Elite capture, elite persistence and conflict in cross-scale linkages in the Mexican forest commons

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Abstract: *Cross-scale governance has been posited as a requisite for sustainable resource management. However, recent work has emphasized that aside from the 'functionalities' or benefits of these arrangements, there are also 'dysfunctionalities' or failures (Benjamin et al. 2011). These failures often relate to the capture of these governance arrangements and their benefits by some groups at the expense of others, and to the ensuing conflicts related to these captures (see e.g. Adger et al., 2006). This paper, part of a dissertation project on cross-scale governance in community forestry, analyzes elite capture and conflict in two bottom-up (community-created) and two top-down (externally-created) cross-scale systems in community forestry in Durango, Mexico, focusing on how a combination of local institutions, power inequalities and political-economic and historical factors produce different forms of capture and resistance to it. Mexico, with a 'model' system of community forestry co-existing with a long history of authoritarian and clientelist forms of governance, provides an ideal setting to study these issues.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Recent scholarship argues that institutions and organizations connecting different levels and scales of governance –multi-level or cross-scale linkages– as essential for sustainable resource management (Berkes, 2008; Brondizio et al., 2009; Heikkila et al., 2011). The idea of networks has been intrinsically tied to the ideas of self-organization and community as the basic unit of organization (Knox et al., 2006). The same has occurred with the literature on cross-scale linkages. However, this conception obscures relations of power, hierarchy and control within these inter-connected systems. Not all networks are

self-organized, and even those that are can be subject to unequal outcomes. Current analyses of CSLs have been criticized for not exploring these issues, labeled the "politics of scale" (Adger et al., 2006; Lebel et al., 2005; also Armitage, 2008). A similar critique has been leveled on much of the scholarship in common-pool resource studies (e.g. Johnson, 2004; Kashwan, 2011; Sikor, 2006; Sick, 2008)[1].

The well-known phenomenon of "elite capture" in decentralization and community-based development programs (Agrawal and Gupta, 2005; Bardhan, 2002; Dasgupta and Beard, 2007; Iversen et al., 2006; Labonte, 2011; Mansuri and Rao, 2004; Platteau, 2004; Saito-Jensen et al., 2010) has shown the pervasiveness of the unequal distribution of benefits. Elites are individuals or groups with disproportionate influence over a collective action process because of their higher level of power (Beard and Phakphian, 2009, cited in Wong, 2010; Schmidt and Theesfeld, 2010). Elite capture is a situation where elites control or manipulate these processes to serve their personal interests (Wong, 2010). This commonly includes opportunistic or self-interested behaviors based on treachery, including purposefully misleading, deceiving, and confusing others, misappropriating or stealing public or community goods for private benefits, falsifying financial accounts or signatures, biased selection and exclusion of certain groups from benefits or participation, and avoiding compliance or modifying certain rules to their benefit (Iversen et al., 2006; Labonte, 2011; Schmidt and Theesfeld, 2010; Theesfeld, 2009; Wong, 2010). Elite capture processes have also been labeled as "local tyrannies" (Andersson and Ostrom, 2008), and "power abuse" (Theesfeld, 2009). While most of the literature on elite capture has focused on local elites, in some cases government agents may also seek to capture community-based projects or organizations to extract rents (e.g. Balooni et al., 2010; Peluso, 1992; Ribot et al., 2006; Sikor et al., 2009) or obtain political benefits such as votes, i.e. patronage (Nelson and Agrawal, 2008; OTHERS).

Processes of elite capture are seen as detrimental for common-pool resource management because they can lead to worse ecological outcomes and to less cooperation (Adger et al., 2006, Pérez-Cirera and Lovett, 2006; but see Andersson and Agrawal, 2011; Kashwan, 2011; Naidu, 2009). Yet elites are not inherently 'bad'. In some cases, elites can

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[1] A special source of criticism has been the lack of attention to power relations and macro-level political-economic structures.

be crucial in initiating collective action and in fighting off external attempts at controlling local resource governance (e.g. Balooni et al., 2010). Elites may also be crucial in channeling resources and projects to their communities or organizations (REFERENCES). Additionally, in some cases elites may 'control' rather than capture participatory process; in these cases, elites may generate collective benefits or benefits to some non-elites even as they capture benefits for themselves (Dasgupta and Beard, 2007; Schmidt and Theesfeld, 2010; Wong, 2010).[2] At the same time, arguably there is a difference between corruption and mismanagement of resources (Poteete and Ribot, 2011), and local leaders should not be expected to meet high standards of accountability and service to their communities given that they have received limited or no training on key aspects of managing organizations (see e.g. Labonte, 2011).

These insights have slowly begun to be brought into the work on community-based resource management (e.g. Saito-Jensen et al., 2010). Some research on networks has pointed out that connections can serve the most powerful actors to increase their power and resources (Dryzek, 2006; Fabricius et al., 2007; Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003), in a way 'reducing' the network. However, it has not been widely applied to cross-scale and networked governance. Thus, there is a lacunae of understanding of what Benjamin et al. (2011) refer to as the 'dysfunctionalities' or failures of these systems.

An explicitly political-economic approach opens the door to consider the uneven gains (winners and losers) from cross-scale interactions as an integral part of common-pool resource governance. These cross-scale or networked interactions may help to empower resource users at different levels, but they can serve the most powerful actors to increase their power and resources, serving to perpetuate patterns of marginalization and domination (Adger et al., 2006; Lebel et al., 2005; Fabricius et al., 2007). The outcomes depend on how and by whom they are created, the bargaining power of different participants, and the transaction costs of accessing and creating linkages (Adger et al., 2006). Power here is related to "how decisions are negotiated, how tradeoffs are made to give room for maneuver, and how other actors are enrolled on a cause." (Adger et al., 2006) These 'power struggles', as Bartley et al. (2008) point out, occur in an institutional context which

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[2] This complex nature of elites ties into research showing that inequalities or heterogeneities in resource endowments can have both positive and negative impacts on collective action (see Dayton-Johnson and Bardhan, 2002; Schmidt and Theesfeld, 2010; Vedeld, 2000).

structures the opportunities available to different actors (and *organizations*). From this perspective, decentralization and cross-scale governance is not only a process of 'expanding' and 'connecting' levels of decision-making to improve resource management, but a struggle to capture resources and restructure power relations across and within these levels.

In summary, while the dominant approach to multi-level/cross-scale governance is interested in understanding how these linkages, as a form of cooperation, affect outcomes of resource management, a political-economic approach emphasizes how the linkages are subject to constant conflicts and how the benefits are distributed unequally across actors and attempts to explain why these inequalities occur.[3] This paper draws on this political-economic approach to analyze elite capture in four cross-scale arrangements in community forestry in Durango, Mexico. The remainder of the paper has five sections. Section 2 traces the theoretical terrain of trying to explain why elite capture may or may not occur, and why this may persist over time. It centers on three main factors that have been posited to influence elite capture: power relations, local institutions, and historical and current political-economic conditions. Section 3 presents the context, methods and sources of information used in this paper. The following section presents the results. Section 5 analyzes how these results may be explained using the theoretical insights gained from the literature, and Section 6 concludes.

2. EXPLAINING ELITE CAPTURE AND PERSISTENCE

2.1. Local institutions

From the perspective of institutional analysis and collective action studies, elite capture –and the failures of decentralization more generally– has been explained as a problem of institutional design (see Bartley et al., 2008; Iversen et al., 2006; Wong, 2010). Relations between elites and non-elites are mediated by institutions which can facilitate or constrain elite capture (Theesfeld, 2009; Wong, 2010). This is akin to the recent findings that local institutions can help mitigate the negative outcomes of intra-group and inter-group inequalities (Andersson and Agrawal, 2011). Institutions of monitoring, enforcement

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[3] Benjamin et al. (2011) describe this difference as one between studying governance *by* networks (studying outcomes) versus studying *of* networks (their internal governance dynamics).

(including sanctions) and accountability have been shown to be key aspects influencing elite capture (Iversen et al., 2006; Labonte, 2011; Schmidt and Theesfeld, 2010). Decision-making institutions can also have strong influence. The competitiveness of elections, the transparency of the process, the secrecy of ballots, and the spatial representativeness of candidates are particularly important (Fritzen, 2007). Informal institutions such as consensus-seeking may also affect elite capture, as they can make it very hard for individuals to come forth as challengers to the elites because of the latters' recognized sway over the majority (D'Exelle and Ridle, 2008). Rules about the possibility of reelection can also be important, since reelection is (partly) contingent on the performance of elected leaders (Krishna, 2002; Daftary, 2010) and can therefore create an incentive for good governance. However, as Daftary (2010) shows, these electoral institutions are not sufficient for leadership accountability – they need to operate in tandem with non-elite leaders' agency to mobilize constituents and create pressures on elected leaders to distribute benefits to non-elite groups. In this way, local elections create 'political brokers' who represent different groups, and push elected leaders from patronage to facilitating delivery of government programs and services. Local institutions regulating who participates and how should also be considered. In the case of inter-community associations, a relevant aspect is how communities are represented in the associations.

Finally, the origins of the institutions can also be a determining factor for elite capture. Projects and institutions designed from the top are more likely to be captured, especially because these projects often ignore local social relations and fail to truly integrate and empower the different strata of local resource users (Platteau, 2004; Schmidt and Theesfeld, 2010; Theesfeld, 2009; Wong, 2010). For instance, Nayak and Berkes' (2008) analysis of the JFM program in India suggests that linkages established from the top-down can lead to a reduction of communities' linkages with external actors, lower levels of local collective action, and politicization of local resource governance. Similarly, Zia et al. (2011) and Duffy (2011) show how top-down cross-scale arrangements can serve to impose government and NGO management objectives focused on pure conservation on local resource users more interested in balancing conservation with development.

2.2. Power relations

In recent years, some scholars have pointed to the limitations of institutional analyses to explain local-level outcomes of decentralization policies, and to the need to consider power relations together with institutions (e.g. Bartley et al., 2008; Clement, 2010; Dasgupta and Beard, 2007; García-López, 2009; Kashwan, 2011; Masaki, 2007; Poteete and Ribot, 2011; Ribot and Peluso, 2003; Theesfeld, 2009; Wong, 2010). In development studies, inequalities in resource endowments have been a major explanation of elite capture (Bardhan and Mookerjee, 2011; Platteau, 2004). Platteau (2004) points to inequalities in four areas: social positions, access to economic resources, knowledge of political protocols, and education. This is related to the distributional theory of institutions (Knight, 1992) which posits that unequal resource endowments lead to unequal bargaining power, which in turn generate unequal outcomes (see Theesfeld, 2011 for an application).

Therefore, elite power stems mainly from their access to different forms or of capital –social, economic and political. As posited by Bourdieu (1977, 1985; in Wilshusen, 2009), access to this capital is in turn influenced by previous endowments of capital. Moreover, different forms of capital are exchangeable to a certain degree; in other words, social capital (connections to other actors) may help gain economic and political capital. Similarly, Poteete and Ribot (2011) posit that 'strategies of domination' employed by different actors to resist and derail decentralization policies are based on their 'bundles' of power (see also Ribot and Peluso, 2003). In the words of Lebel et al (2005: 19): "Power is reflected in, and reproduced by, the capacity to control and capture resources from different levels." Elites' economic resources allow them to bargain from a stronger position, because they have lower exit costs (costs of not reaching an agreement), less risk aversion, lower discount rates (more 'patience'), and can make more credible commitments (Theesfled, 2011, following Knight, 1992). Their social and political capital also allows them to capture project rents, further increasing their economic power (Platteau and Gaspart, 2003). The key positions that they hold –*positional* power (Theesfeld, 2009)– and their higher levels of education give them privileged access to information, knowledge, and connections to external actors. This is specially the case when leaders are the main or only contact with donors, which creates major information asymmetries and lack of accountability (Schmidt and Theesfeld, 2010). Kashwan (2011), for instance, shows how community leaders' serve

as intermediaries between community members and forest officials in the process of land titling, which gives much power to these leaders and allows them to use their positions to extract rents and other benefits from both sides, and to influence community members' land titling decisions to their advantage. Their position is their source of power, but at the same time it allows them to accrue more of it – generating a self-reinforcing process.

As Schmidt and Theesfeld (2010: 3) put it, elites' "ability to communicate with outsiders, read project documents, keep accounts and records, and write proposals" means "they are often the ones crafting rules and policy measures that are biased towards them". This is akin to the idea of centrality in network theory (see Benjamin et al., 2011). Elites can also use their positions to change the rules, sometimes through undemocratic means, or to skirt them, even while they enforce it on others (Andersson and Ostrom, 2008; Kashwan, 2011; Pérez-Cirera and Lovett, 2006; Schmidt and Theesfeld, 2010). In short, control over decision-making processes and information are key. In addition, people may be reluctant to enforce rules on elites who mismanage resources because of non-elites' fear of losing benefits or being punished (D'Exelle and Ridle, 2008; Kashwan, 2011; Wong, 2010). Moreover, elites' social capital–connections to key actors– combined with their leadership position also gives them a 'status' as the only actors capable of channeling resources, leading to the toleration or even support by non-elites of the resource capture (Daftary, 2010; Platteau, 2004; Schmidt and Theesfeld, 2010).[4] As Platteau (2004: 227) puts it:

> "In a context where the ability to deal with external sources of funding is concentrated in a small elite group, the bargaining strength of common people is inevitably limited, hence their ready acceptance of highly asymmetric patterns of distribution of programme benefits. If the intervention of the elite results in an improvement in the predicament of the poor, however small that improvement, the latter tend to be thankful to their leader(s): the new outcome represents a Pareto improvement over the previous situation."

Wong (2010), for instance, finds that the representatives in one community were considered problem solvers and their reputation was increased by their ability to bring

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[4] Local (and, we might add, regional) elites are part political brokers, part dispute mediators and part development agents channeling resources (Daftary, 2011; McDonald, 2001; 2003; Kirshna, 2011)

small but tangible benefits to community members, such as free trees, mango seedlings and water pumps. Moreover, elites can use their networks to occupy various positions of authority and to 'scale up' from the community to other levels (Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2000; also Wong, 2010), further strengthening their power and creating new opportunities to capture resources and influence decision-making processes to their advantage. In the case of a water irrigation association formed in Bulgaria, Theesfeld (2009) shows that the manager created the association thanks to the privileged access to information, training, connections to external actors and resources he gained in his position in the youth organization of a political party. The creation of the association then increased his reputation and his income (from collection and mismanagement of fees from members), which in turn furthered his career in politics.

In short, leadership positions provide increased knowledge about and access to government programs, connections to other actors, ability to influence decision-making, and opportunities for accessing other elected and appointed positions. As we will see, these are common features in all four of the associations in this study. For instance, in forest communities and associations in Durango, foresters often monopolize crucial knowledge, particularly regarding government projects that channel resources on which communities depend for their employment. This gives them an incredible power over the rest of the group. Peasant leaders are in a somewhat similar position because, though they may not have the technical knowledge that foresters have, many of the resources are channeled through them, as legal representatives of their organizations.

2.3. Historical and current political-economic context

Most analyses of elite capture have stopped here. However, we need to recognize that both power relations and institutions operate in broader political-economic structures and historical processes that affect them (Hayward, 2006; Shapiro, 2006; Swartz, 2007; Bourdieu, 1977, 1985, in Wilshusen, 2009). National political or legal changes, such as decentralization policies, as well as large-scale economic changes, can alter power relations in society by creating political openings for less powerful groups, or by reinforcing elites' power (Tarrow, 1998; Wollenberg et al., 2006). For instance, Dasgupta and Beard (2007) argue that in Indonesia, the economic crisis and the post-Suharto changes including the new

decentralization legislation, the pro-democracy and political reform movements and an increased sensitivity against corruption, collusion and nepotism, were all important factors influencing the local outcomes of decentralization. Similarly, Bobrow-Strain (2007), looking at the landowning elite in Chiapas, shows how the introduction of cattle ranching in Mexico (driven by government subsidies, an increased demand for beef, and locally-specific factors such as labor scarcity) began to displace Chiapas' coffee plantations as the main source of economic activity, which in turn reduced landowning elites' power. More recently, Kashwan (2011) found that in Indian forest communities, the presence of social movements, electoral competition, and the historical patterns of state-community relationships influence community members' decision to request land titles. He highlights how previous experiences with certain institutions, such as participatory processes, provide institutional learning and can consequently influence how certain actors respond to a given situation (Kashwan, 2011).

The experience of ex-communist/post-socialist countries in Eastern Europe is very relevant because, as with Mexico, they endured a very long period of authoritarian and centralized government. Luthans et al. (1998) conclude that the prevalence of 'dark leadership' –leaders who are abusive, resort to manipulation, take advantage of and exploits others– in ex-communist countries like Albania is a product of the historical and current context. They argued, for instance, that, the class-based social system controlled by one party of communist countries restricted leadership to a selected elite from that party –the *nomenklatura*. Dark leaders, in turn, destroyed or co-opted any and all opponents, thus creating a scarcity and chronic instability of leaders, a situation also reflected with political bosses (*caciques*) in Mexico. Meanwhile, communism –by imposing decisions from the top and giving people very little room to develop their own abilities– created a sense of "learned helplessness" in which people felt they did not have the ability to influence outcomes and had low levels of experience and confidence, and consequently became passive and unmotivated to act collectively. This is very similar to the "feeling of powerlessness" described by Gaventa (1980) as part of his explanation for why miners did not act against oppressive conditions in a mining town in the Appalachian region. After the fall of communism, the high level of uncertainty and crisis in the transition period fostered "role ambiguity and uncertainty regarding responsibilities", making potential and current

leaders "vulnerable to changes and power struggles", and pushing potential leaders into business organizations rather than political or civil society ones, while also creating a desire for 'strong' leaders who could solve the social and economic crisis and fill the power vacuum (Luthans et al., 1998: 190; also Theesfeld, 2009).

2.4. Conflict and resistance to elite capture

Despite the prevalence of elite capture in CBNRM projects, it is not an inevitable outcome (Saito-Jensen et al., 2010). As studies of decentralization have emphasized, local control over resources is a highly contested process (Poteete and Ribot, 2011; Wollenberg et al., 2006). In these contestations, horizontal linkages and mobilization between communities, as well as connections to external allies, can advance the devolution of authority to local users and alter local power relations (e.g. Agrawal and Ostrom, 2001; Adger et al., 2006; Britt, 2002; Cronkleton et al., 2008; Fox, 1996; García-López and Antinori, in process/Chapter 2; Kashwan, 2011; Poteete and Ribot, 2011; Saito-Jensen et al., 2010). Local and regional leaders may also help avoid interference by external actors (e.g. Balooni et al., 2010) or give voice and empower previously marginalized groups (e.g. Daftary, 2010). At the same time, it is important to recognize that these conflicts may have negative implications for collective action, leading to the breakdown of trust and reciprocity among participants and to a vicious cycle of non-engagement or even exit.

In sum, elite capture needs to be understood as a combined result of unequal power relations, institutions, and macro-level socio-economic and political structures. However, elite capture is often a source of conflict and thus is not inevitable; rather, different elites and non-elites struggle to define who participates and who benefits in cross-scale governance arrangements.

3. CONTEXT, METHODS, AND CASES

3.1. Context 1: Cross-scale linkages and elite capture in Mexican community forestry

In Mexico, the successes of its community-based forest management experience have led some to call it a "global model for sustainable landscapes" (Bray et al., 2003; see also Bray et al., 2005; Merino, 2004; Antinori and Rausser, 2010). But as with any model, it risks becoming a panacea. Most studies have focused on presenting examples of success

cases. Only a few have attempted to look at inequalities and power relations (e.g. Bofill Poch, 2005; Mathews, Nuijten, 2003, 2004; Pérez-Cirera and Lovett, 2006; Wilshusen, 2009). Bofill Poch (2005), for instance, in exploring the community of San Juan Nuevo in the state Michoacan, a, highlights how even such a 'model' of successful community forestry is ultimately captured by certain groups and engages in quasi-clientelist arrangements with the government. At the same time, these processes generate resistance and conflicts that affect collective action within the community.

With these exceptions, an understanding of the *failures* or dysfunctionalities of Mexican forest communities, including the capture of community forestry processes by elites, is lacking. This lacunae is important given Mexico's history of state authoritarianism and clientelism during seventy years of uninterrupted rule by the Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI), which has made effective grassroots collective action very difficult and has facilitated elite capture and control (Fox, 1996; Gordillo et al., 1998; Wilshusen and Murguia, 2003). Under this system, "[peasant] organizations had to be acknowledged and legitimized by the state. In fact, organizations were often formed at the initiative and encouragement of the state…as long as their loyalty to the state was not in doubt." (Bartra and Otero, 2005: 164). In addition, peasant organizations and local politics were often controlled by political bosses or *caciques* that served to expand the PRI's power into local arenas (Gledhill, 1991, 1998; Knight, 1998; Lomnitz-Adler, 1992).

In the 1980s, Mexico began a process of democratization which in tensified in the 1990s under the presidency of C. Salinas de Gortari and culminated in 2000 with the election of the first opposition President in the 20th century (V. Fox, from the PAN). Yet these changes have been slow, uneven and contradictory, and vary across states (Hamilton, 2011). In addition, while these reforms have had an impact on cross-scale peasant organizations (e.g. Lutz, 2006; McDonald, 2001; 2003; Taylor, 2001; Taylor and Zabin, 2000; Wilshusen, 2010), they have not eliminated clientelist and patronage structures, or caciques. McDonald (2001, 2003), for instance, looking at milk producers in Michoacan, finds that the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s marginalized some previously dominant caciques and clientelist structures tied to the National Peasant Confederation (CNC) but that these were simply replaced by new, "*techno-caciques*" who were entrepreneurs with political connections. Lutz (2006), in analyzing power relations within several Mexican

peasant organizations, highlights that these organizations have undergone a re-composition or 'bricolage' in recent decades, inserted in a recomposed rural corporatist structure, new organizational forms, an increasing specialization of the leadership role, and the continuation of authoritarian leadership and practices in rural areas.

Wilshusen (2009) draws on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social capital to explain elite capture and persistence of a timber marketing fund created by a forest association in Quintana Roo. He finds that informal lending practices were facilitated by the lack of rules about the use of the fund's money and the lack of monitoring and enforcement. He also finds that friendship relationships with the fund's managers, especially *compadrazgo* ties, were crucial in determining who captured the money. Moreover, these informal loans were sometimes used by local elites to lend money to others, further reinforcing their elite status and the local-level inequalities. In some cases, these were longstanding elite, but in others, new elites emerged as a result of a new intra-community timber trade. Wilshusen also finds that informal lending and elite capture repeated itself continuously in the histories of both the FA and communities. In other words, they were part of "broader processes of elite persistence based in long-standing practices" (Wilshusen, 2009: 402).

3.2. Context 2: Durango

Durango is one of Mexico's largest states. It has the largest forest cover and largest timber production in the country, as well as the highest number of FSC certified communities. Furthermore, contrary to other areas of Mexico, Durango shows low levels of deforestation, with a rate of only 1% between 1993 and 2002, 5 percentage points lower than the national average (Perez-Verdin et al., 2009).

Historically, Durango was also a laboratory in experimenting with both centralized and decentralized forms of forest governance. Towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, dictator Porfirio Díaz gave away much of the forest land in Durango –until then occupied by indigenous communities and non-indigenous peasants– to US companies to invest in large-scale mining and timber extraction. This destitution was slowly reverted beginning in the 1930s with the land reforms resulting from the Mexican Revolution. In the 1950s, however, the federal government began imposing a combination of logging bans and extraction concessions to private companies throughout the country

(see Chapter 2/García-López and Antinori, in process), preventing peasants from directly benefiting from the resources they owned. In Durango, this ban covered 2 million hectares of forests (41% of the state's total forest area) and lasted from 1948 to 1967 (Zarzosa, 1958, in Bray and Merino, 2004; Arreola Valenzuela, 1995). Other areas of Durango were never part of the ban and continued to be exploited under concessions to large private companies. In the 1970s, this policy was modified with the replacement of some private companies with larger state-run companies (*paraestatales*), further expanding the state's reach into forest communities. Durango was one of the main areas of parastatal activity.

However, at the same time Durango was the center of a strong anti-concession movement that emerged in forest communities in the mid-1960s, and which had the support of the National Peasant Confederation (CNC, the peasant organization affiliated to the PRI) and some government sectors. In the 1970s, and partly as a response, Durango was one of the main beneficiaries of land grants and federal money for the creation of community forestry enterprises. In 2004, Durango was again the center of policy experimentation with the implementation of the PROFAS program and the government delimitation of forest management units (UMAFORs), where the government sought to constitute new regional forest associations called *asociaciones regionales de silvicultores* (ARS). Durango was the first state to have its UMAFORs defined and to have organized ARS in each of the regions (a total of twelve). National forest associations and scholars decried the PROFAS program, which in practice excluded funding to pre-existing FAs, as an attempt to establish new clientelist organizations to support the federal government's party (PAN). Analyses of the program showed that in many states these top-down organizations focused their actions on their continued existence and the government's interests rather than the members' interests (Merino et al., 2008). Moreover, in several cases they became captured by regional elites, including foresters, lawyers and peasant leaders (ibid). Similar experiences were found in Durango (see Chap. 2/Garcia-Lopez and Antinori, in process).

In addition to its importance as a forest state and the rich history of community forestry, Durango offers a unique setting to study the influence of this context because despite the political openings occurring at the national level, it has remained a bastion of the Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI), which controlled Mexican politics for over 70

years. The PRI has never lost the governorship and most municipalities, particularly the rural ones where forest communities are located.

3.3. Methods and Cases

This project began as an attempt to understand the histories, impacts and internal governance of a cross-scale form of organization –inter-community forest associations (FAs)– on community forestry. FAs are organizations composed of multiple forest communities in a given region (see Chapter 4). The data was gathered as part of a one year dissertation fieldwork in Durango, Mexico. I carried out case studies of two FAs created by communities (bottom-up) and two created by external agents (top-down), selected to represent different policy phases (see Chapter 2) and similar group sizes. The working hypothesis for case selection was that top-down linkages would be more susceptible to elite capture. Selection of cases was thus purposeful, seeking to achieve maximum variation in the variable of interest – organizational origins (Gerring, 2007). The initial information about the form of origins, year of formation, and membership size was obtained from a 2007 survey of forest communities in Durango (see Antinori and Rausser, 2010). The analysis was done following the comparative case study method, allowing for close examination of the subject of interest (George and Bennett, 2005). Information was collected during one year of fieldwork in Durango based on archival research and semi-structured interviews of key actors within each forest association, participant observation of FA meeting activities, interviews of key informants representing the interests of other stakeholders, and focus group discussions an semi-structured interviews with members and elected leaders of communities. A total of 48 communities from the 4 FAs participated in the study.

4. ELITE CAPTURE, PERSISTENCE AND CONFLICT IN CROSS-SCALE LINKAGES IN DURANGO, MEXICO

This section presents the main results related to elite capture in the four FAs in the study. I discuss below, elite capture, persistence and the ensuing conflicts were a recurrent theme in all four FAs, although each has its own historical process with important differences. Contrary to expectations, the bottom-up linkages did not have more immunity

to this problem than the top-down ones, but there are some differences in the actors involved and the way the linkages are captured and reclaimed by certain groups. In what follows, I provide a description of the bottom-up associations (FA-1 and FA-2, Sec. 4.2) followed by the top-down ones (FA-3 and FA-4, Sec. 4.3), emphasizing the historical origins, the internal institutions, and the processes of capture and conflict. I then move to explain (in Sec. 5) how capture is related to the FAs' institutions, power relations and historical political-economic factors.

4.2 FA-1 and FA-2: From bottom-up 'liberation' to capture and back?

FA-1: Liberation movement-turned-political organization

FA-1 originated in the mid-1960s out of a peasant struggle against the concession of vast areas of forests to a private corporation in the most important forest region of Durango. The corporation owned most of the lands in the region, a result of Porfirio Díaz's massive privatization of forestlands. Communities which owned land were obligated to enter into contracts with the corporation, which controlled the profits and the management of the forests. The region's forester, hired by the company, benefited directly from this system. So did certain agencies within the state and federal government, which according to interviews received bribes in exchange for continued support.

Community leaders organized the struggle with two objectives: distribute or restitute the company's lands to landless peasants in the region, and allow land-owning communities to retain the benefits of the timber extraction being done on their lands. Therefore, it could be said FA-1 emerged as a struggle by forest communities to revert the top-down linkages which had been imposed on them and in which benefits from the management of the forest were captured by external actors. The movement quickly received crucial support from the local leaders of the National Peasant Confederation (CNC), who helped the communities gain access to federal echelons of power within the government-party structure, bypassing opposition by the state's governor and lawmakers. The political-economic context in which FA-1 emerged, however, implied that this support was given in exchange of incorporation into the state structure (see Bartra and Otero, 2005; García-López and Antinori, in process; Gordillo et al., 1998). In fact, after a few years of having become constituted, the government argued that the organization was illegal

because its form was not recognized in any law, and forced it to reconstitute into a legally-recognized *ejido* union, and to integrate into the CNC. The association's documents show that representatives from the government's agrarian reform agency and the CNC were present in the constitution and that they regularly attended the FA's meetings.

Therefore, the new bottom-up linkages were also partly created by external and local actors who had their own interests in mind. For the PRI, it was the continued political control of the region's peasants. For the organization's leaders, it was the opportunity to access some of the resources from the timber extraction and from the new government programs supporting inter-community linkages, as well as developing their political careers within the PRI.

Interviewees consistently complained about the decay of the organization from the 1980s onward, as it became a "political trampoline" or "ladder" from which leaders could achieve higher positions of power. In fact, if one looks at the history of leadership positions, many of the association's leaders have gone on to other elected or appointed positions with the PRI and the local government. Two union presidents went on to become municipal presidents. Others were appointed into positions within the local government such as councilmembers, or elected as presidents of the local CNC committee or other organizations such as the local cattle ranchers' association[5].

FA-1 leaders also enriched themselves through resource capture - financial mismanagement and corruption were recurring themes in the oral histories of the association. In the 1970s, a strongman from the region took hold of the association. During the twelve years he held power directly or behind the scenes, his mismanagement of the organization's sawmill and timber marketing service led to its demise, and to his personal enrichment. The same story recurred in later periods. The 1998 Activity Report from the organization's governing board complained about the mismanagement of the construction and resources of a $10 million MXN pesos project for a tree nursery approved during the previous board's period. An equal sum was spent by the complaining leadership for a commercialization project that lasted less than 3 years.

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[5] Cattle ranching unions, as most peasant organizations, were integrated into the state-party structure as members of the National Peasant Confederation. On the capture of these associations by local elites in Michoacan, see McDonald (2001, 2003).

The following leader, Mr. B., collected contributions from member communities for subsidized fertilizer and oat seeds that never reached their intended beneficiaries. He was remembered by many as a strongman and politician who had an ability to lead but had a tendency for corruption.

In 2005, after the PROFAS program began, FA-1 divided into two new regional associations (ARS) at the insistence of CONAFOR together with the region's main forester (see below in (c)) and the leader of one of the largest communities. In 2007, again at the insistence of CONAFOR, and with the promotion of one of the association's leaders, the two ARS re-united into one. Mr. B. was instrumental in promoting the re-unification of the two ARS. His support for this move was strategically conceived to further cement his position within FA-1 and to further his political career. By creating a new parallel association, he was able avoid the two-term limit in the original FA-1 bylaws and extend his presidential term for 3 more years. This in turn allowed him to expand his resource capture by accessing a whole new set of resources from CONAFOR given to the ARS associations, and to delay any internal investigations about his financial management. He also used his position to escalate into the presidency of a state-level forest association, which in turn led to recent appointment as secretary of a national forest association. While these positions do not entail salaries, they do provide access to governmental project funds and to certain benefits (in his case being treated several times in one of the best government hospitals in a nearby state).

More than isolated actions by individuals, these processes were embedded in a recurring conflict between large communities, who represent the largest share of wealth in the association but are a minority in numbers, and small ones, who are many but poor, over the control of the organization. The divisions during the PROFAS program and a previous one in the mid-1990s were precisely along these lines. Evaluations of previous leaders similarly diverged between the two groups. Mr. B., for instance, was perceived by the small-and-poor as very corrupt, a politician, and as giving preference to the larger communities. For instance, one community leader said that during his tenure, Mr. B. would often hold meetings about government programs but he would only take the larger communities with him. "It's always them (the larger communities), we are only taken into account when a majority (voting) is needed." However, this division is not solely due to

community size/wealth. It is also due to historical divisions in the provision of forestry services: the small-and-poor all contract forestry services from the region's largest forestry services, where they have been since their original forestry activities; meanwhile, the large- and -wealthy communities all have private individual foresters. The forced incorporation of new members from two municipalities which have not historically been part of the forest region where FA-1 operates is also a source of tension, especially since these new members mostly ally with the small-and-poor group.

External actors have also attempted to capture the association for their own benefit. One is the federal government's National Forest Commission (CONAFOR). The forced change of FA-1 from *ejido* union into an ARS in 2005 has generated a re-centralization of sorts, where CONAFOR has been able to influence the organization's objectives, scope of action, and types of investments. All new associations had to adopt a standard set of bylaws following a model written by CONFOR. In addition, CONAFOR has forced FA-1 and other ARS associations to carry out a regional forest study, a 5-year strategic plan and a yearly operating plan in order to receive funds for any projects. Recently, CONAFOR mandated that all the ARS associations to invest about half a million pesos each for studies that would serve to update and adapt to each region the biometrics models used in communities' forest management plans. CONAFOR threatened that communities which did not have these studies done would not get an extraction permit from SEMARNAT. These studies, of course, have been supported by the private forestry service offices because they would be paid hefty amounts (about 1.5 million pesos in each region) for the studies. But for cash-strapped FAs and their member communities who have other pressing priorities, like generating employment opportunities or improving their region's infrastructure, forced investment in these projects is an unwanted intrusion. The forced transition of FA-1 into ARS also implied the inclusion of new members The inclusion in the association of the small landowners and some communities which were not previous members.

Another external actor that has continually sought to intervene and capture the organization is the region's main forester, Mr. J.B., who directed what used to be the government-run forestry services office (UAF/UCODEFO). An interviewee explained that Mr. J.B. enriched himself through these forestry services, which technically belonged to a

FA (a *permisionario* union), but which were controlled by him in collusion with the association's president. In 2007, when FA-1 became an ARS, J.B. became the association's secretary, despite a longstanding rule in the union against the participation of people not from communities, and a year later, he became the representative of the municipal CNC council. Then in 2010, when the state held elections, he vied to become the PRI's candidate for municipal president. A community leader from one of the region's largest communities was also seeking this candidacy, and as part of his strategy was trying to become President of FA-1, which also had elections that year. J.B. however, tried to block the community leader from reaching the FA-1 presidency by using a loyal friend as opposing candidate. Mr. J.B.'s loyal friend won the FA's presidency and J.B. won the party's candidacy. Later, the new FA president used his position to accompany J.B. in his campaign throughout the region. J.B.'s wealth allowed him to carry out the very expensive campaign. But this was not only a friendly favor. After he won the municipal election, J.B. appointed the FA-1 president as municipal treasurer as a reward, a position with a lofty salary of approximately $50,000 USD a year.

Finally, political parties are continuously seeking to capture the organization. During the fieldwork, it was evident that there is an intricate relationship between FA-1 and the PRI. The last internal election also highlighted how the organization was part of the larger party politics in the region. Being affiliated to the CNC, FA-1 has a duty to support the PRI and be involved in its campaigns. During the 2010 state elections, for instance, the Union's president participated, as well as other FA leaders, attended public activities where he expressed 'the region's' support for the PRI's candidate for governor. The PROFAS program was clearly also a way for the party controlling the presidency (the PAN) to attempt to increase their support in rural areas and to create organizations which would serve the equivalent purpose of the CNC for the PRI, i.e. channel votes.

Both the electoral process and previously the forced change into ARS have been a major source of conflict in the organization in the last years. It led the larger communities into a sort of 'strike' where they decided they would not pay their membership dues, which represents about 70% of the Union's income from these dues. In their interviews, some leaders of these communities emphasized the lack of fairness of the process and the 'politicization' of the organization. Their real motivation, however, was to destabilize the

organization as a form of revenge for having being voted out of the presidency, and in order to be able to eventually convince people that they needed him as their leader for the organization to be financially stable; this was partially true given that the protesting communities were the largest and wealthiest and their member quotas represented the vast majority of the association's income).

FA-2: Bottom-up forestry services

FA-2 also emerged as a struggle from communities trying to revert a top-down linkage controlled by external actors. In this case, the linkage was a *permisionario* union created in 1986, controlled by the region's main forester in complicity with the union's president. According to several interviews, the union's president did as was told by the forester; and he was complicit in the forester's mismanagement funds, particularly a grant destined for a road-improvement project. This, coupled with a perception by some that the forester was 'mismanaging' the forest, created strong conflicts within the organization. due With the 1992 forest law, which privatized all forestry service concessions (see Chapter 2), the forester –knowing that he would probably be fired as union director– claimed that the law implied they had to dissolve the *permisionario* union and pay severance benefits to all the employees (both claims were false). He 'offered' that he would pay the supposedly-needed severance in exchange for keeping the union's infrastructure (e.g. office, office equipment, and pick-up truck), which had been obtained through collective investments by all the member communities. The original member communities opposed this, but the forester had a majority of votes in his favor due to the fact that he had been strategically incorporating into the union many private landowners –some with allegedly forged memberships. Some were incorporated the same day of the voting. The forester had also brought police and thugs the day of the voting, just in case. The proposal passed and the forester kept the union's infrastructure, which he has used to develop a large and very profitable forestry service business.

This conflict led to the exit of seven of the nine original member communities, who wanted to continue owning their own forestry services, but with autonomy, free from the control of a forester. They formed FA-2 in 1994 for that purpose. As the current president of the Union expressed, they formed the Union so they could "do the work [the forest

management, channeling of government resources, etc.] themselves, *so they could be the ones ordering the forester, and not the other way around*". This struggle, however, did not isolate the union from attempts to capture it for personal political or economic gains. During the first eight years, the Union faced many hardships. According to some, the leadership was somewhat weak, and the forestry service director began to "control everything". The forester became the organization's legal representative. In fact, some community leaders recall that in this period all their dealings were done with the forester; they only remembered the forester and thought there was no other leader at the time.

In 2002, the exiting leadership maneuvered a restructuring of the Union's statutes in order to allow private individuals and small private landowners to become members of the organization. According to some, this was an attempt to allow the entry of allies to that group into the union to obtain a permanent majority and perpetuate their leadership. An ex-leader described the group as 'frustrated businessmen' trying to use the union to channel funds for personal projects. In fact, one of the members of that group has a small eco-tourism venture, a trout farm and a water bottling company, which were built with funds channeled by the FA for his community but which are now run as personal businesses. The move to incorporate individuals as members did not work, and the new leadership quickly moved to re-organize the Union again. They started to file their tax returns and their reports to different agencies, which the previous leadership was not doing, changed the forester, and established that the legal representation would be done by the elected leaders.

The new leadership, however, also sought to benefit from being in their position. The president, who recently finished his second term (and last by union rules), has in recent years used the union –and a parallel association created in 2006, which he still presides– to advance his political career. Recently, he became the region's representative of the National Peasant Confederation (CNC), a position widely understood as springboard to other positions within the CNC or in the municipal government. He also gained positions as representative in SEMARNAT's Central Consultative Council and CONAFOR's State Evaluation Committee, which give him the ability to influence programs and therefore gives him power as a 'broker' for other community members.

As with FA-1, the association holds direct connections to the CNC-PRI, which aside from helping the association obtain certain benefits, has also served to use it as a voting

machine, although not in such a direct and blunt way as FA-1. A community leader from the opposition party argued that he would like to be Union leader but did not even try because he knew that they would not let him because he was from the opposition party (the PAN). He and others also explained how the PRI party uses the Union's leadership to summon and mobilize peasants for their activities, and to publicly express support for the state and municipal governments and the party's candidates. During the state's electoral campaign in 2010, the FA-2 leader spoke, alongside other associations' leaders, in multiple gatherings in support of PRI's candidates, and in one activity in which the entire 'forest sector' lauded the job done by the exiting governor.

The region's main timber corporation has also been involved in attempts to influence and capture the organization and its resources. The corporation's CEO is the region's most powerful man. He has control over most of the private properties in the region, and he and his son, with a few allies, have 50%+ shares in the region's most important community. His second-hand man in the corporation was recently the president of the governing board in another community. According to one interviewee, the timber entrepreneur attempted to infiltrate FA-2 but when he saw he could not control it and 'do things', he left. Then began the PROFAS program, which created an opening for him. In 2006 he region created a new association, which been used by him to capture resources for eco-tourism ventures in his properties and in a community where he owns a majority of membership shares. In 2007, FA-2's members, seeing that the funds were only flowing to the new ARS, decided to join it but maintaining their association. This could be seen as strategic adaptation wshich serves to sustain the organization and to access new funds. As the association's president explained: "we dance to the tune we are played".

In recent years, there has been an emerging conflict between two sub-regions, enhanced by the electoral process and the perception that the leader was serving mostly the interests of one of them region. While all communities have agriculture, some communities did not have any forestry. This tied into the communities' location –the forestry communities were mostly from one sub-region, while the agricultural communities were mostly from another.

4.3 FA-3 and FA-4: Captured from their origins?

FA-3: Top-down forestry services

FA-3 was created as a forestry service union in 1989, after several years of mobilization by leaders from some communities, an up-and-coming forester from the region's largest community, Mr. S. Most members perceived that the organization was created as a legal requirement, and in this sense, it could be considered a top-down institution. However, there was also a bottom-up motivation to change the existing forester who had directed the government-run forestry services. From the beginning, Mr. S. had a strong hand in the new organization. He had been the right-hand man of the previous forester, and was selected as the association's vice-president, a position he held uninterruptedly until last year. After one year of being formed, the association's first forestry service director was ousted after someone (perhaps Mr. S.) mobilized some community leaders against him on the basis that a clause in the organization's bylaws established that the forester had to be from the region. Mr. S. then became the organization's forestry service director. As he also held to the position of vice-president, he became both employee and employer at the same time, creating an obvious conflict of interest. In the following years, strong disagreements emerged between the Union's president and Mr. S. over the handling of the Union, particularly its finances. Some say that the Union's president would not let Mr. S. control him and that he was opposed to the forester's financial management plans; others that it was about party politics (Mr. S. was a PRI loyalist, and the President was from the opposition PAN party). Regardless, in 1995 Mr. S. mobilized key members to expel the president and elect a new one, Mr. N.M.. After more than 15 years, the second president still holds his position, and, despite his positive attributes, he is perceived by many as a marionette of Mr. S. The leadership argues that this permanence of the leadership is good for the 'stability' of the organization, and that it is allowed in the bylaws because there are no fixed term limits. The governing board is completely controlled by Mr. S.: the secretary is the uncle of the president, and the treasurer is Mr. S.'s uncle.

In the field, there were strong suggestions that Mr. S. and the Union's president, in collusion, have been siphoning money from the association to enrich themselves. There are fees for certain projects which never materialize, or which are carried out by the government without monetary contribution by the association. For instance, each year

members contribute $1/m3 of wood for a 'road improvement' quota. This amounts to almost $200,000 Mexican pesos (about $20,000 USD) every year. However, some communities said their roads had never been fixed. Moreover, this year the Union obtained federal money to fix some roads in the region, but when I asked the forestry services director if they would use the quota to contribute their mandated share of the project's costs, he said they would need a separate contribution for this project, and he could not explain how the quota was being used. The Union also has a housing fund which supposedly provides small interest-free loans to community members for house improvements, but few community members had knowledge of this fund. Several communities also complained about having contributed money or timber logs for a study related to a proposed electrification project, but the project never came. A community member told me he found out that Mr. S. and the union's president had been stealing from him the money from his mother's community membership, which he had inherited. They signed an agreement to pay him the debt, but they never did.

The forestry service fee –which is raised annually and is the highest in the state (and according to some in the whole country)– together with the 20-25% charge leveled on all programs channeled to communities, is another source of capture. The forester and the FA's leadership justify the continued increases as a necessity to keep up with rising costs (particularly fuel) and because the association arguably provides many services that other forestry services do not. But, as several ex-leaders explained, there is little transparency or justification about what the money will be used in, and no monitoring afterwards. Moreover, in the same region there was another forester which albeit admittedly smaller, provided similar services, including radio communication, a tree nursery and fire combat, for almost half the costs. Finally, there is a less direct but still important way in which the union's forester has been capturing benefits. Having the power to decide which programs to apply to in each community, the forester has an incentive to focus on programs in which he can claim the 20-25% off the program's amount channeled to each community. A top CONAFOR official in Durango noted how in FA-3 they keep requesting funds for reforestation despite the fact they had few areas left for this activity, because "that is what pays".

The association's president has also used his position to obtain money from community members in exchange for services or projects never provided. For instance, a community leader confided that the president had promised a solar panel for his house and asked for $10,000 Mexican pesos arguing that this was needed to apply for the project; the panel was never installed. He has also used his position as association leader to develop his timber extraction business in the region. This business, in turn, has provided another venue to mismanage funds; for instance, he has taken timber logs from community members in several communities with unfulfilled promises to pay later. Even the current forester recognized this, saying, in reference to one of the leader's debts: "we all know how he is".[6]

Meanwhile, the association's president and the forester have also used their positions to reach other political positions. Over the years, the forester has become a nationally recognized figure. As legal representative and the recognized 'leader' of the association, he has taken credit for most of its successes. This has propelled him into fame and has given him access to other positions of power. He has won state and national awards, and has served as the president of the state's association of foresters and on several federal and state advisory committees. In 2010, he was appointed as head of an important state government agency. The forester's control over the association is so strong that when he resigned as forestry service director to take over the new position, the organization agreed that when he finished his 4 years in the government, he would be hired back. In addition, when the new forestry service director started to complain about not having real authority, they quickly removed him and gave the position to the exiting forester's right hand man, despite the fact that this person did not meet one of the basic qualifications: being a forester.

For his part, the FA's president, Mr. N., has held elected positions as municipal trustee/comptroller (*síndico*) and currently as councilmember (*regidor*).[7] Both are positions with a salary of almost $20,000 USD a year, a substantial quantity considering this is a poor, rural municipality of about 23,000 inhabitants. Community leaders complained that Mr. N. only visited them when he was campaigning for these positions, a critique also

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[6] My own personal experience with the Union's president confirmed the categorization of him as someone who asks for money that he never returns.

[7] The association's previous Treasurer has also been a *regidor*, and others in the current governing board have also held elected or appointed positions.

leveled recurrently against the leaders of the other FAs. I also observed how he brought food bags to several communities supposedly on behalf of the Union, but the timing happened to coincide with his campaign for *regidor*. The president was also elected as the vice-president of the state-level forest association (AES), where he is indirectly implicated in the capture of a federal program's resources by the AES president (the ex-leader of FA-1, discussed above), and he is almost guaranteed to become the next AES president. These positions, have enhanced the power and access to resources, information, decision-making, and 'connections' of both the forester and the Union's president, further reinforcing their social, economic and political capital. As the forester himself remarked, being in his position gives him privileged knowledge to information about government programs before anyone else in the association. This is obviously a benefit to the association, but also creates opportunities for resource capture.

The influence of non-community actors was also evident in this case. FA-3 has among its members a private timber corporation, a strong ally of the forester. This is a highly unusual arrangement in FAs, and even goes against one of the basic ideas of forming an FA –for communities to gain bargaining power with the buyers. Some communities complained about the lack of price regulation by FA-3, explaining that the companies where the ones which set the prices in the region. While this is now a standard practice in all of Durango, the timber corporations' membership in FA-3 is a direct way in which these corporations can prevent the Union from ever serving that price regulation purpose. The presence of the corporations also creates a disincentive against the development of vertically-integrated forestry enterprises in member communities (i.e. sawmills, improved management), because corporations make most profits as intermediaries buying timber logs and sawing them themselves.

The forester's control of the organization has also generated a capture of management objectives. In this case, while FA-3 is often presented by their leaders and outsiders as a model of sustainable forest management , and there is some evidence of this (e.g. increasing timber stocks, reduced forest fires – see Chapter 4), there were also complaints in some communities about the way that the forest is managed. A central issue is the forester's emphasis on marking-up trees which are dead or damaged (e.g. crooked). This helps conserve the forest because the best trees are kept as seed banks, and because the

extracted volume ends up being less than the estimated (marked) volume, since the damaged trees are often hollow. However, some community members argued that it is a way of overcharging them for the markup activities, because the Union charges for the *marked* volume (per m3 marked-up for cutting)*,* not the lower extracted volume. In addition, because communities end up extracting less than they had estimated, they have lower profits. Consequently, there is a tension between the ecological sustainability of the forest and the economic well-being of the community. Most recently, the opposite seems to be occurring, as the forester began promoting clearcutting as a strategy to increase timber production in the region, and has been trying to impose it as a regional program even though the vast majority of communities in the region have expressed opposition to it. An ex-leader of the largest community stated the tension clearly: "that could be very technical but we are the owners of the forest and they cannot give us orders from above." The forester's discourse of increasing productivity as part of the solution to the problems of the region's forest sector ignores that causes for declining productivity are economic and organizational, not of production. Moreover, in FA-3 clearcutting is mostly to the benefit of the timber corporations because of the abovementioned intermediary role.

Despite the complaints heard about these and other issues, FA-3 has surprisingly remained relatively conflict-free throughout its history; this includes conflicts between small and large communities, which tend to pervade most collective action situations. Moreover, it has only lost one member during its 20-year existence, even as most of the other *permisionario* unions lost substantial numbers of members, became inoperative, or simply dissolved. This is partly due to a share-based voting system where the larger members have more decision-making power. In addition there is an unwritten rule that their leadership has to include representatives from different communities and private landowners.

FA-4: Top-down forest management organization

FA-4 was created by the region's main forester, Mr. G.M., in compliance with the 2003 Forest Law, which he perceived as a mandate to create new silviculturalist associations (ARS) within government-delineated forest management regions. Mr. G.M. was a wealthy and well-connected individual in the region – he had been operating in the

region for over 20 years, ever since he was appointed by the government to direct the Forestry Administration Unit (UAF) there. In the 1980s, he created a forestry service union much like the one in FA-3, in which he controlled things despite the appearance of community ownership.

With the 1992 forest law (which privatized the UAFs), G.M. became the owner of the forestry services, although the community-owned union still remained and the communities he services were still, with a few exceptions, the same ones as in the UAF. The forestry service union still formally existed when the 2003 forest law came into effect, though did not operate in practice. G.M. used these communities as the basis for the new *silviculturalist* association. Not surprisingly, the association's first and second presidents were described as 'front men' for the forester. Communities complained that little information flowed in those periods, with hardly any meetings or visits from the leaders to the communities. During the three-year term of the second president, for instance, the association only met twice and all communities reported no visits from the leadership. The association's office space is a desk in the forester's office, and the association's forester is also an employee in the same office. And the association's meetings, which for the first two presidencies were directed by the forester, are still held in the forester's private property in the mountains. During this period, he accumulated a large wealth and connections to different political parties. His connections eventually helped him be a runner-up to become the state's delegate of the federal Environmental Secretariat (SEMARNAT) on one occasion and of the delegation of the National Forest Commission (CONAFOR) on another.

FA-4 did not seem to have the large and recurrent problems of elite capture that FA-1 and FA-3 have faced. However, there were some indications that the forester has used the association and its resources for his private benefit. For instance, he has been using the association's equipment (computer and plotter) for his own private forestry services. There are questions about how the forester has become so wealthy, and recently there were some tensions when the forester apparently failed to report that the association's funds for a project had been deposited to him.

Yet contrary to FA-3, where the forester has been able to maintain almost total control of the organization, in FA-4 recently the power within the association has begun

changing due to the current president's interest to make the association more autonomous. He has been stressing the need to have their own office space, has been overtly critical of the forest and does not work from the forester's office. Beyond a purely common interest, however, the president's move may also signal an attempt to use the association for his own private objectives. Last year the president tried, unsuccessfully, to use his position as a springboard to becoming his party's candidate for municipal president in his region, but was not able to leverage this support inside the party despite gaining the support of the region's communities. He did, however, become part of the leadership of a newly-created cattle rancher's association in his municipality, and is also the president of the local chapter of the National Peasant Confederation (CNC).

To date, the association has not experienced any strong conflicts related to elite capture, and there do not appear to be small-versus-large-communities dynamics.

5. DISCUSSION: FROM BENEFITS TO CAPTURE

5.1. Multiple actors, multiple captures

The results in this study show the complex network of actors, internal and external, that are involved in the capture of one type of cross-scale linkage in the forest commons – inter-community forest associations. They underscore that the creation and maintenance of these linkages is also driven in part by personalistic interests; and that these unequal benefits are a rather ubiquitous part of cross-scale governance. The findings also suggest that there are no significant differences between bottom-up and top-down linkages in the process analyzed. In both, there is capture by external actors such as foresters, political parties, timber corporations and government agencies, and by internal actors, particularly FA leaders.

Foresters represent one of the main elite groups capturing these organizations. Their status as elites is unquestioned. As a community leader stated: "I've never seen a forester who is doing badly". The capture by foresters was not exclusive to the four FAs studied here. It was actually a commonality in all the new silviculturalist associations created as a result of the PROFAS program in 2004 (see Chapter 2/García-López and Antinori, in process). The foresters were the main promoters or direct creators of the new ARS, which they saw as a new source of funding. The associations' 'offices' were a desk within the

forester's office, a space for which the associations paid rent to the forester through the PROFAS program. In addition, CONAFOR paid the associations to hire their own forester to do studies and dissemination of information about the agency's programs. Instead, the associations ended up paying an employee of the established foresters, who took advantage of the money for their own activities. In several cases, the associations became inoperative and the foresters have kept their equipment, especially computers and plotters. To promote the formation of ARS, foresters –particularly those who have been directing the same office from the 1980s– drew on their pre-existing networks of communities receiving their forestry services.

Foresters gain direct access to money destined to associations because part of the CONAFOR funds are earmarked for the forester doing the application. The importance of this can be seen in foresters' reactions to the original rules (*lineamientos*) set out by Conafor for the PROFAS program funds. Initially the rules stated that the associations' foresters could not have any other jobs, i.e. they could not have ongoing services to communities. Foresters strongly opposed this because all of them would have been disqualified (only one ARS forester does not have a private forestry service office). They ignored this rule for several years with the complicity of CONAFOR, and lobbied hard to have it changed until they succeeded.

Foresters also use their associations to gain access to meetings where they can influence policies that further their economic interests. For instance, in the first meeting I attended during my fieldwork, a gathering of the state-level association (which groups all the government-sanctioned regional associations in Durango), the foresters complained about the lack of funding for reforestation in different areas of the state in that year's CONAFOR programs. I found it curious that it was the foresters, and not the associations, speaking at this meeting. A few days later, a top-level government official noted that this was because the foresters, and not the associations, were the one that directly benefitted from reforestation programs, because they could sell the plants they produced to CONAFOR for the communities' reforestation activities and also charge communities a 10-20% fee over the project's total money.

In addition, by connecting to an inter-community association foresters are able to gain prestige and power indirectly because they are seen as commanding or influencing a

large organization of communities (i.e. votes). It is not the same to provide services to all those communities to now have, on top of that, an organization that can mobilize that group for political purposes. In fact, as I observed, foresters in several FAs (including FA-1 and FA-3) used their positions to invite and even spend the association's money to mobilize members to attend government events from the PRI party. They also gain prestige from the success of the associations they are tied to, as with Mr. S. in FA-3.

These findings seem to confirm the hypothesis and preliminary results from Barsimantov (2010), where foresters seem more focused on capturing resources than on promoting community empowerment and good governance. In addition to foresters, FA leaders and political parties are recurrent offenders in the stories of elite capture and persistence. The political capture of FAs through PRI-affiliated *caciques* has some interesting parallels to the chieftaincy system in Sierra Leone, in which chiefs filled a vacuum of power at the local level and helped politicians mobilize electoral support (see Labonte, 2011). The observation also ties to the work on the "dark side" of leadership (Luthans et al., 1998; Theesfeld, 2009).

The results also highlight that these 'capture' processes also engender conflict and resistance from different actors within each network, some of which bring a perspective of a more just or equal distribution of benefits (like the smaller and marginalized communities in FA-1 and FA-2), and some of which simply want to be in a position to capture the benefits. The histories of FA-1 and FA-2 are examples of associations struggling against previous top-down linkages captured by external actors. To some extent, these conflicts have continued to date. In FA-3 and FA-4, the conflicts have been much more subsumed, and take the form of everyday forms of resistance. In FA-1, communities organized and mobilized to end the concession system and create a new system of community forestry, ending the control of timber rents by a private corporation and its allies in the government. On previous occasions conflicts have left to 'exit' of certain members who disagreed with the elected leadership, now in the current conflict 'weapons of the weak' through verbal forms of de-legitimizing and foot-dragging on paying membership dues (voice). In FA-2 the solution was forming a new organization when their original one was captured ('exit'). In FA-3, exiting the association is also a choice, through the elites actively engage in attempts to prevent this. Another strategy used, which is also evident in FA-1 and FA-2, is

a repertoire of 'weapons of the weak' tactics (see Scott, 1985) such as verbal forms of de-legitimizing and lack of compliance with rules such as attendance to meetings and payment of member dues. In FA-4, the current leader has been actively attempting to become more autonomous from the forester, including attempting to obtain their own office space. These conflicts, however, also engender distrust and lack of reciprocity which hinder collective action; this is specially the case in FA-1 but there are also examples from the other associations.

At the same time, there is no denying that these 'captured' linkages and the elites who capture them have also generated positive impacts on forest communities (see Chapter 4). For instance, FA-3 is seen as one of the most successful FAs nationwide and is the only in the state where timber stocks have increased over time. In addition, the organization has enjoyed political and financial stability for over 20 years while generating new forms of collective action (e.g. fire prevention & combat and road improvement committees). In other words, it has been able to sustain collective action over time, a clear measure of success. Other notable achievements such as a stark reduction in forest fires (FA-4), drastic road improvements (FA-2), conflict-resolution between communities and government agencies (FA-1) or price negotiation and commercialization (FA-1) could be ascribed to the other three FAs in the study.

5.2. Explaining elite capture and persistence

Power relations

The obvious question is why these linkages are captured so frequently and why are certain actors –foresters and PRI-associated peasant leader specifically –the ones dominating this process? The first factor that needs to be considered is unequal power relations between the actors involved. The case of FA-3 is illuminating. Why, despite their constant complaints about the rising costs of the forestry services in their organization and their inconformity with the association's leader, have member communities not done anything to change things? When I asked an informant, who had also been an employee of the association's forestry services for a long time, he replied: "Because no one wants to grab the bull by the horns". The image evokes fear (forester as a bull) and a sense of impotency, but also that there is no leader to come forward and unite the opposition. The

forester is very well-positioned in the state, with strong connections to the PRI as a political party and as the state's government, and he was close friends with the new governor. His political connections, together with his status as a nationally-recognized forester serve as a strong dissuasive for anyone wishing to confront him. In addition, his almost complete control of information allows him to misinform and use threats to maintain power asymmetries. Several interviewees, for instance, recounted that the forester and leaders told communities that if they left they would not have government monetary supports (CONAFOR programs) because the government wanted (sometimes the word used was 'required') communities to be organized. Similar threats and half-truths linking community membership in FAs to government supports were constantly used by foresters in alliance with CONAFOR in talks to communities, as well as by FA leaders in FA-1 and FA-2 during assemblies. Interviews show that communities have widely adopted this discourse (see Chapter 4). In the case of a community that exited FA-3, they noted how the forester initially did not want to give them their documents so they could process their extraction permit, and then didn't even allow them to keep their personal radios, even though they had contributed financially for their purchase.

The control of information also allows the forester and the president to continually recite the discourse of benefits, which serves to reinforce the prestige and power. Internal power relations are also maintained by these players through small loans given to community leaders on a personal basis. This not only create a binding financial dependence, but also a sort of political servitude where community members are afraid to speak up for fear of losing the future access to more funds, often needed for medical emergencies or family festivities (on the relation between loans and power, see Wilshusen, 2009).

The prestige and power of the largest and most developed community in FA-3 (from where the forester is and where he commands much influence) also serves to influence other members in their voting. Because the community's leadership is allied to the forester, who is a member of that community and has a large family network there, this serves to maintain the status quo. As one of the community's leaders said: "In the meetings when the community [representatives] raises its hand to speak everyone looks [pay attention] and supports us." This community's power, in turn, stems from the fact that the community is

wealthy, relatively well-organized and highly developed, but there are other reasons at play. One is the share-based voting system, which assigns to this community the largest share of votes (see below). The other is that this community has become the regional hub for a band of drug traffickers, with which some think that the leadership has become affiliated. This creates a fear effect which although not discussed in interviews, is an obvious factor at play. In short, the community's alliance with the forester is a dyadic relationship that strengthens the forester and the community at the same time.

FA-1 and FA-2 also offer examples of how powerful actors can use their power to capture the organizations they lead and to change the rules to their advantage. In FA-1, the leader's ability to control information and provide false or incomplete ideas were crucial in the recent change from *ejido* union to silviculturalist association (ARS). This, in turn, benefitted him economically and politically. Nonetheless, in this case there seems to be not one dominating group but completing factions seeking to control the organization, which not only has to do with size but also with forester affiliation and with different cliques within the PRI. In FA-2, new bylaws were approved in 2002 as an attempt to bring in new members who would support the then-leaders. And in the recent internal elections, a municipal councilmember, who was a close ally of the group of the exiting president and their handpicked candidate, threatened some community leaders by saying that he would not support the association if the opposing group won.

Local institutions

The institutional context mediates these relations and outcomes. Again, I use the case of FA-3 as illustration. The share-based voting system is a crucial rule which helps maintain the power relations and the elite capture in place. This system ensures that only two members (a community and a timber company) control more than 50% of the votes. Thus, it creates a strong incentive against any opposition, because without convincing one of these two members (which happen to be strong allies of the forester), it would be futile to present any proposals that contradict the leadership's positions.

Other institutions in FA-3 combine with this share-based voting system to maintain inequalities and promote elite capture. Meetings are only once a year. An ex-leader of the association's main community argued that contrary to the union's purpose, the forester's

activities were never up for discussion during meetings. Rather, a prepared annual work plan was presented each year and people simply voted for it or against it. This, combined with the share-based system, is an obvious dissuasive for any opposition because rather than present ideas about projects or activities, communities had to express their approval or disapproval. Reports provided were mostly about 'self-congratulation' for the achievements of that year by the leadership and forestry services. 'We are the best', was the constant message community leaders, as well as I, constantly received. This self-congratulation serves a useful purpose of maintaining the 'hype' about the association among the members and in turn appeasing doubts about the leadership's ability to channel resources and other benefits. Moreover, there was no monitoring to see if the activities that the plan stipulated were actually carried out, since the person directly in charge of monitoring (the vigilance council, part of the governing board) was the forester's uncle. Another related institution that facilitates elite capture and control is a formal rule that says that only a majority of shareholders can ask for accounting reports (*rendición de cuentas*) in addition to the required annual report. A third institution that relates to elite capture was the leadership terms, about which there was contradictory information. The current leaders and forester said that the bylaws allowed for unlimited terms as long as performance satisfied the membership; others argued that they were fixed 5-year terms. In practice, the institution that has prevailed is an unlimited term. This facilitates elite persistence by forcing members to openly ask for a change in leadership, rather than having a secret-ballot election, which puts a mark on them as being openly against the current leadership and the forester.

In FA-1, the lack of rule enforcement and of sanctions seemed to recurring problems associated to elite capture. None of the leaders accused of mismanagement were ever punished. Meanwhile, the association's rules regarding re-elections were violated on several occasions, as were the rules against having external (non-community) individuals as members of the association and its leadership. Similarly, the association's general assembly had also decided, on several occasions, to establish some sort of punishment for those who recurrently missed the meetings and those who did not pay their dues, yet none of these decisions was ever implemented.

FA-2 and FA-4 had a similar problem of lack of rule enforcement regarding participation and accountability. For example, the bylaws of FA-2 require three annual

meetings, but during my fieldwork they only had one. For the purpose of financial reports, FA-2 has an accountant who provides detailed financial reports every year, though some have complained that the reports are not provided in writing in advance of the meetings, so there is little room for careful analysis. FA-4 also had fewer assemblies than the required and had problems collecting member dues despite numerous public commitments by non-paying members to pay up. In all four associations there were also complaints by community leaders about the lack of information and of presence (visits to communities) from association leaders, which hindered the flow of information (hence transparency and accountability). In FA-4, for instance, members complained that during the two previous presidents' tenures, there had been many grants flowing in but there had been no reports about their use.

The informal institutions in electoral processes in FA-1 and FA-2 arguably also have a role to play in elite capture. On one hand, each candidacy is established as a *planilla* or *plancha,* which is a set group of people, a clique usually composed of friends and/or family, filling in all the positions (presidency, secretary, etc.). This limits representation of losing factions, and promotes a more adversarial voting based on cliques. (In contrast, in FA-4 the candidates for vice-president, secretary, etc. are selected from the losing candidates for president.) Another problematic institution in FA-1 and FA-2 is the absence of any process whereby candidates present their proposals implies that there are few guides for holding the winning candidate accountable during his tenure. Moreover, it reinforces voting by cliques. The importance of this institution was highlighted in FA-2's last election; when an opposition member proposed, before the voting, that each set of candidates (*plancha*) present its proposals, the moderator of the meeting said that the proposal was off-topic.

There are also institutions that may limit elite capture. The term limits in FA-1, FA-2 and FA-4 can limit the ability of any one leader to dominate. However, non-reelection, which is the rule in the new FA-1 and in FA-4, can diminish the election-induced incentive to perform well (including good financial management). Rules defining how members are represented in the organization (representation rules) can also contribute. In FA-2, a rule requires 4 representatives per community and divides the representation equally with two representatives from the communities' elected leadership (*comisariado*) and two elected separately from the community assembly. This rule allows for a broader representation of

interests in the association's assemblies, which in turn limits the ability of the association's leadership to gain the complicity of community leaders in the process of capturing resources. In fact, as I observed, it made the elections much more competitive than if the *comisariados* were the only representatives, since in many communities, *comisariados* and the assembly representatives held diverging views about who should lead the association.

Regular meetings may also limit the power of elites to capture organizations, by creating frequent monitoring opportunities. This is especially true when combined with regular reporting by the leadership, as done in FA-1, where there is a monthly report of activities and income. In FA-2 the hiring of an accountant eight years ago was meant to help give 'order' to the organization, both politically and economically, including preventing resource capture. The organization does a very detailed income reporting. The current president in FA-4, despite not having regular meetings, has done very detailed financial reports as well in the meetings held to date.

INSERT HERE Table 1. Institutional aspects influencing elite capture

Historical and political-economic conditions

At the macro-level, an important factor influencing the process of elite capture and persistence is the historically-configured and context-dependent patterns of governance. Historically, until the 1980s, foresters in Durango were only accountable upward, first to timber corporations (under the private concession system in the 1950s) and later to the government (under the government-run concession system and the UAFs and UCODEFOs), but not downward to communities. Foresters were appointed by the government, and thus represented the government's interests. Moreover, foresters were crucial agents to facilitate the expansion and regularization of timber extraction in Durango. Thus, while in some cases foresters were crucial in organizing and supporting communities in their struggles for more autonomy (see Chapter 2), in many they simply implemented federal prerogatives on the ground. Socially they also held high prestige (interview with SRN official, DATE). This tradition of foresters as bosses, and the close association between them and the government, still prevails in Durango's forest communities. It helps

explain the prevalence of foresters as elites capturing FAs even in cases where the organizations were initially bottom-up.

At the same time, the privatization of forestry services in 1992 has generated a new incentive of profit maximization, which in turn creates two perverse incentives for foresters vis a vis community forestry. One is to submit applications for programs that generate income for them, regardless of whether communities need them or not. This is the case with reforestation initiatives. The second is to downplay, or even attempt to subvert, communities' social organization and vertical integration as much as possible. Since forestry services are now open to competition, and a community (or an association) may choose at any time to change forestry services or create its own, the forester fears that once a community or association becomes very developed, it can provide the services on its own. The fieldwork confirmed that the problem extends to the community level, where foresters tend to apply to programs that generate income for them, without necessarily consulting communities about their needs or objectives.[8]

The use of FAs by peasant 'leaders' to escalate into political positions and capture resources, and the symbiotic relationship between these associations and the PRI also need to be understood in historical perspective. Historically, most peasant organizations (including FAs) were integrated into the PRI structure through the CNC. The CNC had, and still has, official representation in the PRI and was allocated a (progressively smaller) portion of seats in government at local, state and federal levels (see Durand Ponte, 2009: PAGES; Hamilton: PAGES). Thus, negotiation with peasant organizations, serving as 'intermediaries' to peasants and peasant communities, were crucial. The PRI benefitted from the associations' mobilization of political support and votes through peasant leaders that "usually control large quantities of peasants" (interview with FA-4 leader, 01-31-2012). Over time, the FAs thus became vehicles of representation and their leaders as natural choices for elected or appointed positions within the part-state apparatus. Moreover, as the leader of FA-4 explained, since the PRI was the only party available for people interested in politics and rural issues, it was almost necessary to join. Over time, the

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[8] On several occasions, for instance, I saw foresters hand communities a form where they agreed to apply to any programs, without the forester explaining which programs he would be applying to. The form is a CONAFOR requirement precisely to ensure that foresters are applying to programs that communities truly want.

possibility to reach higher (and paid) positions through peasant organizations, and perhaps to capture some resources on the way, created a perverse incentive to use the organizations as political ladders, which helps explain the observed outcomes. Resource capture was often allowed as part of the 'tools of the trade'. As explained by the FA-4 leader: "[the benefits are] always distorted because this or that leader is supported and obtains huge benefits, and while in some cases these benefits reach the majority of the population, in others the benefit is only for a few who act in cliques (*camarillas*)."

After the 1950s the balance of power changed and the peasant and labor sectors lost out to the corporate sectors in representation in the PRI. However, even then these practices of peasant organizations as intermediaries for peasant communities remain today. In other words, they are part of the institutional context, one carried over many decades. In Durango, the continued strength of the PRI and the lack of a well-develop civil society and NGO sector further reinforce these patterns. In other words, the linkages are 'reduced' rather than diverse, which reduce FAs' financial and political autonomy, since they have more financial dependence on the government and less bargaining power with it.

These patterns have stark similarities to the case of Bulgaria's water user associations discussed by Theesfeld (2009, 2011). They show a form of "nomenklatura effect" where leaders' connections to a party (in the case of Eastern Europe, the Communists, in this case, the PRI) continue to be relevant today despite the party's reduced power (Balcerowicz, 1995, cited in Theesfeld, 2009). This effect shows the importance of pre-existing networks but also of historical patterns of governance, a la Bourdieu (1977, in Wilshusen, 2009).

Interestingly, the patterns observed at the FA level seemed to mimic those at the *community* level, where histories of corruption mismanagement of funds by community leaders and of political bosses were told in almost all communities I sampled. In this sense, these processes represent longstanding practices of elite persistence, as in Wilshusen's (2009) study. From this historical vantage point, the attempt by the federal National Action Party (PAN) government to use the 2004 PROFAS program for clientelist purposes –to build a "blue CNC" as some put it– is simply a strategic mimesis of the PRI's longtime practices.

In this historical view, it is easy to understand why many peasant leaders and community members in Durango firmly believe that the PRI is the party best representing their interests, although they recognize that bad leadership distorts this representation This finding partly parallels that of Haenn (2005), who shows that clientelism was justified by peasants in an association in Campeche as a way of gaining a political voice and obtaining 'development' benefits. In fact, in Mexico clientelist ties may be the only or most effective way peasants can gain a political voice or channel resources, and thus they need to be understood as adaptations to the given context (e.g. Haenn, 2005, Nuijten, 2003). Work in other regions –particularly post-socialist countries– has similarly emphasized clientelism's dual or 'paradoxical' (Ledeneva, 2006: 21) nature which is "both parasitic and functional: they reduce the amount of wealth in society directly by theft and indirectly by lowering trust and willingness to invest; but at the same time they provide means of *negotiating around an inefficient administrative system so that it 'works'.*" (Robinson, 2008: 1218). In this sense, it can help to stabilize social relations and serve as a redistributive mechanism in the context of very high inequality and bureaucratic inefficiency, but at the same time it facilitates resource capture..

Finally, the policy context in the last few years has also fomented the capture of government programs. Elite capture was envisioned as one of the unwritten objectives of this policy at the highest echelons of the federal government. Interestingly, in Durango this objective failed because most associations were captured by the same people that had been controlling associations before –foresters and by PRI operatives– "taking the money and continuing to support the PRI", as one interviewee put it. This shows the capacity of existing clientelist networks to adapt to changing contexts, as found in other countries transitioning away from a heavily centralized and authoritarian government. This transition often creates an institutional vacuum that can be filled by local elites which adapt to the new context (e.g. Ledeneva, 2006; McDonald, 2001, 2003; Sikor et al., 2009; Schmidt and Theesfeld, 2010; Theesfeld, 2009). The PROFAS policy also altered power dynamics in some cases, most notably FA-1, where it created an opportunity for the small-and-poor communities to gain an increased majority (with new member influx). It also created opportunities for already-established or emerging elites to consolidate their power by

capturing more resources, as with the foresters in all four associations and the timber entrepreneur in FA-2.

Conclusions: Mitigating and resisting elite capture

This study has demonstrated that elite capture is pervasive in cross-scale linkages in Mexican community forestry, underscoring the need for more scholarship on this subject in Mexico. The question that lingers is – how to mitigate and resist elite capture? Scholars have recently begun debating strategies to do this. Wong (2010) points to two models –one that actively incorporates elites in projects, and one that excludes them altogether– each with its advantages and disadvantages. Policy-makers in Mexico as well as donors, such as the World Bank, should pay close attention to these debates and the implications for the design of community forestry programs. One of the implications is that foresters' intermediary role has to be diminished through new rules that generate direct and true community involvement in the programs, where currently foresters dominate the process. Increasing funding for programs aimed at strengthening community institutions and organizations is another key strategy that could contribute to this objective. In fact, this research, as well as previous work (e.g. Barsimantov, 2010) has suggested that one of the strategies elites –particularly foresters– have used to maintain their control over community forestry and the associated linkages is by downplaying the social dimension of community forestry in the resource-channeling process. Breaking this 'vicious cycle', as Barsimantov calls it, will require the active intervention of other civil society actors, such as NGOs and progressive academics, as has been done in states like Oaxaca. Unfortunately, over the years the government has tended to reduce funding for social categories of forestry programs and to increase the environmental ones. Establishing certain social projects like participatory territorial zoning) as pre-requisite for environmental projects would not only strengthen the environmental projects, but lead to stronger and more autonomous communities and FAs. Yet these strategies are mostly donor-driven. Grassroots actions will also be required. I can point to two. One is improved design of community and inter-community institutions to mitigate elite capture, some of which were highlighted above. The second is grassroots struggles for internal democracy, which in turn will need the support of other civil society sectors.

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