COMMUNITY-BASED MONITORING OF OIL EXTRACTION IN ECUADOR: LESSONS LEARNED

Introduction
Commercial exploitation of oil began in the Northern Ecuadorian Amazon in the 1970s. Since then, oil extraction has expanded enormously. Local inhabitants suffer from exposure to oil pollution, including oil spills, toxic waste and gas flaring.

Research question
Can community based-based monitoring (CBM) help indigenous communities track, document and report liabilities?

CBM initiative in Ecuador
1. Establish teams of monitors
Selected by Frenta de Defensa de la Amazonia & Union of Affected People by Texaco (UDAPT)

2. Distribution of technological package
Monitors received drone and mobile phones with GPS, photography and reporting applications.

3. Training of monitors
Lessons on ecology, environmental testing, geographical information systems and reporting.

4. Develop baseline
In order to identify past liabilities and fill existing gaps in existing (official) records.

5. Detect and communicate environmental liabilities
Monthly monitoring using technological package. Information is verified and uploaded to web-mapping portal www.monitoreoparticipativo.org

Results

| Duration (2015-2017) | 28 months | 1.37 million hectares | 212 liabilities detected |

Of the 212 liabilities detected:
- 25% were new cases of oil pollution
- 42% of the cases pre-dated the monitoring
- 33% concerned other forms of pollution

Lessons learned

- Existing functional social organizations are key
Strong community organizations with enough funds, time and experience are critical for establishing CBM.

- Crucial to construct baseline of past liabilities
To fill in gaps due to ineffective or ad hoc state monitoring and allow monitors to track and compare changes.

- CBM strategy needs to be flexible
So that it can adjust to environmental and political changes and operate with a long-term horizon.

Conclusion
The study found that CBM contributed to detection and reporting of oil liabilities. In this regard, the potential of CBM is large. Lessons learned may be relevant for indigenous communities facing other expanding extractive frontiers, such as agriculture, now the main driver of worldwide deforestation.

In working towards realizing Sustainable Development Goal 15 on life on land, which includes sustainable forest management, the UN has called on the inclusion of local communities and their traditional knowledge. CBM offers a tool to do just that.

Meaningful change was achieved by providing local communities with the evidence and arguments to hold extractive industries accountable for their actions, and in the long term, by providing a systematized environmental record that could be used by communities, state authorities and civil society.

Note: For more information about ongoing ISS research on CBM in the Amazon see: www.iss.nl/en/research/research-projects/all-eyes-amazon