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Chapter 2

The Ecuadorian Context

2. Chapter 2: The Ecuadorian context. a. Why is Ecuador such a great place to study environmental issues? What are the four region sin the country, and what are the unique challenges facing each?

b. What is a biodiversity hotspot? Use other sources to describe the unique features of the world’s 34 biodiversity hotspots. You can use Myer’s original paper on the topic in 1988 and then see how the concept and hotspots have changed since then.

Summary: The chapter begins by listing statistics about ecuadors financial status over the years and comparing it to its surrounding Latin American and Caribbean country neighbors. Generally, Ecuador has improved financially and politically over the years and was described as a “free” country in 2015 as opposed to “partly free” and even worse in the past. Ecuador’s main exports are oil, in addition to bananas, shrimp, flowers, cacao, wood, coffee, and fish.

Only the size of Colorado, Ecuador has a wide variety of ecosystems with the Galapagos, the coast, the Andes, and the Amazon being the main different bioregions in the country. The largest city is Guayaquil, located on the coast, and Quito is the capital, located high in the Andes amid active volcanoes. The Amazon on the eastern side of the country is where many of the indigenous people live and where the areas rich with oil lie. Ecuador is considered one of the most biodiverse places in the world because it has such a high number of plant and animal species. States in the U.S. pale in comparison to the 20,000 different species of plants that exist in Ecuador. The fact that Ecuador consist of so many different biomes in such a small area makes it a great place to study environmental issues. One can study alpine vegetation, marine life, and tropical birds all within 283,000 square kilometers.

Scientists who believed that mass extinctions would begin within several decades labeled Ecuador as a biodiversity hotspot, because they wanted to label areas such as Ecuador with high biodiversity, as areas that would need special conservation focus (lewis, 2016). Hotspots do go deeper than that simple definition. For an area to be labeled a hotspot, it needs to be created not only through the biodiversity of nature but also through the choices of the government who control that area. Often, it seems that the spots labeled as hotspots are the ones that are struggling economically. These countries may not have the resources to focus on protecting their natural resources and biodiversity and there fore are a hotspot that requires special conservation focus because of the added threat.

Before, oil was mentioned as the main export of Ecuador, followed by bananas, fish, cacao, flowers, shrimp, and coffee, as well as tourism. The issue is that oil brings in by far the most money. Oil brings in 12 million dollars annually which is followed by bananas which counts for only 2 million dollars annually. Each export decreases from there. So, it would be a massive economical issue if Ecuador were to “keep the oil in the soil”. And essentially, a country needs to be economically healthy to support conservation. So, Ecuador has limited options in what it can do to thrive.

Reflection: Essentially, this chapter delved into Ecuador’s unique situation. Facing the choice between feeding the economy and drilling for oil (the easy way) or holding strong and trying to continue to develop environmentally is a very hard choice to make. From my outside perspective I support the choice to grow and work with and alongside the environment rather than destroy it through drilling for oil, among many other things. I imagine as a citizen of Ecuador who may struggle for money it would be hard to support that choice. I also believe that there would be many people in Ecuador who would support the environmental choice because they value the wonderful landscapes that they are surrounded by as well as wanting to set an example for the rest of the world. With Ecuador being a biodiversity hotspot, I believe it to be vitally important to protect and use as a model for the rest of the world to follow. If Ecuador can succeed in synthesizing human society with conservation and environmentalism this would be an amazing victory for all. That success would not only show but prove to the world that it is possible to create a paradigm shift and live sustainably. Biodiversity hotspots such as Ecuador are important because they make up less than 3% of the earths land mass worldwide but hold over half of the earth’s biodiversity. While reading about hotspots in outside sources I discovered a quote that helps sum up my thoughts. “Without species, there would be no air to breathe, no food to eat, no water to drink. There would be no human society at all. And as the places on Earth where the most biodiversity is under the most threat, hotspots are critical to human survival.” (conservation.org). This includes the idea that without a healthy planet there will be no society. So, to me it seems that it is a necessity to shift our ways of living to a way that is sustainable. There does not seem to be any other options. Additionally, places of high biodiversity, or the hotspots, seem to be places that have extremes are unique characteristics. This creates places with species that are endemic to an area and therefore a higher priority of protection.

To end this chapter, I wish that the book was not quite so all over the place. Perhaps it is just the nature of the topic, but I feel as though there are subjects that are touched on and then never touched again. Or they get mentioned later on in more detail, but this seems to just make understanding a little more complicated. At least for myself. Ultimately, I am enjoying the book very much. The messages that are presented are ones that make a lot of sense to me and ones that I support. I am looking forward to reading the rest of the book and being able to discuss it with fellow classmates in the future.

# Works Cited

*hotspots, targeted investments in natures most important places* . (n.d.). Retrieved from conservataion.org: https://www.conservation.org/How/Pages/Hotspots.aspx