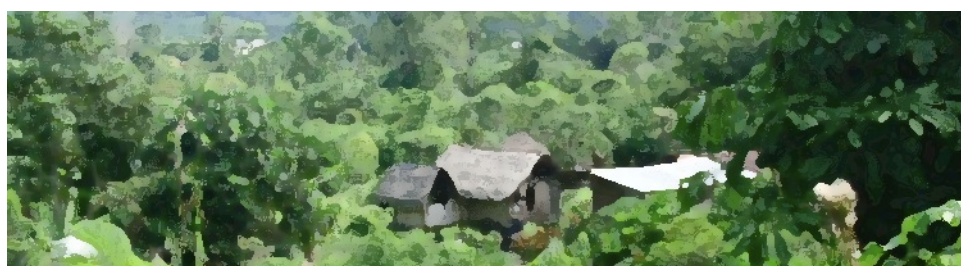


Oil and Water: Empowering Communities Living in Resource Extraction Regions

*An analysis of Amazon Partnerships Foundation's
Community Self-Development Methodology*

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Amazon Partnerships Foundation (Fundación Tarpuna Causay) and **Grupo FARO** have partnered since 2009 to research the impact of extractive activities on communities and policy development in Napo Province, Ecuador. Through APF's grassroots programs Grupo FARO's regional and national policy work, the organizations have collaborated on studies and tools to assess the evolving implications of large-scale resource extraction on humans and the environment.

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In the current global economic climate, countries with non-renewable resources experience increasing pressure to extract them to finance their national budgets and public benefit projects. Many of these resources are found in areas where indigenous groups have lived for generations. In the case of the Ecuadorian Amazon, while some groups want to continue maintaining their ancestral way of life without the incursion of extractive projects, others accept the presence of extractive operations and hope to benefit from the revenue they generate.

Ecuador's constitution promotes the concept of "the good life", or "sumak kawsay", which in part defends the independent right of indigenous nationalities to maintain their multicultural way of life in harmonious coexistence with nature. The constitution also seeks to integrate the state, markets, society, and the environment.¹ This framework therefore opens up the possibility of an approach to natural resource management that is less dependent on extractive industries and moves the country toward an era in which "natural resources are used rationally, sustainably, and principally for local use, thereby facilitating true national and endogenous development".²

While families struggle daily to provide for themselves and protect their community's welfare through adequate and sustainable use of their natural resources, they also search for ways to coexist with oil drilling, mining, or timber operations in their territory. Given this situation, the question arises: How can communities benefit from an empowerment process that enables them to articulate and carry out their vision of sustainable development? Amazon Partnerships Foundation (APF) and Grupo FARO, sharing the same commitment to transparency, democratic practices, and support for communities' well-being and autonomy, have collaborated to address this question.

A principal activity of this collaboration is a technical analysis of the Community Self-Development Methodology that APF has implemented in Napo Province, Ecuador, an area where extractive industries have a significant presence. APF has provided practical experience, data, and assessment of local impact, while Grupo FARO has provided policy analysis of the regional and national implications of empowerment processes and extractive activities.



Table 1: Demographic data on communities collaborating with APF in Napo Province, Ecuador (Source: Municipal government of Tena, INEC 2006, and APF).

Average household income:	US\$100 per month
Ethnic background:	Majority indigenous Kichwa, some mestizos
Average education level:	Majority have not completed high school
Economic activity:	Subsistence farming on small, multi-crop plots
Average number of children per family:	Five

Empowerment: the Challenge Facing Communities Co-Existing with Extractive Industries

By its nature, the concept of "empowerment" is broad and complex. Researchers Nanette Page and Cheryl Czuba suggest that "empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process . . . that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important."³ For the purposes of this analysis, an "empowered" community is defined as one in which members can assess both their needs and assets, make informed and consensual decisions, and carry out activities (whether projects, policies, alliances or others) based on their priorities, independent of support from the government or corporate sector.

Despite having managed their natural resources and provided for themselves for centuries, Amazonian communities, in particular those living in areas where resource extraction is prevalent, are usually "recipients" of development projects because they are supposedly incapable of meeting their own needs. When communities are seen as "recipients", power becomes concentrated in those who offer support, who by virtue of their financial assistance also have the power to define communities' priorities.

Over the years, this relationship has created a culture of dependency that has contributed to a lack of self-esteem and self-sufficiency among indigenous groups and a deterioration of self-governance skills. This power imbalance makes communities vulnerable to agendas of extractive industries or governments that negotiate with them, among whom a common practice is to "give" health, education, sanitation, water, or employment projects to communities in exchange for access to the resources in their territory.

Given communities' urgency for things such as access to safe drinking water, food security, and household income, combined with the misperception that they cannot meet these needs themselves, it is not

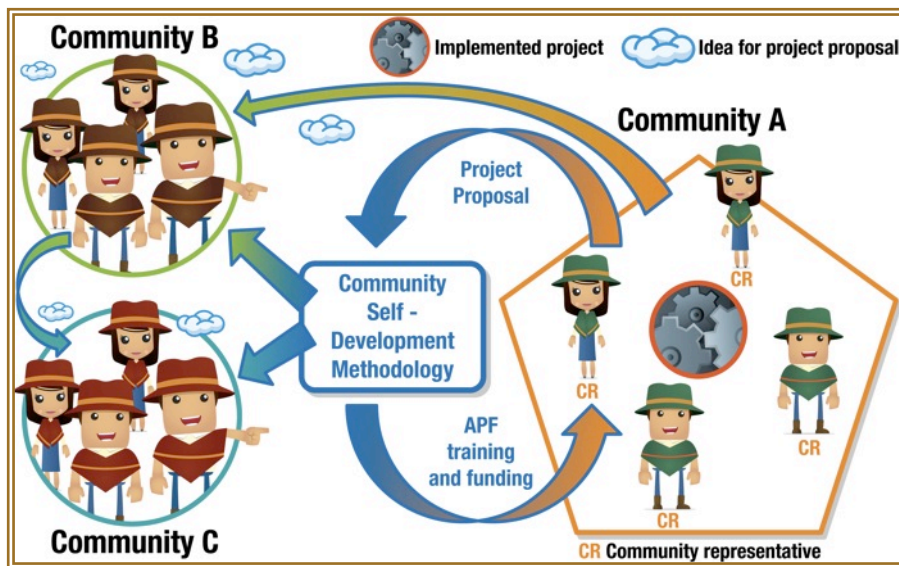
surprising that communities accept this arrangement without seriously considering how they might be affected by negative externalities such as environmental contamination, health problems, and territorial loss³ that often accompany large-scale resource extraction. The short-term urgency of their unmet needs along with a lack of empowerment make them susceptible to the extractive sector's agenda and the consequences of environmental damage.

APF's Community Self-Development Methodology attempts to address this problem with an approach based on the principal of collaboration between two equal parties. First, we believe that for any change to take root, the desire and commitment must come from within the community. Second, we recognize the *community's* priorities, which often center around basic needs such as safe drinking water, increased household income, and sanitation among others, as well as on traditional values for sound natural resource management.

The APF team trains communities, many of whom have little formal education, to plan, implement, and evaluate their own conservation projects, which also help satisfy basic needs. Unlike other organizations that design projects and later bring them to the community inviting their participation to implement them, communities present their projects to us and from the beginning take responsibility and ownership for the results.

Community Self-Development Methodology: Changing the Power Dynamic from within Communities

The Community Self-Development Methodology consists of three phases: proposal solicitation, implementation, and evaluation. At the invitation of the community, we begin with an interactive workshop on climate change, oil exploration and mining, and community solutions that can mitigate these potential threats.



Graphic 1: How the Community Self-Development Methodology is implemented

Through conversation we explore the community's concerns and needs and help them assess their own resources and ideas for feasible projects that match their priorities. From the very first encounter, we emphasize the importance of the community's commitment to meeting their needs and developing their project management skills, as well as our commitment to the process. (Graphic 1)

If they are interested in our program, we teach them how to create a project proposal and basic budget. If approved, we provide up to \$2,000 to carry out their project, plus a year of training in project management. This training begins the implementation phase, during which we conduct workshops on construction, installation, planting, etc. as well as environmental topics according to the community's own project plan. All our workshops, created with input from communities, use dynamic, interactive teaching techniques to foster self-esteem, democratic participation, and leadership, as well as a recognition of the value of sustaining natural resources.

The community also forms a project committee consisting of women and men who learn how to create and use simple project management tools, which communities themselves have helped us develop. In the evaluation phase, the committee members learn monitoring and evaluation techniques such as data collection so they can see how well they are implementing the project. Over the course of the project, the community learns the importance of information management, conflict resolution, consensus-based decision-making, and transparency. Perhaps more importantly, they learn they have the capacity to do these things themselves.

With a small team and budget, APF and partner communities have achieved promising results over the last three years. According to a recent evaluation of three communities that implemented rainwater catchment systems for drinking in 2009, all surveyed families (50% of total participants) are still using their systems, 86% report they are very satisfied with the project, and the majority feel their community is more

Once communities meet certain basic needs, they also gain a desire to promote their vision of sustainable development.

organized now than before the project. Two out of three communities submitted other follow-on projects, one for construction of composting toilets to avoid river contamination, and another for rainwater catchment systems for additional families in the community of Campana Cocha.

Campana Cocha exceeded its outstanding results in workshop attendance, achieving 88% attendance in the second project compared to 85% in the first. Likewise, the number of families maintaining their systems in good condition rose to 98% from 91%. The community achieved these results because the participants reached a consensus on changes they could implement to improve the project's outcome the second time around.

Other changes are also notable. Before the projects, the community wanted to extend an ineffective piped water system that drained rivers; now they want to optimize the rainwater system for all of their water needs, including laundry, and they want to reforest cleared areas as part of an effort to become an "ecological community." One of the community members is now an elected official in the parish government and promotes these conservation activities.

This data indicates that once communities meet certain basic needs—in the process acquiring self-governance skills and rediscovering the cultural importance of conservation—they also gain a desire to promote their vision of sustainable development. With greater autonomy, they are more prepared to confront negative or manipulative agendas, demand transparency, and employ democratic processes in all interactions with other parties.

Table 2: Results of the Community Self-Development Methodology, 2009-2011.

More than 100 project management workshops conducted in 11 communities

Financial support provided for 7 communities

84 rainwater catchment systems installed

450 fruit and hardwood trees planted

9 workshops on organic cacao production conducted for 36 farmers

5 composting toilets built

3 tree nurseries built

More than 3,000 organic cacao seeds planted

Approximately 1400 men, women, and children have benefited from APF support

Community Empowerment and Natural Resource Management

The Community Self-Development Methodology encompasses four components that are important to strengthening democratic processes at the grassroots: information access, inclusion and participation, accountability, and local organizational capacity.⁵ The immediate benefit of this methodology is that marginalized groups can gain access to basic services with a focus on sustainable natural resource management; at the same time power becomes more equalized because the financing strategy is based on community priorities and initiative, not those of the funder.

Longer term, the synergy between natural resource management and communities driving local development makes communities less vulnerable to negative impacts of large-scale resource extraction. In addition to increased knowledge about the benefits and methods of conservation, communities that live in an area of large-scale mining or oil operations seek a greater understanding of accountability processes, including indemnization and compensation, and can make informed decisions about resource extraction that reflect the input of all community members.

Because they have developed democratic practices internally, they have greater awareness and confidence to request information from local and national government agencies and hold them accountable as well.

Table 1: Benefits of empowerment processes to communities that live in areas of large-scale resource extraction. (Source: World Bank and APF)

Empowerment Component	Potential Benefits for Communities	Practices Acquired through Community Self-Development Methodology
Information Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confidence and knowledge to request data on extractive operations and impacts. Greater knowledge about profits and income generated from extractive industries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collection and analysis of financial and project activity data. Recognition of the importance of data collection and management.
Inclusion and Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More grassroots participation in regional policy-making. More confidence to accept or reject projects related to natural resource use and territorial rights. Greater negotiation power regarding issues that involve community welfare. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal collaboration, problem-solving, and consensus-based decision-making. Inclusion of women in project management and decision-making roles.
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confidence and knowledge to hold entities accountable for contract stipulations, agreements, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation of activities and results for all participants. Expectation of transparency and democratic participation.
Local Organizational Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater recognition of economic, health, and cultural value of conservation practices. Increased self-sufficiency and commitment to progress as defined by the community. More unified leadership through development of a cohesive, consensual vision and less vulnerability to external influence or manipulation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification of clear, democratic internal regulations and increased leadership skills. Ability to meet basic needs through implementation of communities' own projects. Appreciation of sound natural resource management for community livelihood.



Empowerment strategies like the Community Self-Development methodology enable communities to determine their development agenda and advocate for it.

Conclusions and Recommendations

APF's experience demonstrates that strategies that support grassroots projects based on community priorities and commitment can strengthen communities' democratic practices, link community empowerment to good local governance, and improve community wellbeing. Ultimately, empowerment approaches like the Community Self-Development Methodology enable communities to determine their development agenda and advocate for it even if pro-extraction policies dominate the discourse. This level of community involvement makes it much more likely that investments in community development will actually reach the people they are intended to support.

It is therefore worth exploring an expansion of community development in practice and vision, encouraging public and private stakeholders to incorporate a similar type of capacity-building that helps communities recognize their ability to meet their own needs and develop their own vision of sustainable resource management. Specific recommendations are:

- ✓ Implement and study the Community Self-Development Methodology and similar approaches to analyze the impact on a greater scale over the long term.
- ✓ Support local organizations implementing these methodologies to build a network of local professionals that can help build bridges between communities and other stakeholders.
- ✓ Educate governments about the benefits of community empowerment and how more engaged communities can contribute to more effective regional resource management.

These recommendations can help facilitate genuinely open, transparent, balanced dialog among *all* stakeholders to create a culture in which development agendas are expected to reflect broader consensus.

Endnotes

¹Secretaría Nacional de Planificación y Desarrollo. *Plan Nacional del Buen Vivir*, 2009. Quito: Ecuador. From <http://plan.senplades.gob.ec/3.3-el-buen-vivir-en-la-constitucion-del-ecuador>

²Ruiz Marrero, C. (2011, 16 de marzo.) El nuevo progresismo latinoamericano y el extractivismo del siglo XXI. *Observatorio Petrolero Sur*. From <http://opsur.wordpress.com/2011/03/16/21992/>

³Page, N & Czuba, C. (1999, October.) Empowerment: what is it? 37(5). *Journal of Extension*. From <http://www.joe.org/joe/1999october/comm1.php>

⁴Amnesty International. Texaco en Ecuador: el peor desastre petrolero del mundo. *Derechos Humanos y Empresas*. From <http://rsechile.wordpress.com/texaco-en-ecuador-el-peor-desastre-petrolero-del-mundo/>

⁵Nayaran, D. (2002, 1 May.) *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook*. (pp 14-17). Washington, D.C. World Bank. From http://www.handicap-international.fr/bibliographie-handicap/6SocieteCivile/Advocacy/NARAYAN_draft.pdf

Photos: pg. 1, typical Kichwa house in Ahuano parish; pg. 2, preparing the drill site for oil extraction near Nuevo Paraíso, Cotundo parish; pg. 5, installing a rainwater catchment system in the community of Isla Apaai, Ahuano parish (photo by David Barnes).