

Can Yasuní be saved?

A simulation exploring the impact of oil production

Overview





This simulation reproduces a conference held in November 2011, convened by the Ecuadorian government with a view to reaching a decision on whether or not to preserve Yasuní National Park on the basis of a negotiation process. After an introduction, each participant adopts the role of one of the stakeholders involved, representing their position in the discussion. The example of Yasuní provides a window on the dependencies in place in an interconnected world. As a result, participants gain an insight into the economic, ecological and social impacts of oil consumption, and explore the different interests at stake. The search for solutions highlights the inequality of the options available to the different stakeholders involved in global power relations. In the evaluation phase, participants devise their own courses of action.

Instructions

Background

The simulation is based on the real-life issue of Yasuní National Park in Ecuador, reproducing a conference held in November 2011. The conference was convened by the Ecuadorian government to decide on the preservation or destruction of Yasuní National Park following a negotiation process. This rainforest is among the world's ten greatest biodiversity hotspots; however, its soil also harbours 7.2 billion US dollars' worth of oil. Ecuador is an oil-producing country, and cannot afford to simply leave the oil in the ground. Nonetheless, President Correa made a proposal to the UN General Assembly according to which he would forgo oil production in the Yasuní area if the international community paid half the value of the lost revenue into a UN trust fund.

Preserving rainforests and forgoing the use of oil are important fronts in the fight against climate change. The current emissions trading system rewards countries for reforesting a degraded forest – why not also reward a country for leaving its forest alone in the first place? The initiative was supported by the UN, which opened a trust fund for the purpose.

	14-26
	180 minutes
	A4 paper for note-taking, pens, clock, signalling device, props for a conference atmosphere: glasses, drinks, biscuits or similar Downloadable materials (< www.endlich-wachstum.de >): Role allocation cards, role profiles, "Introduction to the scenario" text and PowerPoint presentation, name badges, table name cards, message slips, event cards, layout diagram, information on the current state of affairs
	1 large room, several smaller rooms, 6 to 8 tables arranged in a U-shape.

However, not enough money has been paid in so far, and Correa must decide by the end of the month whether the oil should be extracted or left in the ground. In order to make the decision, Correa has invited key stakeholders to support and advise him.

Role of the facilitators

The facilitators' role is to direct the game, ensuring that it progresses smoothly. To this end it is important to make sure all participants remain in character and comply with the allotted times. Especially in the unofficial rounds, the facilitators should encourage participants to remain in character. They should be on hand during the course of the game to answer any questions, and in particular to support the participants in the role of conference moderators. They should also be in a position to advise the groups with regard to their goals and strategies where necessary. This is best done in the group phases.

Roles - overview

- › Moderators: 2 participants
- › Ecuadorian government: 2-4 participants
- › German government: 2-4 participants
- › Norwegian government: 2-4 participants
- › Ecuadorian NGO: 2-4 participants
- › German NGO: 2-4 participants
- › Oil company: 2-4 participants

Instructions - overview

The game is organised into rounds. To begin with, the groups are formed and a brief outline of each of the roles is given. The groups are given some time to adjust to their roles. 4 playing rounds then take place, each comprising an official round of negotiations (as a plenary session) and an unofficial one (in groups). In the penultimate round of negotiations, the stakeholders have the opportunity to enter into their final agreements. In the final round, the Ecuadorian government announces its decision.

- › Introduction: 30 min.
- › Opening: 10 min.
- › Group phase/strategy-building: 5 min.
- › First round of negotiations: 10-15 min.
- › Group phase/first unofficial negotiations: 10 min.
- › Second round of negotiations: 10-15 min.
- › Group phase/government retires to deliberate, or unofficial negotiations are held: 10 min.
- › Possible third round of negotiations and group phase: 20 min.
- › Final round: 10 min.
- › Break: 20 min.
- › Evaluation: 35 min.
- › Overall time: 180 min.

Detailed instructions

1. Introduction: 30 min.

To begin with, the facilitators briefly outline the scenario, the stakeholders involved and the instructions with the help of the PowerPoint presentation (Materials from the CD: PowerPoint presentation and "Introduction to the Scenario" text). Examining the roles with the help of the presentation makes it easier for the participants to adjust to their respective roles. It is especially important that participants understand the rules of the simulation. (10 min.)

After the introduction, the roles are allocated. Rather than allocating the moderator positions at random, it is a good idea to ask for two volunteers from the group for this demanding task. If no one comes forward, the role can be allocated at random along with the others. The (remaining) roles are allocated to the participants at random, who sit at the corresponding tables. (5 min.)

Once the participants have received their role descriptions, they read them and discuss them in their groups. The facilitators then instruct them to formulate a strategy and choose two chief negotiators for the first round.

In order for the game to get off to a good start, sufficient time should be taken before beginning the first round to ensure that everyone has fully understood the scenario and their group's task. (15 min.)

2. Opening: 10 min.

The moderators now open the conference, and each party briefly introduces itself, describing its position and stating its demands. Once the 10 minute time limit has been reached, the opening round ends.

3. Group phase/strategy-building: 5 min.

After the opening round, the spokespersons return to their groups. Each group then discusses how to proceed in the following rounds of negotiations. Two new spokespersons are chosen. The groups also have the option of approaching each other to conduct unofficial negotiations. The group phase ends after exactly 5 minutes, with the announcement of the start of the next round of negotiations by the moderators.

4. First round of negotiations: 10-15 min.

The negotiations begin immediately, regardless of whether all spokespersons have returned to their places. If unofficial negotiations have already taken place, at the start of the new round the moderators seek to determine what progress has been made. If appropriate, at the end of this round the facilitators can deploy the first event card (Materials: "Event cards"). The moderators conclude the round of negotiations by announcing a "coffee break".

5. Group phase/first unofficial negotiations: 10 min.
Following a brief consultation within each group on how to proceed, the participants mingle at the coffee buffet to conduct unofficial negotiations. These negotiations can also be held in separate rooms designated for this purpose. The coffee buffet should have a different set-up to the seminar so far, in order to preserve the conference setting and help the participants remain in character.

6. Second round of negotiations: 10–15 min.
First of all, the moderators seek to determine what progress has been made in the negotiation progress. There will generally be no concrete results after the first unofficial round of negotiations. At the start of the second round of negotiations, the moderators urge the Ecuadorian government to decide upon a concrete course of action. As a result, for the remainder of the conference the government will follow a particular direction. As it becomes increasingly clear to the remaining parties what the consequences of the Ecuadorian government's potential decision will be for them, they step up their efforts to find alternatives. This dynamic is important to the simulation. It is crucial that the moderators (with the support of the facilitators) encourage the parties to adopt a suitably proactive attitude. The government must come to a decision in the third round at the latest. In order to intensify the negotiation dynamics even further, a second event card can be deployed by the facilitators. At the end of this round, the moderators ask the Ecuadorian government whether it is ready to make a decision, or requires a final round of negotiations. Depending on the reply, the government then retires to make its decision, or further unofficial negotiations are held.

7. Group phase/government retires to deliberate, or unofficial negotiations are held: 10 min.
Depending on how much progress has been made, the government can retire at this point to make its decision. In this case, the following round is the final one. If further negotiations are required, the groups come together again briefly to discuss strategy. They then conduct another round of unofficial negotiations.

8. Possible third round of negotiations and group phase: 20 min.
Possible third round of negotiations and group phase: 20 min.

If the government has not yet been able to reach a decision, a final round of negotiations takes place. Optionally, a third event card can be deployed by the facilitators. The government must then retire in the group phase to make its decision.

9. Final round: 10 min.
At this point, the Ecuadorian government announces its decision. The decision is sealed either by handshake or in writing, signed by the stakeholders. All parties have the opportunity to comment on the decision in a final statement. The moderators then end the conference.

Break: the room should be thoroughly ventilated and the chairs rearranged into a circle. 20 min.

Evaluation

Stepping out of the roles:

For the concluding reflections, it is important for participants to have an opportunity to abandon the roles played during the simulation. This process should once again make it clear that the participants were adopting a personality separate from their own. Some participants may have been made uncomfortable by the relative power/powerlessness of the different roles. Accordingly, this process also provides an opportunity to release pent-up emotions. If appropriate, these activities can take place outdoors.

- › Activity 1: the participants stand in a circle and “take off” their roles like a body suit. They do this by opening an imaginary zip running from the top of their head to the soles of their feet. They then peel away the suit, first from their head, then from their arms and upper body, and finally from their legs. They hold the suit in their hand, and on a signal from the facilitators throw it into the middle of the circle as hard as they can. The participants then shake their body vigorously.
- › Activity 2 (as a complement to Activity 1): all participants stand in a line. On a signal, they start running and shouting at the same time. They shout as loudly as they can and run as far as they can without pausing for breath. When they cannot shout any longer, they remain where they are.

Reflection:

This is followed by a moderated reflection process, for which the participants sit in a circle. The following questions are merely suggestions. Depending on how the discussion evolves, the facilitators can choose particular issues to focus on.

The questions are arranged by topic.

Feelings:

- › How did you feel in your role?
- › What made you feel more/less comfortable?
- › Did you find it easy or difficult to play your role?

Course of events:

- › How did the simulation unfold? What was the (chronological) course of the negotiations? How can this course be explained?
- › Were you able to sufficiently assert the interests of your organisation? Why?
- › Were the different stakeholders equally powerful? Who was able to assert themselves the most? Which positions had the most power? Which were the least powerful?

Outcome:

- › How satisfied are you personally with the outcome? What does the outcome mean for the different stakeholders?
- › What is your assessment of the compromise reached? What made you agree to it in your role?
- › Was it possible to find a good solution at all?
- › What would you personally consider a “just” solution?

Transfer/comparison with real life:

- › Do you think the way in which the simulation unfolded and the solution found are realistic? Where do you see parallels and differences in relation to the real world? (Participants generally want to know how events actually turned out. Information on the current state of affairs (June 2014) can be found in the supplementary material on the CD).
- › What are the power relationships among the groups involved in the real world?

Economic growth:

- › What does this conference have to do with economic growth?
- › What are the arguments given by the various stakeholders for or against economic growth?
- › What arguments might refute these positions?
- › What is the relationship between economic growth and oil?
- › Can the economy grow indefinitely? Why? Why not?
- › What is the goal of economic activity?
- › What ecological limits to growth are you aware of?
- › What other natural resources besides oil are limited and disputed?
- › What are the long-term effects of climate change?
- › What steps can be taken to prevent climate change?

Politics:

- › What part is played by democracy in this simulation?
- › How is power distributed between government and corporations? Why?
- › How much influence is wielded by NGOs and the public?
- › Are you aware of any positive examples of international conventions?

Opportunities for action:

- › What part does oil play in your life? What do we need oil for in our everyday life? (see method “Peak Oil Alarm”)
- › What alternatives are there to oil and other fossil fuels for electricity generation?
- › What can we do to reduce our consumption of resources (energy sources, forests, soil, water, metals, etc.) in order to preserve them for future generations all over the world?
- › What can you do in your environment (e.g. school, work, university, sports club, community...) to reduce energy/resource consumption?
- › What options are available to you to influence your government’s policymaking?
- › What NGOs/associations/youth organisations are you aware of in your city which campaign for the preservation of Yasuní/sustainable energy use/ lower consumption of resources/an economy without growth?

Evaluation of the simulation:

- › How do you feel about the method employed for this simulation?
- › What will you take away with you?
- › What do you think was missing? What else would you like to have learnt/found out?

Evaluation methods

The following methods can be used in the evaluation to add variety and promote the involvement of all participants:

Traffic light feedback

The traffic light feedback method is appropriate for a quick opinion survey that everyone can see the results of, or to kick-start a discussion. Each participant receives a green, a yellow and a red moderation card. They then take a stance on a short statement by placing one of the cards on the floor in front of them. The colours have the following meanings:

- › green: I agree!
- › yellow: I'm not sure.
- › red: I completely disagree!

Participants can express an even wider range of opinions by combining two cards (e.g. green and yellow). After the cards have been shown, participants can also express their opinion verbally and the facilitators can ask follow-up questions.

Position barometer

An (imaginary) line is drawn through the room, the two extremities of which are labelled "Entirely agree" and "Do not agree at all" using cards. Participants can express the extent to which they agree with a statement by positioning themselves along the line. Those who wish to can briefly explain their choice of a particular point on the line. Speaking should be kept to a minimum, with short, concise statements.

Card survey

The card survey is a brainstorming method involving all participants. Each participant receives a flip chart marker and several moderation cards. In response to a given question, participants individually make a note of their answers, questions, ideas, suggestions etc. in keywords. The following rules must be observed:

- › capitals only
- › max. three lines per card
- › only one idea per card

The cards are then displayed on the wall one by one, in clusters according to their thematic focus. The rules for the clusters are as follows:

- › Cards of the same category in one column
- › new category = new column

In the third step, the group discusses and writes down headings for each cluster. This process highlights specific aspects for further discussion.

<p>Tips for facilitators</p>	<p>More eloquent participants are often quick to take on an active role, while less extroverted ones tend to hold back. It might be appropriate to ask the more active participants to support less extroverted ones and give them room.</p> <p>Further information on Yasuní:</p> <p>http://www.saveamericas-forests.org/Yasuni/</p> <p>http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/aug/23/ecuador-yasuni-national-park</p> <p>http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yasun%C3%AD-ITT_Initiative</p> <p>http://www.yasunigreengold.org/</p> <p>http://www.sosyasuni.org/en/index.php</p>
<p>Suggestions for follow-up</p>	<p>If this has not been done already, an in-depth discussion of the ecological limits of growth, particularly with regard to oil, using the method “Peak Oil Alarm” (chapter 2) is a suitable follow-up. The relationship between oil and economic growth can be explored using the method “Growth Timeline” (chapter 2, currently only available in German - see <www.endlich-wachstum.de>).</p> <p>A closer examination of our own role and a discussion of possible courses of action to reduce our oil consumption are also appropriate. The method “Who can change things?” (chapter 5) explores specific opportunities for action in the fields of civil society, economy and politics.</p>