

SUMMARY

Socio-environmental Impact of Mining in the Northwestern Region of Honduras Seen through Three Case Studies

THE REFLECTION, INVESTIGATION AND
COMMUNICATION TEAM (ERIC)
IN COORDINATION WITH THE
COLLEGE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE
OF SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY, MISSOURI



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Introduction

Mining is not new to Honduras, mineral deposits have been commonplace in our territory since colonial times. Although it was abandoned for a while, the mining industry recovered its strength at the end of the 19th century, during the period of liberal reform, and now with renewed strength over the last 25 years.

This activity has generated wealth for foreign investors and a few Honduran families. Nevertheless, for ordinary people, mining has never meant anything more than poverty and conflicts. Today, as in the past, the Honduran state has granted all kinds of privileges to these mining companies, almost always foreign ones, with the vain hope of creating jobs and increasing its revenue through taxes. This economic strategy has proved to be a failure, but our leaders do not learn, or are not interested in learning from experience.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the neoliberal economic model imposed in Honduras by international institutions made it possible for these foreign capitals to unite with local elites. Together they realized that they could obtain large profits from the rivers, forests, the air and the minerals in Honduran territory.

The political parties that run the government as they would their private estate, passed laws that favored this process. This all facilitated the practice of allowing these mining companies to make huge profits from the unlimited exploitation of the common goods that nature gave us, without caring about the human and social costs.

However, things began to take a really ugly turn with the 2009 coup in Honduras. After the coup, state institutions in Honduras became even weaker and more corrupt than they already had been. The bribes and threats against authorities on behalf of powerful political and economic sectors, made it possible for mining to become a booming activity once again.

This development model, which is called **extractivist** (based on the extraction of natural resources) was able to develop itself to the perfection during the government of Juan Orlando Hernández. As the president of congress, and later as the president of the Republic, Hernández passed laws and granted concessions to transnational corporations, without listening to or engaging in dialogue with the citizenry.

This process that ultimately consolidated itself over many years, left us with an extractivist economic model sustained by three pillars: multinational businesses, some national entrepreneurs and a strong, authoritarian government.

Faced with this reality, many women and men are standing their ground. They are aware that public assets belong to all, and need to be protected. However, these people are vulnerable because the State does not defend their rights.

The murder of Berta Cáceres was one of the most well-known and mourned for in the country, but it is just one of a long list of crimes against defenders of the environment and human rights. Dozens of people have suffered persecution over the last years, giving their lives for this cause, which is that of all women and men in Honduras.

ERIC and Radio Progreso, in coordination with the School of Public Health and Social Justice of the University of Saint Louis, Missouri in the United States, carried out an investigation about the mining industry in Honduras, whose results are presented here.

After examining the way in which this new model is affecting the region, we present three summarized case studies, and share a brief analysis of the situation of human security in the communities studied.

These cases allow us to make some conclusions and suggest courses of action that will help us to continue to resist and to search for different development options for Honduras; ones which are compatible with the respect for human rights and the preservation of Mother Earth.

Extractivist Model of Development

1

All human beings want to have a better life. It is a normal and healthy aspiration. We want our descendants to live more comfortably, and most of all, with more opportunities to fully develop their talents and capacities.

There are many ways to work to improve our future. Some are egotistical short-term measures that look beneficial at first glance but make things worse in the long run. However, other people think more about the common good and the benefits for future generations, although it takes longer or demands more effort. **These distinct routes towards improving our lives and futures are called models of development.**

Without a doubt, the extractivist model is a bad model of development. It benefits the few and impoverishes the majority. It consists of using the nation's natural assets, which belong to all people, and selling them to the highest bidder.

Concretely, the entrepreneurs of the extractivist model take large volumes of non-renewable natural resources and they use them to make their businesses grow or they take them to other countries. In exchange, they supposedly create jobs and generate some benefits, but, as it has been demonstrated, these do not compensate for the destruction they leave behind.

One could say that it is **an unsustainable model of development**, meaning, food for today, and famine tomorrow. It makes countries like ours weaker and more dependent on large corporations, and leaves the population more impoverished and divided.

This is the model that has been imposed on countries like Honduras over the last few decades, although it is not new. Many years earlier, the entire American continent, with all



Small scale miner in the Cuculmecca mine, El Corpus, Choluteca.

of its natural wealth, was in the hands of European countries. These countries took great quantities of raw materials that were used for their own development.

In recent years, this badly named “model of development” returned with new vigor, due to the growing need for raw materials across the globe, and their high price on the international market.

However, to return to the core of the problem, we need to look at the main characteristics of the extractivist model of development:

- **Accumulation by dispossession:** for this model to work, companies need complete control over the territory where natural resources are found. To do this, they expropriate the lands from their former owners, which are mostly peasant or indigenous communities.
- **Deterritorialization:** the state ceases to fulfill its duties in certain territories, leaving them in the hands of the foreign countries that want to exploit their natural resources. National laws cease to be in effect in these territories, and the ancestral rights of original peoples disappear.
- **Social fracture:** Companies activate a series of strategies to win over the population's support, giving gifts and promising important benefits. Often, there are divisions in communities. Some people believe that the mining industry will make them less poor, while others oppose it because they fear that it will cause harm to the population in the long run.
- **Inappropriate use of exploitation technologies and methods:** the entrepreneurs often use technologies that multiply their benefits. For example, open-pit mining is very common, despite the serious damage it inflicts on the environment.



Peasants from the Nueva Esperanza community, Atlantida (Photo by Jeremy Zipple).

The Extractivist Model of Development in Central America

During the 1980s, Central America was immersed in severe political and social conflicts that produced repression, armed confrontation and great suffering to the populations. Following those difficult times, some international organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization promoted neoliberal structural reforms in these countries.

According to these institutions, the solution to consolidate peace and to escape poverty was an old recipe that had already proven itself counterproductive: opening to foreign investment to facilitate the exploitation of natural resources. In that manner, the governments of the region signed several free trade agreements, such as the free trade agreement between the United States, Central America and the Dominican Republic (RD-CAFTA).

These international institutions tried to convince us that free trade agreements were good for development. However, they failed to explain that free trade among unequal partners does not benefit everyone equally: it is very beneficial for the strong, and very harmful to the weak, in this case to the Central American countries.

On the other hand, with the signing of these agreements, commercial rights prevailed over human rights. That is to say, whereas the treaties signed by countries on human rights issues lack good mechanisms to ensure compliance, if a country breaches a trade agreement, sanctions are imposed immediately.

As part of this process to favor neoliberal policies, Central America reformed its mining laws. In 1982 Costa Rica passed a new mining law that was reformed again in 2010, and similarly in El Salvador (1995), Guatemala (1997) Honduras (1998 and 2013), Nicaragua (2000), Mexico (2003) and Panama (2011).

The fundamental aspects of these laws are all quite similar. Some examples include:

Mining companies pay lower taxes: between 1 and 3% of their profits.

Companies have greater legal protection for their businesses.

Simplification of the administrative processes to facilitate foreign investments.

Mining companies have fewer obligations with the country and the population.

The reduction of environmental regulations, which means that the companies have less of an obligation to protect the environment.

The use of water and soil is free of cost for the mining companies.

**A New Law
For a New Model**

2

Honduras is a country that is rich in mineral resources. According to specialists, Honduras has a well-developed continental crust, containing diverse minerals such as antimony, iron, mercury, gold, silver, lead and zinc. Additionally, there are important reserves of non-metal minerals such as limestone, marble, gypsum, bentonite, kaolin, pearlite, granite, opals and zeolites.

Between 1987 and 1992 the government made an inventory of existing mining resources to prepare the way for foreign investment. A few years later, in the middle of the reconstruction following Hurricane Mitch, they passed a new law to substitute the 1968 Mining Code. It is said that 155 mining concessions were approved under this law, which represents the exploitation of 35 thousand square kilometers of Honduran territory.

Environmental and social conflict occurred as a result in many places such as Santa Rosa de Copán, El Paraíso, Choluteca and Francisco Morazán. After such high levels of protest and so many problems, in 2004, the government decided to declare a moratorium, meaning the suspension of those concessions until the approval of a new mining law.



Mining company MINOSA, San Andres, La Union, Copan

During the years in which the moratorium was in effect, the extractivist model had faced some setbacks. One could say that the environmental defenders and a different model of development won some important battles. For example, the Supreme Court declared that the Mining Law of 1999 was not constitutional, meaning that it violated some fundamental rights.

Nevertheless, happiness is short lived for the poor, and those wanting a new mining law gained the upper hand with the 2009 coup, after which they imposed a new law that was even more beneficial to foreign investment than the previous one. The new law came into effect in 2013, with the support of countries interested in promoting mining in Honduras such as Canada, Peru, Chile and Germany.

The social discussion on that law – prior to its approval by the government of Porfirio Lobo Sosa – had many irregularities and manipulations. For example, one should point out that Rigoberto Cuéllar, the Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment, coordinated seven workshops to start a social discussion around the law proposal in 2012.

A law is brought for social discussion so that people can speak their mind and have their opinions taken into account. Nevertheless, even though participants expressed their opposition to open pit mining and the use of toxic substances, the law proposal did not incorporate these demands of the citizenry.

The final version of the General Mining Law was passed in 2013, amidst the strong opposition of many sectors of the citizenry and environmental organizations.

In January 2014 the government of Juan Orlando Hernández came to power, and has continued to promote the extractivist model, without taking into account the allegations and the protests of affected communities and the popular movement.

In that manner, in July and August of 2015, the Council for Mining, the Extractive Industry, Trade and Investment (COMICOIN) and the government of Honduras, pushed forward a world meeting in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, which they called “Honduras is Ready for Mining”. Entrepreneurs from the Middle East, China, Africa and South America attended the event, interested in mining investments in the country.

The New Mining Law Safeguards Investments Above Human Rights

A democratic country is mandated to safeguard the rights of the entire population. This is stipulated in the constitution of the Republic of Honduras. Moreover, the Honduran state has also signed international agreements that further commit it to that goal, for example, in 1977, Honduras signed the American Convention on Human Rights and in 1985, it ratified Convention 169 of the ILO about Indigenous and tribal populations.

Convention 169 of the ILO is very important for the mining industry because it establishes that **indigenous peoples have the full right to decide the priorities of their economic, social and cultural development.**

Convention 169 does not oppose progress, however, it conceives development in a way that is very different from those who promote the extractivist model. According to this convention, social progress and economic prosperity are only achievable if the population lives in a healthy environment and their natural goods are managed carefully and responsibly.

The new General Mining Law contradicts Convention 169 and other important international regulations, because it safeguards the legal certainty of investment much more than it does the human rights of the population. That is to say, it puts commercial and business interests above the wellbeing of people.

For example, presumably the Mining Law prohibits mining concessions in protected areas and water producing areas. It stipulates that these areas should be declared and registered in the Catalogue of Inalienable Public Forestry Patrimony and in the Registry for Real Estate.

Therefore, the prohibition does not apply to the mining activities in protected areas that only are only declared as such but have not been registered and recorded as such. This is what happened with the concession given to the El Venado Mine, in the Montaña de Botaderos National Park.

Convention 169 also establishes that every country is obliged to consult with the communities about any project for the exploration or use of the natural resources found in its territories, in order to determine if its interests could be negatively affected. In this sense **prior consultation is fundamental**, it is a valuable tool so that indigenous peoples and any population can defend their legitimate rights and interests.

Nevertheless, the Honduran State is not respecting the right to prior consultation and when this right is violated, conflicts increase and often violence ensues.

**The Response of the Citizenry
to the Extractivist Model**

3

Most men and women in the country agree that the extractivist model has had a direct and indirect effect on our economy and ways of life. However, not all people share the same position on the mining industry.

In this investigation we found three different positions on this issue:

- a) Those who support the mining industry and see it as a source of work and wealth for the country, seeing it as an opportunity to achieve progress that cannot be wasted. Those who feel this way agree with those in the government who seek to facilitate mining investments in Honduras.
- b) Those who take for granted that the mining industry has come to stay, whether or not we like it. They feel that at best, we need to make some reforms to reduce its effects on the environment and make the most of its benefits.
- c) Those who radically oppose any extractive endeavor, convinced that it causes more harm than good. Those with this position believe in models of development that are more humane, sustainable and respectful of the environment.

The Honduran Catholic Church is divided on this conflict and presents two distinct positions. The hierarchy of the church has opted for a reformist position, arguing that the present model of mining exploitation can improve, incorporating reforms and opening spaces for the participation of citizens and humanitarian organizations, to safeguard the benefits for the population and greater control over the companies.

However, there is another sector of the church, such as the Dioceses of Olancho, Choluteca and Atlántida, which stands in opposition to the new Mining Law, perceiving that it harms the population and fails to take into account its desires. These dioceses have participated in mobilizations to demand the prohibition of open pit mining. In this same line, in 2015, the Honduran Religious Conference denounced before the United Nations that:

.... The original peoples have not been consulted about the projects that are being carried out or that are programmed to be carried out in their territories. Multiple concessions have been issued for hydroelectric and mining projects that result in the plunder of territory, directly affecting their subsistence and culture. This has caused acts of resistance from the indigenous and afro-descendent populations, leading to the criminalization and repression of their members which has translated into violent deaths, threats, harassment and criminal charges.

It is also important to point out the role taken on by some social organizations such as ERIC/Radio Progreso, the Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras OFRANEH or the COPINH.

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Coordinator and founding member of COPINH, Berta Caceres, was murdered in March 2016. Just one year earlier, she had received the Goldman Award, the so-called Green Nobel prize. Miriam Miranda of OFRANEH and Father Ismael Moreno of ERIC/Radio El Progreso also received awards.

These international acknowledgements are important because in addition to being a tribute to the efforts of a person and their organization, they also highlight the dignity of a people. Father Melo of the Social and Popular Movement of Honduras stated upon receiving the Rafto Award in 2015:

We also understand that the international acknowledgment of Father Melo underscores the legitimacy of the struggle of millions of Honduran men and women who yearn for a real and profound change in the social, political and economic situation that affects us as a society. It also highlights the justness and the motivations behind the public demand to put an end to the thousands of abuses against the peasantry, indigenous peoples, Garifuna communities, the rural peoples and communities, victims of the voracious interests of the transnational extractive industries in Honduras.



Indigenous mobilization in San Francisco de Locomapa, in defense of common natural goods -- photograph courtesy of MADI).

Case 1. El Venado Mine, Montaña de Botaderos National Park, Municipality of Bonito Oriental, Colón.

The Aguán River crosses a considerable part of the territory of Colón, making it one of Honduras's most productive departments. Nevertheless, very few people benefit from the fertility of the lands. Most of them are large-scale livestock owners and African Palm companies, while most of the peasantry survives by farming the mountainsides.

In order to understand life in the Aguán Valley and the origin of the social conflicts there, one should remember that the Law to Modernize and Develop the Agricultural Sector was passed in 1992. In practical terms, this law was the final blow against the attempted agrarian reform efforts of the 1970s.

From the 1990s onward, peasants were pressured by Palm entrepreneurs to sell their lands. More than 20 thousand hectares, belonging to 45 cooperatives, went to the hands of three estate-owners: Miguel Facussé (12,000 hectares), René Morales (5,000) and Reynaldo Canales (2,000).

The struggle for land has led to permanent conflict that has caused significant violence and constant human rights violations in recent years. In this context, three social organizations have become notable for their accompaniment of social struggles: The Coordinator of Popular Organizations of the Aguán, COPA, the San Alonso Rodriguez Foundation and the San Isidro Labrador Parish.

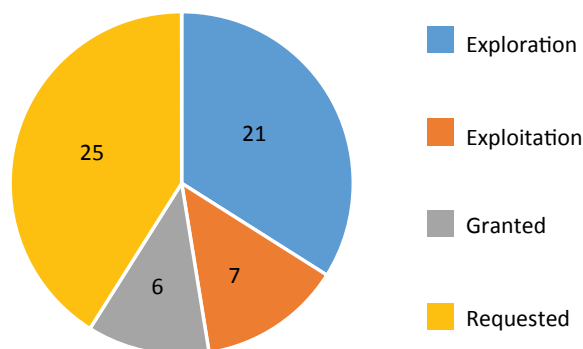
These organizations have maintained a constant struggle against injustice and impunity, thereby ensuring that such tragic events, such as the murder of Carlos Escaleras, one of the first environmental martyrs, or the unjust imprisonment of Chabelo Morales, are not forgotten. These organizations also struggle for the defense of natural goods, opposing the large-scale hydroelectric dam and mining projects in Colón.

According to the Honduran Institute of Geology and Mines, INGEOMIN, in 2015 there were 59 mining concessions in the Department of Colón, of which 34 are found in the municipality of Tocoa: 25 are in the request stage, 21 in exploration, 6 that have been granted the right to exploit and 7 in the exploitation stage. In total, more than 5% of the Department of Colón and one third of the Municipality of Tocoa are currently undergoing processes of exploitation by mining companies.

Concessions in the department of Colón

Municipality	Total concessions	Hectares per municipality
Balfate	1	600
Bonito Oriental	2	1,100
Iriona	4	1,717.7
Limón	2	2,000
Sabá	6	5,900
Santa Fe	1	800
Sonaguera	2	1,200
Tocoa	34	30,300
Trujillo	7	3,200
Grand total	59	46,817.70

Status of the concessions in the department of Colón



Many of these concessions have been temporarily halted due to the decline in the prices of raw materials. Nevertheless, investors continue their investigations to obtain information that can help them make decisions.

In accordance with the information they have, the mining entrepreneurs adopt strategies to get close with the communities to “buy out” the will of those living there. According to our investigation, the mining corporations continue to follow a four-step process to seduce local populations.

- The first step is to send messengers to prepare the terrain. Their mission is to soften the population and convince people that the mining company will bring development to the communities.
- The second step is to weave alliances with local authorities and invite them to participate in their strategies to get closer to the communities.

- The third is to visit the communities to give them food, shoes, notebooks, etc.
- The fourth and last step is to appear before the community to present more ambitious proposals: the creation of jobs, fixing the highway, etc.

Admittedly, part of the population resists these promises. However, there are many needs, and some believe the messages given by the mining magnates, and others, and succumb to blackmail or pressure, hoping to improve their situation. As one woman-leader said:

There are times that part of the population is in agreement, because sometimes there are community leaders who present these mining exploitation projects or the concession projects as being hugely beneficial. In that manner, they are coopted into supporting. We say that poverty makes it possible for them to buy off consciences.

According to our study, 7 of every 10 Tocoa inhabitants is in disagreement with mining and 63.5% of the population believes that it does not bring benefits. However, opinions are evidently divided, to such an extent that in the community of Abisinia, several leaders even threatened the parish priest of Tocoa because he had been denouncing the harms of mining. Cesar Obando, one of Radio Progreso's correspondents, and other community leaders of the Sabá municipality were also threatened.

Local authorities from Colón have also become allies of the transnational companies. Some military personnel are also allies, and come in to buy allegiances by giving gifts, a practice that is becoming the norm.

Colonel Alfaro was always getting his sweet fritters, or soups, and the shortening and other provisions from the transnational companies. He used a woman, Geraldina Cerrato, the coordinator of the Municipal Office on Women's Issues, and presented her as a leader of the communities. He didn't come to wage a war in the Aguán, but to get a reputation for giving away food, shortening, pencils, and by using money, medical brigades, and he was the facilitator of the mining companies in the region.

The government has allowed for the mining exploitation of lands from the Montaña de Botaderos National Park, which had been declared a protected area in 2011 by the Forestry Conservation Institution (ICF), due to the importance of the preservation of its ecosystem for the sustainable development of local communities.

However, as stated earlier, the new mining law makes it possible to give away protected lands in concession, even when it is known that mining activities entail deforestation and water contamination. Logically, almost 80% of the people interviewed in this investigation stated that the ravines are drying up.

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El Venado is the most well-known of the mines of this natural park, and is the one that has sparked more controversy. It is found in the municipalities of Gualaco and San Esteban, department of Olancho and part of Bonito Oriental.

This mine closed in 2014, leaving many workers unpaid, and severe water contamination that affects many communities to date.

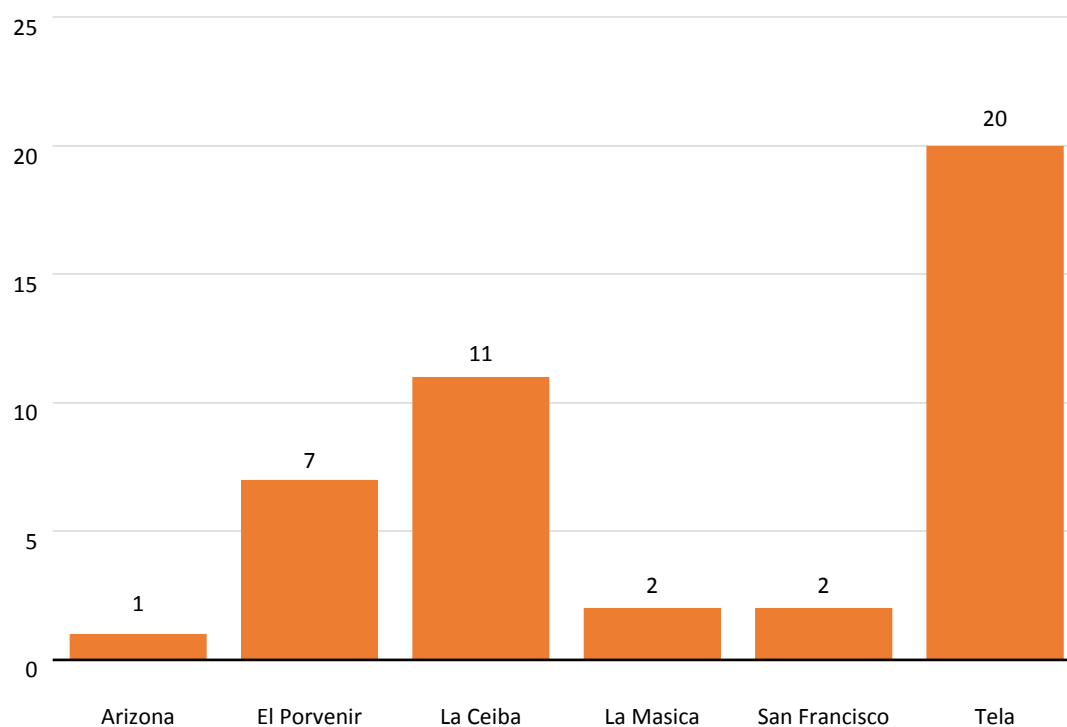


The effects of drought in on lands exploited by mining companies.

Case 2. Mining in Nueva Esperanza, municipality of Tela, Atlántida

The department of Atlántida is known for its abundant water resources and diverse flora and fauna. This wealth of natural resources is under threat now: six of its eight municipalities are homes to the 43 mining concessions registered in this department. The highest levels of conflict occurred in the municipality of Tela, concretely in the Florida Sector, where there are 16 communities

Concessions by municipality



State of the mining concessions

State	Quantity
Exploration	13
Exploitation	13
Request	17
Total	43

The conflict began in July 2012, when the Minerales Victoria Corporation, which belonged to the Honduran businessman Lenir Perez, obtained a one-thousand-hectare concession of lands between the Nueva Esperanza and Yusa communities in the sector of Florida, for use in the open-pit mineral extraction of construction materials.

This concession was plagued with irregularities, and was carried out behind the backs of the population. First, exploitation activities were carried out despite the fact there was only an exploration license, and the company fenced off lands, cut trees and made roads, which caused a significant impact on water sources.

It is important to clarify that in order to grant the permit for exploration, the Secretariat for Natural Resources and the Environment, SERNA, needs to issue an environmental license, which requires an environmental impact study that should be brought to the population for social discussion.

However, according to the community, this study was never made known. They tried to carry out a consultation with the community when it was too late, when the exploration was already well advanced. The mining law is unclear on this aspect, which is detrimental to the rights of the population. Without a doubt, carrying out a consultation with communities at such a late stage is a trap, when everything is already in place and the harms are already starting to become evident.

On the other hand, although they gave a concession for non-metal mining, which has fewer requirements and environmental controls, everything indicates that the entrepreneur's idea was to implement metal mining. The law allows for this change in types of concession through a simple administrative process. Nevertheless, there is a significant difference between them, since metal mining consumes larger quantities of water and causes more contamination.

When the communities of Nueva Esperanza discovered that exploration was taking place, they realized that it represented a serious threat to the quantity and quality of the community's water, meaning a threat to their livelihood. Almost 70% of inhabitants lack a water project, meaning that they obtain water directly from the source through pipes connected to the springs.

According to a poll we carried out during this investigation, 93% those interviewed in Nueva Esperanza, feel that the mining projects cause environmental problems and 89% oppose these projects. This is a community that is very aware of the harmful effects of mining:

Several people from the community are knowledgeable of mining issues and are aware that these projects contaminate. In addition to what people have studied, they simply feel have this gut feeling that these projects are harmful, and have never led to benefits at any time, or in any place.

Despite the fact that the entrepreneur carried out an intense campaign to “flirt” with the community, promising jobs, salaries and motorcycles for young people, only 3 of the 45 families living in Nueva Esperanza and some activists from the Partido Nacional were involved in the exploratory activities or sided with them. In that context, the entrepreneur advanced to another phase:

When [Lenir] saw that he couldn't [convince us], he looked for the phone numbers of all of the presidents and vice presidents of Community Councils and began to call each of them to make offers, saying that it wasn't a bribe, just a little help. Some received 10 thousand lempiras, others 20 thousand and he even promised some people 100 thousand lempiras.

Some young people were also manipulated, to harass those opposing the project in exchange for drugs. This didn't make the conflict worse because most people were clearly opposed to mining, although a division formed that left a scar:

One of the major problems were the conflicts that it caused on a family level: some might be in favor and others against it, and this was the beginning of the problems it generated. The division extended itself to the communities, because some believed that implementing mining in the community wouldn't affect them in the least.



Members of the Nueva Esperanza community (Atlántida), on their way to the area where Lenir Perez's iron oxide mine would be exploited. Photo: Jeremy Zipple

Sectors of the Catholic Church and community members organized in the Broad Movement for Dignity and Justice (MADJ) were especially active in opposing the project. It was a long struggle in which the President of the Community Council, García Fúnez, as well as César Alvarenga and the Parish Priest César Espinoza, were targets of pressure by the entrepreneur and mayor of Tela, David Zaccaro, who supported the mining entrepreneur from early on.

Everyone knows what that mayor who left Tela, David Zaccaro did with the communities.... He received about seven million Lempiras in order to convince the communities. That entrepreneur got together with the mayor and even went to the head of the police, Commissioner Paz Murillo, and he gave them all money.

The Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (CIDH), granted precautionary measures for Fúnez and Alvarenga, after they presented complaints and failed to be protected by Honduran authorities. Other people faced criminalization, being forced to regularly report to the police in Tela. Some police officers even threatened the radio-journalist Leonardo Amaya.

As the community's opposition increased, the threats and harassment became more severe. For that reason, the Regional Community Council of the Florida Sector chose to visit the director of INHGEOMIN, Aldo Santos. Although he acknowledged that there were irregularities, he tried to wash his hands and blame SERNA for failing to create a social discussion around the environmental license. Nevertheless, INHGEOMIN is directly responsible for the compliance with regulations to protect, restore and sustainably manage the environment.

As the situation got worse, the Community Council requested the mediation of the Bishop from La Ceiba, Monsignor Lenihan, and of the National Commissioner for Human Rights. During the month of April of 2013, there were two attempts to establish a dialogue between the parties to find a peaceful solution to the conflict, but without results. Once again, there were acts of intimidation and threats against community members.

At some moments, there was a virtual “state of siege”, which brought about severe consequences such as the suspension of school for several months. Many people who had been threatened were forced to abandon the community, leaving for other areas of the country or the United States. Testimonies evidence the environment of anxiety and intimidation that existed:

We lived in fear, there would be shots in the middle of the night, there were armed men and they hid close to our homes.

Such was the tension that on July 25 2013, a mission from the International Accompaniment Project-Honduras (PROAH) made up of the Swiss man Daniel Langmeier and the French woman Orlane Vidal, were intercepted and temporarily kidnapped by heavily armed men, to terrorize these activists.

This criminal operation was led by Wilfredo Fúnez, in charge of the security at the Victoria Minerals corporation. One year later, Fúnez was tried and imprisoned for committing the crimes of deprivation of liberty, forced entry and duress against the two international observers.

Finally, on August 30 2014, after a town hall meeting in which the population expressed in mass their opposition to mining operations, the Municipal Corporation of Tela declared that the communities of the Florida Sector produced water and should be exempt from any mining exploration or exploitation.

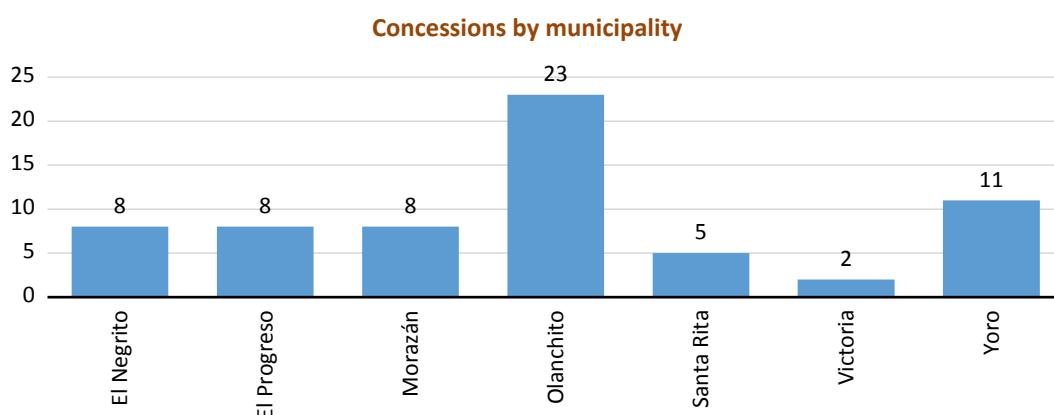
This is an important triumph for a community that resisted mining against wind and tides. However, they must not lower their guard. In 2014, many communities received letters from the Honduras Mining Company owned by Gustavo Urrutia, who requested the right of way for a mining project proposed for the village of El Carmen which is found next to Nueva Esperanza. The community put out the alerts once again, and placed a sign at the entrance to town that said **“Water and territories belong to the people”**.



On August 30 2014, the 16 communities from the Sector Florida said NO TO THE MINING COMPANIES in a town-hall meeting convoked by the municipal corporation of Tela, which had to comply with the decision (photo courtesy of MADJ).

Case 3. The Tribe of San Francisco of Locomapa, Department of Yoro,

There are 65 mining concessions in the Department of Yoro, counting those requested and approved. One third of these are found in the municipality of Olanchito, and then in the municipality of Yoro. This investigation focused on San Francisco de Locomapa, in the Municipality of Yoro, an area inhabited by the Tolupán people.



State of the concessions

State	State account
Exploration	11
Exploitation	16
Granted	1
Requested	37
Total	65

The Tolupáns are indigenous peoples comprised of 31 tribes who live in the departments of Francisco Morazán and Yoro. Although they have settled on lands that are rich in natural resources for centuries, their living conditions are very precarious. According to the information gathered for this study, over the last year, 73.4% lacked sufficient resources to eat varied and nutritious food, 100% had no medical insurance and 96.7% lacked electricity in their homes.

In San Francisco de Locomapa the conflicts began when the municipality and the Institute for Forestry Conservation approved a plan for forestry management and antimony extraction from Tolupán territory, without consulting the population. These activities are causing environmental damage that translate into deforestation and the contamination of water sources:

Some 20 years ago, the water flow was strong in the Locomapa River, but with all of the deforestation that has taken place, its level has gone down considerably. We used to have to take off our shoes to cross it, but today we can just hop across thanks to the felling of trees.

The communities most affected by the reduction of their water sources are the Cabeza de Vaca II, Sinaí, Ojo de Agua, Palmar and Linda Vista. The effects of extractive activities are further aggravated by the impact of climate change. In 2015, due to the El Niño phenomenon, the drought continued, meaning that there was no corn harvest, and there was only one bean harvest. This has all led to increased awareness of the effects of antimony extraction:

For example, security measures are not taken during antimony exploitation, wherever they cut the rock, they leave it lying there, and when it rains, it dirties the water that then contaminates clean waters. When I worked for one Company, they would brainwash us, saying that the activities weren't going to cause harms but at the end, one winds up realizing that this type of badly managed exploitation leads to the deterioration of many things, for example: It kills animals living on the ground and corn and beans fail to grow.



The wake for Maria Enriqueta Matute, Armando Funez Medina and Ricardo Soto Funes, Tolupán indigenous people who were murdered during a protest against mining and forestry exploits in their territory.

The Tolupán people opposed extractive activities from the beginning, which led to the immediate intervention of the judicial system and state security. In 2010, eight indigenous leaders were imprisoned because they opposed the forestry management plan of the Velomato Logging industry, which belongs to Kenton Gerardo Landa. Charges were held against them for two years, even when the Appeals Court of San Pedro Sula finally acknowledged that Convention 169 of the ILO supported their right to consultation.

Nevertheless, violence increased and assassinations took place in a climate of total impunity. On August 25, 2013, María Enriqueta Matute, Armando Fúnez Medina and Ricardo Soto Fúnez were murdered with firearms after twelve days of a peaceful highway- takeover protest to prevent the extraction of rocks containing antimony and wood from their communal lands.

On December 19, 2013, the CIDH (IACHR) granted precautionary measures for 38 people, while many more were forced to leave the area. That is what happened to Consuelo Soto, and despite these measures, her husband was murdered on April 4, 2015.

For the most part, the population lives in fear due to the constant presence of armed groups in the area:

Yes, there are always problems and one has to be very careful when speaking about it because when they find out that you're talking about these things they get furious and they are very dangerous people. They have violated our rights in the sense that they refuse to take our opinion into account and when these people want to do their things, they don't respect the rest of us and it is a violation of human rights because every living being has the right to defend and care for the resources that God gave us.

This problem has caused division in the communities, since some people, including members of the executive committees, are involved in the extraction and selling of minerals:

It is useless to be struggling for land if we indigenous people are also causing ourselves harm because we are selling the land to other people who aren't from here.

Due to the corruption that became evident in the leadership of the tribe, the MADJ pushed forth the creation of preventive councils that seek to oversee the activities of these leaders. The division has become more than evident:

The problem in the tribe is serious, there is a division between them: there is a group that they call the preventers, who are those who are preventing the problems, and then there is the Tribal Council, where a lot of money is passed around, and there are dangerous people.

Despite the fact that all of these things have been denounced through the media and to the authorities, the government has not carried out adequate investigations, and has failed to punish those who are materially or intellectually responsible. Similarly, they have failed to take the necessary actions to protect the Tolupán people.

MADJ has documented and denounced the sad role played by the police who, instead of defending the rights of the indigenous people as they should, have sided with the groups that extract and commercialize antimony, and from whom they receive bribes.

The Municipality of Yoro is also responsible for these incidents. Instead of monitoring that illegal activities cease to occur, they granted transportation permits to those who illegally move the antimony.

In summary, the roots of the problem suffered by this community can be summed up in three aspects:

- The authorities' lack of respect of the Tolupán people's right to consultation on any plan or project that is intended to be carried out on their lands.
- The weakness of institutions that should supervise and oversee extractive activities in a permanent and efficient manner.
- Impunity for the violation of human rights committed against this people.

Mining and Human Security

4

We use the concept of **human security** to carry out an in-depth examination of the impact of mining activities in the communities. This concept differs from that of military and police security, as it focuses on the reality lived by people every day, especially in terms of **economic security** (having work, earning a living); **food security** (having sufficient, nutritious food to eat every day); and **health security** (wellbeing in general and access to health services); **environmental security** (clean water, live forests and lands and air free of contamination); and **personal security** in the family and the community, as well as security as citizens vis-a-vis the government and the state.

Surveys were administered to 266 homes: 189 in La Abisinia, 33 in Nueva Esperanza and 44 in San Francisco Locomapa, representing a total of 1,069 people in all of the homes surveyed. Most participants identified themselves as Ladinos or Mestizos (47.6%) or Tolupán indigenous peoples (23.8%).

The results allow us to conclude that the people from La Abisinia, Nueva Esperanza and San Francisco Locomapa face high levels of human insecurity in all aspects of their lives: food, water, land, work and health. Moreover, they have also been direct victims of the violence committed by the state and organizations linked to the companies that push forth the mining, hydroelectric and African Palm plantation projects.

Human insecurity is also evident in the fact that almost all of the surveyed population (92.8%) belong to the poorest social sectors in Honduras, with 78.6% reporting the lack of sufficient food (and insufficient money to purchase more) to feed their families during the last year.

Very few fathers (16.5%) and mothers (23.8%) finished grade school. Some went to high school but didn't finish it. Most (56.8%) work in agriculture, which indicates the importance of land for the production of food for family consumption and to sell in the markets.

There are no health centers in two of the communities (Nueva Esperanza and San Francisco Campo). Most of the population has to travel long distances to get medical care. Of all of the mothers and fathers surveyed, only one reported having health insurance.

There is significant concern for water supplies, with 71.4% of the survey population stating their concern about the ravines that are drying up, and that there are no longer forests that produce water. Two communities (La Abisinia and Francisco Campos, Locomapa) have water systems that use tanks and pipes but one community, Nueva Esperanza only has pipes connected to watersheds.

The water used for human consumption is not purified. This is evident in the results of the exams for coliform bacteria (an indicator of water quality). Of 136 water samples from homes, 128 resulted positive for coliform bacteria (94%) and only 8 negative. (The United States Environmental Protection Agency's has a zero-level standard for coliform bacteria in water for human consumption.)

SUMMARY

Socio-environmental Impact of Mining in the Northwestern Region of Honduras Seen through Three Case Studies

With the participation of the communities, the water quality of seven watersheds was also evaluated. This evaluation included the measurement of acidity, hardness, chlorine, nitrates, ammoniac and iron and the presence of microorganisms in the water (only certain types of microorganisms can survive in uncontaminated water). The results of this evaluation showed that with the exception of coliform bacteria, all of the watersheds continue to have good water quality levels. Nevertheless, the principal threat to that water quality is deforestation and mining concessions.

Conclusions and routes of action



Many times, the communities that oppose mining activities have been accused of being against development or progress. However, this is not true. They want to improve their lives but not at just any cost. They demand respect for their rights and that some key issues be taken into account.

First of all, they want respect for the right to consultation; secondly, they want the approval of mining concessions to occur after an independent and trustworthy environmental impact study has been carried out; and third, they would like to receive reasonable benefits from the projects that are approved.

1) Right to consultation

In order for the consultation to be a truly effective mechanism that prevents the violation of the rights of people, various conditions or principles need to hold true:

- ▶ **Good faith:** The consultation should be carried out in a climate of trust and respectful dialogue, with the clear intention of taking the opinion of those consulted into account.
- ▶ **Prior consultation:** The timing of consultation is key. Consulting at the end of a long process is not the same as doing it during the early stages and with sufficient information.
- ▶ **Freedom:** When communities are told to choose between development or continuing in poverty, they are being coerced or pressured, thereby violating their free will to decide. On the other hand, one cannot condition a population's access to basic services (that are the country's responsibility with its population) to their decision on this matter.
- ▶ **Information:** during these consultations the population should receive complete information which should include:
 - a. The nature, scale, impact and reach of the project;
 - b. The logic or objective of the project;
 - c. The justification;
 - d. The project's duration and time-frame;
 - e. The places and areas that will be affected;
 - f. The evaluation of the probable economic, social, cultural and environmental impact;
 - g. Possible risks and benefits;
 - h. Elements of possible displacement.

2) Prior and trustworthy Environmental Impact Study

The study of social and environmental impact should be carried out by an independent organization with sufficient technical capacity, under the supervision of the state. The study should measure the impact that the mining project could have in various aspects: social, cultural, spiritual and environmental.

It is obligatory to carry out this study prior to giving a concession. Moreover, this information should be given to the community immediately, since it is an element that will enable them to judge how they may be affected by the project.

In no case should the state approve a mining project that endangers the physical or cultural survival of a community.

3) A reasonable benefit

Through the prior consultation the community should be informed of the benefits that the mining exploits would bring and the possible reparations that would exist in the event of environmental harms. These benefits should not be the basic social services that the state is obliged to provide such as health centers, schools, electrification projects or roads.

Courses of Action

It is clear that far from bringing prosperity and development to Honduras, the extractivist model has only caused endless problems such as the following:

- Serious human rights violations.
- The impoverishment and an accelerated deterioration of natural resources and the livelihoods of the communities.
- An increased weakening of the state in fulfilling its obligations to protect the fundamental human rights of the population.
- Greater corruption and impunity.
- Division of the citizenry.

Faced with this situation, we are in the need and obligation to find alternative development courses. As a means to think through this problem and to seek solutions for it, we propose the following courses of action:

- 1) The need to push forth legislative and institutional reforms that safeguard the fundamental rights of indigenous and peasant populations as well as the rights of the population in general, above the specific interests of companies. Among other things, these reforms should prohibit extractive activities in indigenous territories, areas for natural reserves, water-producing areas, sacred patrimony and patrimony of humanity, population centers and areas destined for use in agriculture and forestry.
- 2) There have been interesting experiences with the participation of women and youth in Nueva Esperanza and San Francisco de Locomapa, which should be studied in detail to obtain useful lessons for popular resistance.
- 3) It is necessary to have in-depth understanding of other models of development that are alternatives to the extractive industry. Opposing the mining industry does not suffice. We need creative and innovative proposals guided towards improving the population's living conditions.



Municipality of Arenales, Santa Barbara declares itself free of mining exploitation.

- 4) The state should be required to fulfill its duties to safeguard the rights of all people, including those who are threatened when they defend natural resources and the environment.
- 5) The struggle of men and women to defend their territories and their natural resources has strengthened in Honduras, due to community organization among other things. However, it is necessary to increase efforts to highlight the harms caused by this model, as well as the complicity of many authorities in public administration.
- 6) The rights of the population are above the rights derived from the contracts signed between the state and mining entrepreneurs. The rights of the population are basically two: the right to care for, use and enjoy their common natural assets and the right to prior and sufficient information on the projects intended for implementation.
- 7) It is pertinent to denounce the manipulative strategies with which the mining companies and authorities attempt to win over the will of the population. The improvement of social services such as health and education, are the responsibility of the state and not of other actors that offer these services in exchange for mining concessions.
- 8) Valuing nature such as the “Mother Earth” is part of a way of thinking of the indigenous and Garifuna communities. These concepts should be strengthened as a means to face the predatory capitalism that threatens humanity and puts the planet at risk.
- 9) According to the NGO Global Witness, Honduras is the most dangerous place in the world for environmental defenders. It is calculated that over the last years, more than one hundred people have been murdered for defending their territories and common natural assets. These crimes are not isolated cases. They form part of a strategy to destroy the opposition to mining and hydroelectric projects.
- 10) It is important that national and international pressure force the state to uphold its duty to protect and not criminalize those who defend the environment.
- 11) The international community can play an important role, supporting the actions of environmental defenders and demanding the respect for their integrity and rights.



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