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'Exclusive' governance: trust, agency and accountability in the Verde para Sempre extractive reserve

This paper forms a part of my ongoing doctoral research that focuses on comparative analysis of the modalities of inclusive natural resources governance in Brazil and South Africa. Based on fieldwork conducted in the Verde Para Sempre extractive reserve in the Brazilian Amazon in 2014, this paper identifies the causal mechanisms that limit/augment the capacity for inclusive governance in this region. The research uses a combination of theories/methods derived from critical realism, political ecology, informant interviews and document analysis. I develop a heuristic that captures the main attributes of inclusive governance inspired by institutional analysis and social capital theories, which provide the conceptual foundation and direction of the study. Some of heuristic's attributes include the prevalence of: a) synergistic ties predicated on norms of trust and networks of civic engagement between the state and the community, b) effective state institutional capacity, c) a proactive state that creates avenues for public participation, and d) a locally borne out forest management practice. The purpose of the paper is to find out what concrete governance transformation processes in the Verde Para Sempre extractive reserve suggest about the dynamics posited/assumed in the proposed heuristic.
 Representing 74% of the area of the Porto de Moz municipality, the Verde Para Sempre extractive reserve was formed in 2004. Its formation was preceded by significant events. In the 1980s, with the assistance of the Catholic Church, families in Porto de Moz started organizing around a Rural Workers Union to resist the expansion of commercial fishermen in the region. They later mobilized to form the Sustainable Development Committee to demarcate communal areas to stave off intrusion of large timber companies. Meanwhile, conflicting relations between the state and the community led to relegation of these governance systems to the informal domain, thereby making them infructuous. Through an alliance with an international environmental NGO, the communities succeeded in lobbying for the creation of the Verde Para Sempre extractive reserve. The establishment of the reserve was meant to prevent illegal logging and guarantee customary rights to the communities to land and natural resources. Since the reserve is essentially a conservation area, the residents are required to develop a management plan that encompasses many communities, and therefore the need to establish a new set of institutions to bring all these communities under its ambit. However, bureaucratic impediments continue to stymie communities' efforts in preparing formal management plans (a transitory plan is in existence presently in Verde para Sempre), which has resulted in illegal logging by most rural people who continue to remain in the informal sector. Decisions on resource use that had taken place at the community level have now begun to be controlled at the territorial scale, far removed from the local communities. By focusing on the role of trust, agency and accountability, this paper unpacks the neglected question of building context-specific 'typologies' of inclusive forest governance architectures that are of relevance to Brazil, and beyond.