on these developments, outside organizations have begun to focus resources towards women in particular, recognizing their growing presence in agriculture and community organizing. The women’s health organization, Jambi Mascaric, for instance, is supported by the Spanish version of Doctors Without Borders.

Along with a focus on home gardens and women’s health, women agriculturalists have increased their interaction with the market economy, shying away from a purely subsistence tradition. This focus on the market economy can be seen in the production of agricultural goods for the market such as guinea pigs, which women raise in cages close to their homes (Interview Flores). According to Arboleda (2006) the participation in the market



Figure 4: Guinea Pigs (Cuy) in backyard garden (Jacky 2006).

economy has given women a source of income with which they often employ greater decision-making power than in the past.

Before women didn't have a sucre in their purse, only the men carried them and if she wanted something she had to ask...now, however, it is not like this, if I sell my guinea pigs the money remains in my purse and I decide how to use it, whether to give it to my kids, whether to buy food, something for my own personal use...³(Arboleda 2006, 161).

Also, textile production and sale in neighboring Otavalo remains important. Women sell woven pieces, jewelry, or leather goods during the open markets, augmenting their agricultural output income. Such a break from a subsistence based rural livelihood has added to the power of women in more public spheres. Following Arboleda (2006), women are engaging and developing programs and seeking assistance in projects of their own design like the health clinic *Jambi Mascaric*.

Female involvement and agency have been complicated by the employment of young women in the floriculture industry within Imbabura. Neoliberal development discourse promotes the idea of the integration of women into the export market as a method of empowerment for rural, third world women. One example of this export market is the flower industry, which has taken off in the highlands of Ecuador and whose majority of employees are women. According to the World Bank, “[b]etween 1985 and 1997 the real value of flower exports from Ecuador grew from \$0.5 million to \$120 million per year...The flower industry also generated a large number of jobs—36,000 by 1998. Almost two-thirds of these jobs held by women...[it] has provided a large boost to employment and to wages—especially for women” (2002, 31). This statement is an

³ Translated from: “Mas antes las mujeres no tenian un sucre en su bolsillo, solo cargaba el hombre y si algo queria ella tenia que ir a pedir a el...En cambio ahora ya no, si yo saco a vender mis cuyes esa plata dentra a mi bolsillo para yo decidirme que hago con esa plata, si doy a mis hijos, si compro alimentacion, alguna cosa para uso personal mio...” (Arboleda 2006, 161).

example of the place of women in many neoliberal development narratives:

empowerment is reached through the exit of the home and entering into the outside labor force.

While the flower market has indeed created a large number of jobs for women in the form of off-farm employment, Korovkin (2003) finds that floriculture can be more detrimental than helpful to the emergence of women in development discourse. She finds that, “[floriculture] does not necessarily represent a serious challenge to patriarchal relations and in some cases has led to increased incidence of family breakups and domestic violence” (Korovkin 2003, 35). She finds that while floriculture has provided rural employment, it limits a workers upward mobility. Flower companies tend to have a high turn over rate for workers, making it difficult for employees to maintain a consistent source of income (Korovkin 2005). Flower workers find it difficult to proceed with their education because of the long hours, making it difficult to transition to higher pay bracket in off-farm employment. Kovorkin (2005) finds that flower workers are less likely than rural agriculturalists to save money for the purpose of investing in rural capital, such as land and livestock. Those that do own land often own less of it and cultivate it less rigorously than non-flower workers. Thus, floriculture does not function as a gateway to a stronger rural livelihood; rather, it makes it more difficult to hold on to rural land holdings and community infrastructural support in the form of inputs, workshops, and *mingas*.

The following two tables examine the ability and use of savings and land tenure in floriculture regions, which border Cotacachi. In the first table, what is particularly striking is the difference in use of spending. While floriculture workers may earn a viable income, they are much less likely to invest this income in land or livestock. Based on the

tables, participation in floriculture does not increase one's ability to reconnect with rural livelihoods like with agricultural production.

**Ability to save and the use of savings, by age, occupation, and gender
(percentage of all respondents)**

	Over 35		Under 35		Under 35	
	AM	AF	AM	AF	FM	FF
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Have managed to save	43	64	56	34	79	67
Have spent their savings on:						
land	68	76	33	31	18	23
livestock	38	35	44	23	18	6
domestic electronics	40	41	55	62	71	81

AM Agriculturalist Males
AF Agriculturalist Female
FM Floriculture Male
FF Floriculture Female

Based on data from Korovkin 2005.

**Land tenure in rural communities located in flower-growing areas, by occupation
and gender
(percentage of all respondents)**

	FM	FF	AM	AF
	%	%	%	%
Have access to land	60	51	83	71
Cultivate all or part of their land	41	39	73	63
Have livestock	46	64	80	72
Total	100	100	100	100
The size of landholdings:				
< 1 ha	83	94	53	78
1.00-2.99has	10	6	35	16
3.00-4.99has	7	-	12	5
Total	100	100	100	100

AM Agriculturalist Males
AF Agriculturalist Female
FM Floriculture Male
FF Floriculture Female

Based on data from Korovkin 2005

This disconnection between floriculture income and rural investment can be seen clearly in the second table on land tenure. The table demonstrates the obvious decrease in owned land and livestock by floriculture. But, the size of landholdings is particularly salient in that floriculture workers own smaller parcels of land than their agriculturalist counterparts, who are investing in more land with their income. Employment in floriculture, based on these tables, has a negative effect on the agricultural resources available to community members.

In her research on the cut-flower industry and gender equity, Kovorkin has found that floriculture not only has detrimental effects on the health of women, but also on their ability to participate in community programs and organization. She states that, “[u]ntil recently, women have been able to preserve rural communities despite male migration and increase their own influence within them. This community-based empowerment came to halt with their incorporation into the flower labor force. Cut-flower employment has highly negative effect on the amount of time spent by women (and men) on communal work and assemblies. It is also likely to reduce these young workers’ exposure to leadership experiences.” (Kovorkin 2005, 15). Thus, will many women in Imbabura have claimed a space in the social networks within the region, as with Magdalena Fueres, this emergence can be complicated by the influx of export-oriented employment.

In the below table, Korovkin (2003) differentiates community participation and leadership between male and female peasants and floriculture workers in the community of San Pablo Lake, near the textile town of Otavalo, which is about 15 minutes by bus from the city center of Cotacachi. Whereas participation in textile sales and local agricultural goods, which is usually a form of self-employment, seems to increase

agency, according to the table, participation in the cut-flower industry in particular seems to undermine it.

Community Participation (percentage of respondents) by Gender and Occupation in an Indigenous Community in the Watershed of San Pablo Lake, July—August 2000		
Gender and Occupation Category	Participation	Leadership Experiences
Age 15 to 64		
FM	29	15
FF	36	11
AM	74	54
AF	73	33
Ages 15 to 24		
FM/FF	32	8
AM/AF	66	24
AM Agriculturalist Males AF Agriculturalist Female FM Floriculture Male FF Floriculture Female		
Source: Based on Data by Korovkin 2003		

Women and Sustainable Development

In many of the debates surrounding social capital, women are characterized as inherent bearers of a specific strain of social capital, usually that strain which pertains to the domestic sphere. This mirrors early ecofeminist, womb-to-mother-earth constructions, which characterized women as having an inherent understanding of and desire to preserve the environment based on their anatomy and the inherent combined domination of both women and the environment. Shiva (2000) complicates the ecofeminist notion, reevaluating the connection of women and the environment. She finds that this connection has less to do with inherent biological qualities of women, but

rather with socially constructed economic roles where women are placed by surrounding socio-economic influences. Magdalena Fures, in Imbabura in Ecuador, draws upon ecofeminist thinking, but she adds an interest in using the benefits of modernity to augment the role of women in the development discourse. This complicates a static human/environment relationship where women are acted upon instead of empowered environmental actors.

Shiva's argument reveals the malleability of women's constructed role in relation to social capital and the environment. In the highlands, women are claiming space in the socio-political sphere as they are becoming more visible members of the economic sphere. In this sense, women are redefining the notion of women and agriculture, women and the environment, and women and rural development through re-employment of ancestral practices and the establishment of organizations that are closely tied with the economic ventures of the community.

Therefore, while women bear a large responsibility for the promotion and utilization of social capital, which is central in many rural development programs, it is not merely through the domestic sphere, but rather through political, social, and economic actions, which rely on ancestral as well as modern market-based approaches. Yet, in Korovkin's research, one can see that this place in rural development is a balance between traditionally different spheres of participation; interactions with the export economy have had negative effects on women's participation in the community and rural development programs. Radcliffe et. al. (2003) summarizes this balanced state, where "[a]ndean women argue for a political, market-oriented, and identity-based set of activities in their vision of an integrated sustainable development" (400).

The preceding section looked at an alternative development strategy, which has been employed by the indigenous communities in Imbabura, and looked at details of the role of women as actors within this development movement. The rural development strategies being employed by women, as well as men, in Cotacachi, Imbabura, venture away from a binary that oscillates between subsistence and neoliberal development models. The alternative model of development that is expressed in Imbabura draws from both a purely market approach and a subsistence approach to rural development, creating a place-based development program that promotes indigenous livelihoods and a traditional belief system in a context of modernity.

In the beginning of their book on feminist political ecology, Rocheleau et.al. (1996) present the question “Why Women? Why Now?.” To which I hope this investigation to some extent has answered the following: Women in Cotacachi are securing a place in rural development programming through the indigenous, the market, and politics. Rocheleau et.al. describe how local organizations “...have begun to blur the distinction between public and private, productive and reproductive, home and workplace. Such organizations are helping us to reconceptualize and redefine what is political, and what is environmental, as well as what is just and equitable” (18-19). A reconceptualization of rural development paradigms is required that allows the concept of the modern indigenous. The model, or the system, will have to evolve: “The system does not address their needs, and so they act collectively to secure the necessary conditions to guarantee subsistence, protect the health of their families, and the integrity of the surrounding ecosystem” (16).

VI. Conclusion and Policy Implications

This paper has attempted to illuminate an alternative strategy in rural development planning. A strategy that relies on neither a purely neoliberal economic approach nor a subsistence, indigenous narrative. Rather, from my acknowledged perspective, I draw on the case study of indigenous community members in Cotacachi, who are creating a rural development strategy that blends indigenous social knowledge with modernization. The appropriation of various modern agricultural technologies and inputs has allowed these communities to participate in the market economy, stimulate economic growth in their communities, and reclaim their rural livelihoods. The reclamation of rural livelihoods is central to the reversal of social disintegration of rural areas that follows from the process of intense out-migration and agricultural abandonment.

Indigenous women in Cotacachi have begun to play a more visible role in rural development with the out-migration of men. Because of this, women have gained ground in political and economic spheres through their participation in the local indigenous organization, UNORCAC, and increased presence in the production of agricultural goods and textiles. The establishment of a local women's health organization, *Jambi Mascaric*, which blends both indigenous knowledge and western knowledge, has placed the health and livelihoods of women at the forefront of rural development. Women have taken an active role in food security debates, reactivating the use of native plants and animals, while employing modern inputs such as fertilizers in the production process and engaging with the local market economy to augment their income. In this sense, indigenous women of Cotacachi are negotiating modernization and rural change to become central actors in

rural development discourse, empowering them to promote what they perceive to be pertinent issues: food security, female health, and education. Their participation, and internal definition of the issues, challenges empowerment narratives promoted by the World Bank, for example, which measure agency through women's ability to participate in large-scale economic projects like floriculture (Korovkin 2003).

To add to this, the preceding story traverses the following literature: development discourse, indigenous knowledge systems, and women and the environment. Indigenous actors, and more specifically women, in the case study region are engaging at the intersection of these three bodies of literature by renegotiating how and when local indigenous and indigenous women interact with development, indigenous knowledge, and the environment. More specifically, the story of Cotacachi adds to a growing body of literature that is writing women and development and women in the environment with women as critical actors in planning and policy making.

Greater attention should be given to regulating the floriculture industry in this region and the negative effects that this industry has on the viability of rural livelihoods, especially for women. But, regulation of floriculture is complicated by the involvement of many local companies to international corporations. Because of this, it is important to concentrate resources on the preservation and promotion of agricultural livelihoods, which are centrally important to residents of Cotacachi. In this process, the recovery of land, especially productive land, is essential. The recognition and support by national and international development planners of locally infused projects, like the current one being conducted with the ILC, will aid in the continued land reform process. Further, local policy should reflect the centrality of women's issues in this region through a cultivation

of women-based organizations like Jambi Mascaric. More than anything, I believe this would be best fostered through a legitimization of these organizations in local political and economic development discourse.

On an international scale, the feminization of rural areas is increasingly common throughout the Global South. In China, Africa, and Russia, women are the central actors in rural development and, more specifically, in agriculture (Sachs 1996). This investigation can therefore serve as further evidence for the necessary engagement of women in rural development planning through the attention to and fostering of women's organizations and local female leaders. In their study of population and the environment in Machakos, Kenya, Mortimore and Tiffen (1995) state, in reference to community projects, that, "[w]omen's leadership and participation are crucial" (85). Although the case study area faces different challenges and solutions from those of Cotacachi, it highlights the globality of this issue of women, rural development, and sustainability. In terms of geographic literature, the feminization of rural areas is an important aspect of a broader global rural dialogue.

In a more general sense, the story of Cotacachi serves as a case for an increased appreciation of hybridized development strategies being employed by not only women in rural areas but many different rural actors. In the Machakos case study, rural intensification and selective modernization have led to an increase in rural viability for both men and women. Along with a material change in development planning, involving greater access to modern technologies and inputs, a discursive shift is necessary. In terms of policy, this would mean a combined change in material and theoretical access for indigenous actors and indigenous women actors. These two areas of policy change,

increased local political and economic support and a broader theoretical shift, are intrinsically tied. For example, how we perceive and write rural development planning affects and is affected by increases in the presence of indigenous organizations in local, national, and international development dialogues and programs.

In reference to the often-complicated relationship between development discourse and local planners, Bebbington (2000) comments that, "...both approaches (indeed all development doctrine) ultimately imply a notion of 'trusteeship,' in which one actor, on the basis of their presumed privilege understanding or institutional authority, determines on behalf of others the direction in which development should proceed" (497). The issue of trusteeship has been strikingly challenging in constructing a sustainable development program, questioning how one should participate in rural development. The case study of Cotacachi subverts the problematic relationship between state or international policy makers and local actors. This change is true to broader structures and individual participants.

The preceding investigation has challenged my perceptions of development strategies. More specifically, the manner in which I perceive success in rural development, especially women's roles within these processes, has changed. I began this project with the goal of engaging various ideas surrounding notions of rural development, while also finding my place in development discourse. I was attached to the notion of sustainable development as congruent with subsistence, indigenous agricultural systems. I thought of this form of agriculture as "pure" as compared with the evident harm of neoliberal economic development. As my research progressed, alternatives began to appear; I came to see what was the strength in the methods being employed in Cotacachi and was able to appreciate that my assumptions about development were derived from

the very same vein of trusteeship that I had been attempting to subvert. For me, the alternative development strategies analyzed exemplify the necessary reconceptualization of development planning, but also, the roles of planners and practitioners of rural development.

Bebbington (2000) states that, "...people encounter development in the process of trying to build something of their own. In these cases...this means that 'modernizing development' is not necessarily resisted but is more often taken, transformed, and used; and similarly, modernizing institutions are worked with, used, transformed, and turned, as far as possible, to people's own purposes" (513). The development strategies that are evolving in Cotacachi break from static development narratives, creating a new or alternative strategy. In this sense, the existence of such alternatives opens up space in development thinking for a broader range of methods that are more capable of addressing the inherent place-based needs and creating space for local community members to claim agency.

Still, the maintenance of such change seems unsure: the question remains whether a decrease in out-migration, the goal of many rural development programs in Cotacachi, will displace women from their presence in the political and economic sphere. Or, will women be able to maintain their presence in rural development? It is also unclear whether out-migration to some degree will be maintained as part of rural livelihoods, providing capital to increase agricultural production. From my short experience with Magdalena Fueres I feel confident that indigenous women will maintain a voice in rural development decisions. There is permanence in their roles as development planners, manifested in the physical and institutional presence that women have cultivated through the establishment of institutions such as *Jambi Mascaric* and their participation in local economic and

political projects like the land reclamation project in collaboration with the International Labour Coalition. In Cotacachi, alternative strategies are powerful because they are dynamic and adaptable, appropriating resources and previously non-traditional spaces to create a vision of rural society that is indigenous and empowered. It is this dynamism that is important in negotiating the future of development in this region. A sign posted at the entrance of Cotacachi reads: Cotacachi, Land of the Sun, Living Cultures, For Development (Rhoades 2006). Development projects should reflect the internal creative forces in Andean development, through the opening of avenues in which local actors can subvert static development paradigms with their own multiple voices (indigenous, woman, market actor). Policy should work to reinforce the legitimacy of alternatives in the creation and maintenance of locally based, sustainable rural development projects; alternatives which cross social borders, blending political and economic interests, and challenge for whom, where and how development is written.

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⁴ Interviews were given by public figures with full knowledge and consent of use.

