

Protecting the Peruvian Amazon

Oil Development Threatens Indigenous Communities

In the city of Pucallpa, on the banks of the Ucayali River, indigenous leaders gathered to discuss the future of lands tagged as oil concessions. "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," says Meche Lu, ELAW Environmental Research Scientist.

Meche traveled to Pucallpa in April to participate in a workshop with leaders from the Yine, Shipibo-Conibo, and other indigenous communities living near Cordillera Azul National Park.

About 75 % of the Peruvian Amazon has been divided into oil and gas concession blocks. Many of these blocks include lands of indigenous communities, protected areas, and protected area buffer zones, including lands in and around Cordillera Azul National Park.

"There are 21 leaders and some had to travel by boat for six days to get here. One boat tipped. Nobody was hurt, but they lost some belongings."

Meche Lu
Pucallpa travel log



Yarinacocha Lake

Communities that have lived in these remote areas for generations are asking for help responding to the arrival of the oil and gas industry. ELAW is working with partners at Derecho Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (DAR) to collaborate with these communities and ensure that oil development in the Amazon does not destroy waterways, the rainforest, biodiversity, and ancient ways of life.

DAR is conducting workshops across the region with local groups, focusing on indigenous and environmental rights related to oil development. The workshop agenda includes sharing community guidelines to better participate in decisions about proposed energy projects, details on the environmental impact assessment process, community based monitoring programs, and the environmental and health impacts of oil and gas development. This work is made possible thanks to a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

Excerpt from Meche's travel log April 15, 2010

I have been in Pucallpa since Monday evening. The workshop is excellent. The staff from DAR are doing an outstanding job. I did three presentations on the health and environmental impacts of oil; environmental impact studies; and community based monitoring.

DAR's team has wonderful techniques for communicating complex environmental law and science topics in ways everyone can understand. In all of the workshops that I've participated in with indigenous communities, these methods are the best.

It is over 100 degrees Fahrenheit – too hot! The city is full of motorcycle taxis and it is an adventure to move around. The Ucayali River, a major tributary of the Amazon, is huge. It is inspiring to see the commitment of these local leaders to defend their social and environmental rights.



At the Pucallpa workshop, participants drew pictures of their ideal village and talked about how things would change if oil companies came.



Left to right: S. Rivadeneira (Ecolex, Ecuador), A. Santillan, M del R Sevillano (DAR), Mayer Sanchez (Diobamba community), Meche Lu (ELAW)