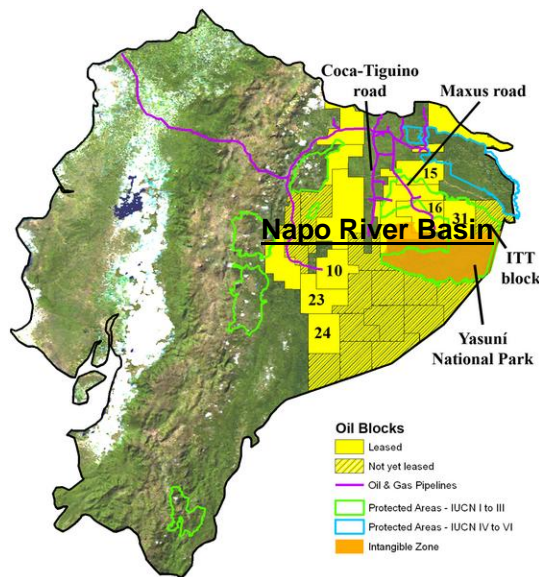


Abstract: Using Language to Study Conflict Resolution within Indigenous Family Units of Eastern Ecuador.

Background

The western Amazon is the most biologically rich part of the Amazon basin and is home to a great diversity of indigenous ethnic groups, including some of the world's last peoples living



in voluntary isolation. Unlike the eastern Brazilian Amazon, it is still a largely intact ecosystem. Underlying this landscape are large reserves of oil and gas, many yet untapped. The growing global demand is leading to unprecedented exploration and development in the region, impacting the local cultures. We asked, how is the increase in oil exploration and subsequent employment opportunities, while

simultaneously compromising environmental values and ability to use their native land, sparking present and future conflicts within the traditional family unit?

Methodology/Principal Findings

We started with a study of their family values through linguistic indicators, a full linguistic course in Quichua, and in-depth interviews. Participant-observation activities and contextual studies revealed many of the male family members had worked or were working for foreign oil companies exploring energy opportunities in their region. The work of these oil companies, and therefore the family members involved, directly harmed the environment, crop production, and property value of the communities. However, even though extended family units are traditionally very close, the anger/frustration/sadness caused by the oil exploration was not transferred to the employees. They understood that it was a source of income, and did not hold community members in contempt for it.

Conclusions/Significance

As the demand for oil directly intensifies the harmful extraction and development within indigenous Napo communities, the dynamism of the family unit will be in constant test. Pressure from globalization, including language barriers between family members, make conflicts more difficult to define and resolve. Quichua is quickly being formalized into a written language in order to preserve current negotiations for future generations. This is one way that indigenous cultures are preparing for the inevitable tests of globalization.

