



Impacts of community environmental monitoring in the Ecuadorian and Peruvian Amazon

Ecuador and Peru have recently witnessed a surge in hydrocarbon extraction that has led to adverse environmental and public health outcomes. Current regulatory frameworks to detect and manage the impact of hydrocarbon extraction have been insufficient in both countries. A 3ie-supported impact evaluation assessed the impact of a user-friendly, technology-enabled community intervention to enhance communities' detection, monitoring and reporting capabilities. The study also assessed the community's ability to make socio-environmental claims that result in adequate compensation.

Intervention

The intervention combined advanced technology and capacity building amongst local youth to work as environmental monitors and increase the rate of detection of environmental liabilities. An enhanced monitoring package allowed communities to access common, inexpensive technologies that were developed together with the users. They included open-source applications, smartphones, drones, and user-friendly interfaces for routines and protocols, which enabled the standardised collection, storage, organisation and transfer of information on environmental liabilities.

The combination of advanced technology and youth capacity development was expected to increase the rate of detection of environmental liabilities and the dissemination of the resulting reports to appropriate authorities, maximising the possibility of official action. The monitors worked in many geographical clusters, with each cluster as big as at least 10,000 hectares. They monitored a total of 2.2 million hectares.

Highlights

- Detection and reporting of environmental liabilities to state authorities increased significantly.
- Although media reporting on the issues increased, the impacts were less meaningful because reporting prior to the intervention was low.
- In relatively remote areas, community-based environmental monitoring of extractive industries can be an effective tool to help create the conditions for holding these industries accountable and contributing to improved practices in the long run.



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Main findings

The intervention led to an increase in the detection of environmental liabilities, reporting to state authorities and reporting by the media. The number of detections increased (by approximately one detection every three months by each monitoring team), as did the number of liabilities reported to the state (by approximately one report per year per team). The teams detected a total of 367 environmental liabilities – 212 in Ecuador and 155 in Peru.

On average, each team detected 0.6 liabilities per month, slightly more than one event every other month. Detection was more common in Ecuador than in Peru and amongst treatment teams, when compared to control teams.

Although reporting by the media increased in relation to the average number of reports, this was mostly because media reporting was low before the intervention.

Recommendations

The findings show that community-based monitoring processes can help increase detection of environmental liabilities. However, policymakers need to create political and legal mechanisms to ensure the safety and effectiveness of the community-based monitors. The goal of using low-cost tools might sometimes clash with the goal of timeliness and effectiveness. A possible solution would be to strike a balance between the two by flexibly adapting extensive training to arrive at the right tools for monitoring environmental liabilities.

This impact evaluation demonstrates that community-based environmental monitoring can produce a substantial amount of newsworthy information. It is therefore important for media outlets to value and use the free and accurate reporting service the community monitors provide.

About this brief

This brief is based on an impact evaluation report by Lorenzo Pellegrini, *Impacts of community monitoring of socio-environmental liabilities in the Ecuadorian and Peruvian Amazon*, published in 2019.



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