



Connecting Communities  
Protecting the Planet

## Oil Development in the Peruvian Amazon Indigenous Communities Speaking Out

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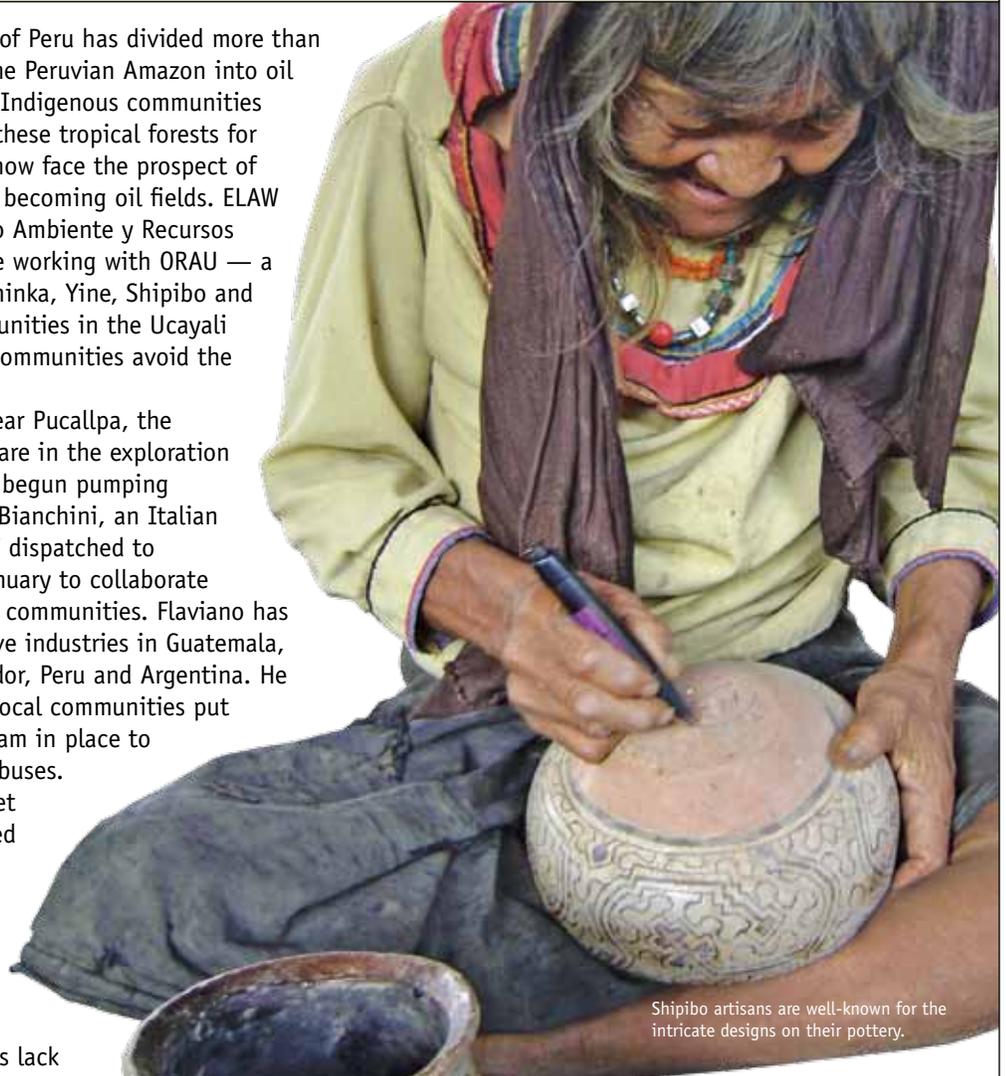
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The Government of Peru has divided more than three quarters of the Peruvian Amazon into oil block concessions. Indigenous communities that have lived in these tropical forests for hundreds of years now face the prospect of their ancient lands becoming oil fields. ELAW partners at Derecho Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (DAR) are working with ORAU — a federation of Ashaninka, Yine, Shipibo and other ethnic communities in the Ucayali region — to help communities avoid the “oil curse.”

“Two oil fields near Pucallpa, the capital of Ucayali, are in the exploration phase and one has begun pumping oil,” says Flaviano Bianchini, an Italian scientist who ELAW dispatched to Pucallpa in late January to collaborate with DAR and local communities. Flaviano has monitored extractive industries in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Peru and Argentina. He will help DAR and local communities put a monitoring program in place to track oil industry abuses.

“The goal is to set up community based monitoring, with easy indicators, so that residents can monitor what is happening, by themselves. Too often, communities lack baseline information about what is actually lost in the search for oil,” says Flaviano, who is spending two months in Ucayali.

“Monitoring does not necessarily require sophisticated scientific equipment,” says Meche Lu, ELAW Environmental Research Scientist. “For example, communities can take note of dump sites, sewers, poaching, leaking pipe lines, and the impacts of increased traffic and human conflicts on the Ucayali River.”



Shipibo artisans are well-known for the intricate designs on their pottery.

**“Working with DAR and ELAW this past two years has helped native communities understand what’s going on and their rights to respond.”**

Felix Roja Silvano, head of ORAU

Many indigenous communities live along the Ucayali River, which flows through Codillera Azul National Park and connects with the Marañón River to form the Amazon

River, the longest and largest river in the world.

“People are concerned about the impacts of extractive industries. There is a lot of tension due to a lack of public participation in decisions being made. The aim is to help communities protect waterways, rainforests, and ancient ways of life, before it’s too late,” says Meche.



Peru’s oil concessions (in green).

## Oil Development (CONTINUED)

**“The aim is to help communities protect waterways, rainforests, and ancient ways of life, before it’s too late.”**

**Meche Lu**  
ELAW Environmental  
Research Scientist



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Cordillera Azul National Park includes pristine tropical forests with dramatic rock escarpments, mountain ridges, lowland valleys, high-altitude lakes, and marshlands. The Peruvian Amazon is the world’s second largest tropical forest, next to the Brazilian rainforest.

Meche traveled to Pucallpa last year to participate in workshops with indigenous leaders. She also reviewed environmental impact assessments for proposed oil projects and environmental quality reports from ongoing oil exploration.

“Workshop participants are now the eyes and the ears of their communities,” says María del Rosario Sevillano, a lawyer with DAR’s indigenous rights program. “They look out for oil spills and health problems in their own communities.”

Felix Roja Silvano, head of ORAU, is worried about the prospect of oil development in the region. “Working with DAR and ELAW this past two years has helped native communities understand what’s going on and their rights to respond. In the coming year we will put a monitoring program in place to protect human rights and the environment of this region.”

Paralegal training for members of indigenous communities in Ecuador has shown promise in preventing environmental abuse from multinational oil companies. Silvana Rivandiera from ECOLEX

in Ecuador traveled to Pucallpa last year to meet with ORAU and share lessons learned training paralegals from indigenous communities in the Ecuadorean Amazon. A representative from ORAU will travel to Ecuador in February to visit communities and see the paralegal program first hand.

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Flaviano Bianchini and staff from DAR: (left to right) María del Rosario Sevillano Arevalo, Flaviano Bianchini, Heidy Flores Pacheco, Asunta Santillan Batra, Irene Ramos Urrutia.

### Big Oil on the Move

The oil industry is looking under every rock and reef for more gas and petroleum. National parks, UN World Heritage sites, pristine forests, coral reefs . . . everything is on the table. ELAW is working with grassroots leaders around the world to help communities speak out about oil development at home. A few examples of this work:

**Uganda & Ghana:** U.K.-based Tullow oil is prospecting for oil in Uganda’s Queen Elizabeth National Park and has struck oil off Ghana’s coast.

**Peru:** The Government of Peru has awarded oil concessions covering most of the Peruvian Amazon.

**Belize:** Oil exploration is proposed for Sarstoon Temash National Park.

**Nicaragua:** Oil companies see this nation as “high-risk high-reward” for oil development.

**Philippines:** Pitkin Petroleum is exploring for oil off Mindoro.

**Bangladesh:** Oil prospecting is proposed for a protected area.

**Trinidad & Tobago:** Oil exploration is approved for offshore Tobago.

**Israel:** Newly discovered gas and oil deposits have been found in the Mediterranean.