

The accountability of resource extraction industries (REIs) in non-western countries; the case of Peru

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My PhD research has been investigating why certain oil-rich emerging market and developing economies (EMaDEs) suffer greater levels of environmental pollution than other oil producers through a case study focus on Peru's Loreto region. To do this, my research has fused together the school of political ecology with the work of political economists to create a new theory which encapsulates my efforts to study the accountability of REIs in ORLAEs and how this may be helping to lead to increased levels of oil pollution and environmental degradation. In Loreto, the primary research question is whether present-day Peruvian stakeholders (citizens, community based organisations (CBOs) and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) are unable to effectively hold resource extraction industries (REIs) accountable for environmental issues due to a range of political, economic social and geographical issues.

I arrived in Loreto in March and based myself in Iquitos, the provincial capital of the province. Aside from its geographical proximity to many of the oil field sites within Loreto (chiefly found along the rivers Marañon, Tigre, Corrientes and Pastaza) Iquitos' provincial capital status afforded me with excellent opportunities to interview CBO/NGO groups and national government agencies based in the city as well as regional and local government ministers and other professionals whose work was of importance for my research. To this end, the first month of my research has been based on conducting interviews (via one of my two translators I have been working with) with members of these groups. These have included Loreto indigenous organisations (CBOs) (La Organización de Pueblos Indígenas del Oriente), NGOs working on environmental and/or human-rights issues (Red Ambiental Loreto, the Peru Mission); national government agencies for corruption (Procurador Público Anticorrupción Descentralizado de Loreto), citizen rights (Defensoría del Pueblo) and environmental monitoring (OEFA); regional and local government representatives for environment, energy and mines and local district councillors for pueblo's (communities in the jungle) as well as legal and academic based professionals and former members of the oil industry. These interviews have afforded me with opportunities to not only talk to people with experience of Loreto's oil based history but also gain access to pueblo based indigenous/non indigenous communities along the various rivers surrounding Iquitos.

For example, at the end of the month I will be joining a group of lawyers from the Human Rights/Justice and Peace Commission of the Apostolic Vicariate who will be taking a fifteen hour boat journey from Iquitos to Cuninico, a small Kukama indigenous community on the river Marañon in the district of Urarinas, Loreto municipality. This community has suffered from a major oil contamination event last year which was documented by various NGOs and newspapers (see Alianza Arkana 2014<sup>1</sup>). We will be staying for three days which will give me the opportunity to interview (via my translator) various members of the community about the

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<sup>1</sup> See Alianza Arkana (2014) 'Cuninico Oil Spill & Petroperu: Speed Up the Clean-Up'. Available at: <http://alianzaarkana.org/media-room/blog-latest-news/entry/cuninico-oil-spill-a-petroperu-speed-up-the-clean-up> (accessed 13 April 2015).

impact that this contamination had and discuss the various aspects of my research. There is an opportunity for a second trip at the start of May if I feel I require more interviewee data.

Secondly, through a former oil worker for Occidental petroleum, I along with my translator and the owner of my hospedaje (a lawyer in Iquitos) are making provisions to travel to San Jose de Saramuro, another community based along the river Marañon (in the district of Urarinas, Loreto municipality) directly adjacent to an oilfield pipeline and REI production site. Their proximity to the REI will provide me with an excellent case study of the relationship with the state and the REI. A number of other trips with this contact have also been arranged for other selva communities.

It is hoped that as I continue to meet more contacts in Iquitos and ask for their support and assistance in gaining access to various indigenous communities in the selva, I will be able to build up an authoritative account of the issues surrounding REI accountability and the various stakeholder relationships with government and REIs.



(Indigenous Federation wall art, Iquitos March 2015)