

FALL 2015

ReVista

HARVARD REVIEW OF LATIN AMERICA

ENERGY

OIL, GAS AND BEYOND



Oil, Gas and Beyond

I was waiting for the ship to come in. In fact, so was everyone else in Nicaragua. Gas lines stretched around the block. The supermarket shelves were nearly bare. Lights went out again and again, plunging the country into frequent darkness. Telex machines couldn't work, and we reporters had to depend on the few places with generators to file our stories (for younger readers, this was pre-computer and smart phones). U.S. President Ronald Reagan had imposed a trade blockade on Nicaragua in May 1985. The Soviets were sending oil, dodging the blockade.

We reporters did what we always do: we reported on the ship's arrival. But we also breathed a collective sigh of relief. The arrival of the Soviet ship meant hot showers and light to read by.

Energy is intensely political. It shapes nations and trade and fuels wars and blockades. Energy, I discovered then, is also intensely personal. It shapes our lives on a daily basis. It's not only a matter of how we get around or whether we have enough food to eat; energy production affects the communities that receive it and those that produce it. It shapes attitudes toward gender and race and nationalism and identity. It pollutes the air and the rivers. It offers immense economic opportunities. Or it does both.

You might not think of Latin America and the Caribbean right away as a big energy producer or consumer. But Venezuela stands ninth in global oil production with gas reserves almost triple those of Canada. Three countries—Venezuela, Brazil, and Mexico—account for about 90 percent of the region's oil production. And Latin America and the Caribbean also have the capability to provide abundant alternative and renewable energy sources: wind, solar, geothermal and biomass, among others.

Perhaps because of my experience in Nicaragua, I started to conceive this issue in terms of meta-politics. And there is certainly a lot of politics related to energy in the region: the political upheaval of Brazil as a result of corruption scandals in the national oil company; the turmoil in oil-rich Venezuela; the impact of the semi-privatization of Mexico's oil industry; the targeting of Colombia's energy installations by guerrilla forces in a show of strength in the context of the ongoing peace process.

But then I thought back on how the arrival of oil had been experienced on a very local and personal level. I began to hear stories about the production of energy: what it felt like to grow up in an oil camp, how energy production affects indigenous women in one particular region, how local communities involve themselves in deciding what is done with oil.

And just recently Alvaro Jiménez, Nieman Affiliate at Harvard '09, happened to mention to me that he was starting a website "Crudo Transparente," a site that monitors the Colombian oil industry. Out of curiosity—and as a quick break from proofreading this issue—I took a peek. The site focuses on five areas: local economy, contracts and royalties, environment, security and human rights and ethnic conflicts. I was pleased to see how much overlap there was with the themes I had chosen for this issue of ReVista.

Although the website deals with only one country—Colombia—it felt like an affirmation of the focus I had chosen for this wide-ranging topic. Energy is political. Energy is personal. Energy matters.

June C. Erlick

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Petrobras Oil Platform
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In the Shadows of the Extractive Industry

A Hard Road for Indigenous Women

BY NELLY LUNA AMANCIO

A TELLTALE DETAIL GAVE AWAY THE CHANGING way of life for the indigenous Machiguenga women living around Peru's most important gas project in the Cuzco Amazons: they had stopped harvesting yuca. Why bother planting the traditional tuber that was the mainstay of their daily diet if they could simply buy it at one of the dozens of little shops that had sprung up around the Camisea gas project installations? Indeed, why bother with yuca when one could easily buy rice? "If yuca is needed, you just buy it," Eulalia Andrés Incacuna, an indigenous woman from the Kirigueti community, told us in 2006, when we first went to the far-flung villages two years before the gas project actually began full operations.

This change in food habits reflected new forms of economic exchange accompanying the Peruvian gas project operated by the private company Pluspetrol. Nine years later, health clinics in the zone report a statistical increase in chronic cases of malnutrition and sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV infection; alcohol consumption is also on the rise and often translates into domestic violence. In spite of the millions of dollars in royalties paid to the Peruvian state, the quality of life of the indigenous population—and especially that of women and children—has not





Previous page: Leslie Searles makes a portrait of a woman preparing yuca, the traditional staple dish. Above: A woman gently washes her newborn.

improved.

Observing the effect of the extractive industries on indigenous women in the Amazons, Peru's Vice Minister of Interculturality, Patricia Balbuena, asserts that "it is harder for women [than for men] to adjust to the changing forms of production that the extractive industry has brought to the Amazon regions, and this ultimately influences gender relations. The firms hire men who then acquire goods that displace women from their traditional routines," observed the vice-minister, a lawyer with expertise in gender, development and demography.

Men no longer hunt nor fish nor dedicate themselves to agriculture. The economy of the family is greatly altered. It goes from being a money-free economy to a highly monetized one with all the social impacts that one can imagine. In her investigation, "Ideas about Progress in Indigenous Wage Workers: The Case of the Machiguengas and the Camisea Gas Project," sociologist Cynthia del Castillo warns that communal indigenous life has been completely altered by alcohol use. "Tensions surround the adoption of new practices and attitudes with the introduction of a monetized

currency, as revealed in extensive interviews. We are referring to excessive beer consumption. The fact that not all the persons interviewed were willing to talk about the subject made the tension visible and, paradoxically, underlined the conscious secrecy surrounding this subject," she observes.

HYDROCARBONS, WOMEN AND TERRITORY

What happens in the Cuzco jungles is repeated with different nuances throughout the Amazon regions of South America. In the last fifteen years,

carbon concessions are located in titled indigenous lands, generating social conflicts with the local population. In some regions affected by the contamination of years of oil extraction, such as Loreto, indigenous women have organized and brought their complaints and demands to United Nations officials. "They have asserted that the contamination affects women in particular because of the changes brought about by the quality and availability of water, the effects on cattle raising (the only source of work for many women) and the negative effects on family health," indicated a 2013 report by the former UN Special Rapporteur for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, James Anaya.

The social impacts of the extractive industries are complex, but seldom studied. "The extractive industry modifies gender relationships. They pay the workers well, but women have very little say in the use of this money," Balbuena explains. Excluded from decision making, the indigenous woman becomes a passive subject of the impact of the extractive industries and the resulting social change.

The extractive industries affect indigenous women in many ways. "Water pollution is one of the main concerns of the indigenous women. With the loss of quality of this resource, the ability to guarantee her family's health is greatly diminished," says anthropologist Óscar Espinosa, a professor at the Catholic University of Peru who recently investigated the impact of oil exploration on two communities in the Amazon region of Bajo Marañón.

In his initial findings, Espinosa has found several cases of stress and severe symptoms of anxiety in indigenous women. "We interviewed many indigenous women and observed that many suffer from these problems. Indeed, several women have experienced hair loss. There's no adequate treatment available for these women," he says. Women leaders from the zone also associate oil industry contamination with an increase in the number of

cases of cancer and birth defects. Uncertainty and the lack of response to these health issues only increase their anxiety.

THE SILENT ADVANCE OF HIV

Communities that were once abandoned by the state and isolated from urban areas have now become more involved in commercial exchange and migration to the cities, particularly among the men. As a result, by 2005 the Amazonian indigenous communities were reported to experience the first cases of HIV infection. Although statistics are hard to come by, local sources indicate that cases of HIV are on the rise.

In the communities bordering the Camisea project, the first officially reported case of HIV infection was in 2010. That year, the local health network identified 11 cases in the native communities located around the gas project. Mario Tavera, adviser to the Vice Minister of Public Health of Peru, says that the increase in HIV cannot be attributed to the extractive industry alone. "There are additional factors such as migration and economic exchange that ought to be taken into account in environmental impact studies of all these projects," he observed.

Carlos Torres Huarcaya, an epidemiologist in Camisea's zone of influence, explains that the HIV cases are imported into the area by the men. "The young indigenous men have begun to go to centers of nighttime entertainment set up in other towns, attracted by the great concentrations of employees and workers since the beginning of the gas exploitation."

Distance and poor infrastructure of the health posts make the efficient and timely diagnosis of HIV quite difficult. The head of the indigenous program of the People's Defender (Defensoría del Pueblo), Daniel Sánchez, recognizes the weakness of the state: "The health system is not prepared to handle the cases of HIV in the indigenous populations of the Amazons. It ought to have a specific strategy that would take into consideration the use of interpreters, as well as a

greater state presence.” Half of the diagnosed cases are pregnant women who find out they have HIV during routine prenatal checkups. Only four patients have received antiretroviral drugs.

ALCOHOLISM AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

Another social impact associated with the extractive industry is the increase in alcohol consumption. In the communities near the Camisea project, beer has replaced *masato*, the traditional drink made from fermented grains that is consumed by the indigenous peoples of the Cuzco jungle. Crates of beer pile up in the port and in the small shops, and improvised bodega-bars sell it throughout the day. The local health authorities point out that although they have no

No local studies exist linking domestic violence and alcohol in the indigenous populations of the Amazon, but most of the women associate abuse with alcohol consumption.

formal study of the illnesses associated with alcoholism, the consumption of beer is evident on a daily basis.

No local studies exist linking domestic violence and alcohol in the indigenous populations of the Amazon, but most of the women associate abuse with alcohol consumption. The Peruvian vice minister notes with concern the lack of anthropological studies on the effects of the extractive industry on indigenous women. “There is no real sense of the size of the impact, starting with the way that monetary economies disrupt traditional gender relations. The breakdown in their traditional system will create new patterns if these changes are not monitored,” observes Balbuena.

What can be done, then? The vice minister believes that Environmen-

tal Impact Studies have to be modified to incorporate more information about social impact. “When we talk about monitoring extractive projects, we think about natural resources and the effects on the environment, but the social impact requires the same degree of study as the environmental one. At present there are no anthropologists or specialists working on these problems; there is no analysis of gender issues. It’s not enough just to say there is a certain number of women in each community and to offer them workshops in cooking and textiles,” the vice minister concludes.

What’s to be done then? Environmental impact studies should incorporate more research into social impact. “Monitoring of extractive projects focused on natural resources and pollution, but not on the social impact,” declares Espinosa.

Studies about the extractive industries’ impact on the lives of indigenous women are very scarce. Del Castillo stresses in her thesis that it is necessary to carry out “more in-depth study to observe how spouses appraise the ‘progress’ their husbands say they are experiencing. The view of the individual who has not left the community, who has stayed to take care of the home, who supports her husband in his work tasks, who does not have the same opportunities as her spouse, can be quite different from the ideals of life held by the Machiguenga man.”

Without these studies, the Peruvian state’s support of the affected communities becomes deficient, above all because there is growing evidence that indigenous women and their children are experiencing a more precarious situation than they had in their traditional system of life.

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An indigenous woman prepares food.

