

BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR PROTECTING YOUR COMMUNITY FROM EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES

Carlos Zorrilla

In 2009, along with several collaborators, I wrote the manual "*Protecting your community from mining companies and other extractive industries*". The goal was to inform communities of the main problems and threats that arise when extractive companies are interested in exploring for, or exploiting, natural resources in community territories. Another goal was to share some strategies that communities could adopt to protect themselves from the worst impacts of these industries. An important part of the work was based on experience in the struggle against several transnational mining companies in the Intag Valley in Ecuador, in which I have actively participated since 1995 (the 2nd Edition of the manual was published in September 2016).

Knowing that the majority of people who live in the countryside (where most of these struggles are waged) do not have time to read long texts, I was motivated to write this overview on what I think is the most basic information on the subject. Fortunately, nowadays there are several other manuals with which you and your community can - and should - deepen your knowledge, in order to protect yourselves (see the list at the end).

HOW TO PREVENT THE PRESENCE OF COMPANIES IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

If you are reading this document, it is understood that you and your community have doubts about the supposed benefits that extractive activities will bring, or you openly oppose these activities and want to find ways to halt their advance (Note: when I refer to extractivism, I mean mainly the mining and oil industries).

The first step is to do everything possible to prevent these companies from entering your community.

Be informed

If you suspect that the government is interested in promoting any extractive project in your region, the most important thing is to be informed about these plans.

How do you do that?

- Checking the web pages of the government ministries in charge of mining and/or oil (if you don't have access to the technology, ask a family member or friend in a town or city).
- Requesting information from government officials about delivery processes, or granting of concessions (it may be through assembly members, legislators or any other national or local government official).
- If, from one day to the next, some people carrying out surveys on socio-economic facts appear in your community, it's possible the government is interested in transferring your territory to extractive companies, or it has already done so. **This type of information really helps companies**. Find out the true purpose of the surveys, and prevent families from being interviewed individually. Do everything possible so that first the community agrees to be interviewed and is aware of and approves the questions, and get the pollsters to commit to sharing the results with the community.

If it is discovered that the government is planning to transfer your territories to extractive companies, quickly alert your community and surrounding communities, as well as vulnerable groups that may be affected - like ranchers, farmers, tour operators, etc. At the same time, seek legal assistance from non-governmental organizations to find out whether or not you can slow down the process. In most countries, concessions grant certain rights to companies that come into conflict with collective rights.

If you find that concessions already exist in your territory but the companies have not yet initiated

the process of penetration (companies and the government call it **socialisation**), a "socialisation" which means dividing the community, urgently gather your community to report what is happening, and warn them about some of the potential social and environmental problems related to the presence and activity of the company in your territory.

During this phase, it is important that you and several of your neighbours know and be thoroughly informed about the activities, the company interested in exploiting the resources within your community, and the impact that such extraction entails, including the presence of the company in your territory. With this information, the community will have better arguments for making an informed decision about whether they want to co-exist with extractivism or not. Often it is better to rely on the testimony of individuals from other communities who have experienced the negative impacts and abuses of extractivism first-hand. On the other hand, you could get in contact with officials of Non-Governmental Organizations who know the issue well and are not involved with extractive companies or the Government, to inform adequately members of the community. **It is important to address legal aspects, including collective and individual rights, during these meetings.** It is essential that your community and its members know their individual and collective rights well, and demand that they be respected.

If the company has begun the process of dividing the community, it is essential to stop the process as soon as possible, before your community is polarized between those who support the project and those who are opposed. This may be done by convening a special community meeting to demand a moratorium from the company of 3 to 6 months from the socialization process, or until the community understands the industry and its impact well enough to make a decision. The company will do everything to keep this from happening, but on the other hand, the same companies will say they are respectful of community and human rights, etc., so not accepting a decision like this made by the community will make them look bad and create doubts about the company, as well as the extractive project, and subsequent respect for the will of the community and the law.

How do companies divide people?

The most important goal of companies throughout the course of the extractive project is to obtain - or give the impression that they have obtained - the approval of the community. This approval is known as the Social Licence. Although not a legal requirement- in most cases- it is very important for businesses, because the vast majority of financiers do not invest in an extractive project knowing - for certain - that the community opposes the project. If there is opposition to the project, companies- whether national, state, or transnational- may invest a lot of money to divide the community, in order to get enough support to show the world that their project has the "social licence" of the community.

They do so by using many tactics, including:

- Buying off influential people within the community. These may be identified in several ways, including by way of false "surveys". Whatever the strategy, they identify their aspirations, strengths, and weaknesses, and act upon them.
- They create community groups related to their interests, or support existing groups. These are commonly the clash groups that confront groups or individuals within the same community.
- They provide or offer to provide basic services needed by the community. These needs are frequently identified in the aforementioned false surveys.
- They discredit opponents. The smear campaign may include spreading lies that undermine the integrity of leaders, for example, saying that they are stealing money in the name of the resistance. When the smear campaign does not achieve its goal, tactics against the leaders become more severe, and they may receive death threats or be falsely prosecuted, and at the worst, be killed. Every year, dozens of social and environmental activists die defending their communities, and

those responsible are not always assassins hired by the company that is carrying out the project. It is suspected that many of the leaders are victimized by big business owners within the same country where the project is being carried out. They are people who have much to gain if the mine or oil field is developed. Similarly, by blaming opponents for destroying dreams of earning a lot of money quickly, it is not unusual for people in the community or surrounding communities to be responsible. These could be small or medium-sized suppliers of goods and services to the companies, or community members who have managed to get high-paying jobs. Others will see their dream of selling their property(ies) to the company at inflated prices unfulfilled.

- Making the battle known nationally and globally helps protect leaders from certain risks, but in no way protects them from all risks. Therefore, take proper precautions and be well-informed about the measures taken by other resistance groups, studying the available manuals concerning these types of struggles.
- Hiring or offering to hire a lot of better-paid labour. This way, they secure the support of an important part of the community. Companies understand that employees will do their best to support the extractive project, by doing things such as:
 - Signing documents that endorse the company,
 - Reporting on plans or programs that may hinder project development,
 - Helping elect people connected to the project and the company's interests, to the community's board of directors, and organizations.
 - Normally, to avoid being dismissed, most employees will act in accordance with the company's wishes.

This last strategy is difficult to neutralize. It is for this reason that the more quickly community members become aware of the real impact produced by the presence of the companies and the extractive projects, the better.

What to do? ... In this context, communities must ensure that they are being led by honest people who put collective value over personal ones, and have the confidence of the majority of the community.

Exploration does not cause harm: one of the many myths of extractivism

You must never forget the first commandment of companies and governments dependent on extractivism: doing everything possible to give the impression that they are working with the approval of the communities. This includes blatantly lying.

During or prior to prospecting or exploration, companies and/or the government will do everything possible to convince you that the activity does not cause harm. However, the social harm done during exploration is very similar to the harm done during exploitation: division, loss of values and customs, mistrust, land trafficking, alcoholism, and an increase in crime. Women are impacted the most, as they are forced to take on more responsibilities at home than they previously shared with their partner. It is very common for venereal diseases to spread in mining camps due to the prevalence of personnel from other areas, which creates demand for prostitution. On the other hand, the environmental impact may be significant, given that exploration, for example, uses and contaminates large quantities of water. Forests may also be affected, when paths or roads are opened for transporting prospecting or exploration equipment.

Another of the great myths of extractivism - and of mining in particular - is that local people will be employed. Generally speaking, worldwide, the mining industry employs less than 1% of the labour force. Of course, it will employ people in the area to "buy support", and for a short period of time, until exploitation begins. Once this phase is initiated, it employs very few people in the area, since the rural residents do not have experience in the industry. This is why firms hire qualified personnel from other

parts of the country, and even from other nations.

Four basic things:

1. Be well-informed about the company, and the project. Who are the owners? Who finances the project or company? What kind of problems have they had at other sites? The more you know about the company and its owners, the more light you can shine on it in order to stop it. If the company is foreign-owned, try to contact activists from the company's country of origin to help you. If it is national, do the same with organizations in the capital. Start looking for the company's or project's weak point – they all have them. If it is a prestigious company, they will be very afraid of having their reputation harmed. Be sure to report the investors of the community opposition, and other associated risks. Use the same strategy of enquiry in terms of the project: What resources are they after? What are the boundaries of the concession? How advanced is the project? Do they have the concession in order? Do they already have the Environmental Impact Study? Was it carried out according to current regulations? Do they already have the Environmental Licence? If your community manages to get legal advice for potential irregularities, the lawyer must analyse all documents related to the project.

2. Document absolutely everything. And report it. Even if the Government is corrupt and supports extractivism, file the relevant complaints. Seek good legal advice on how to file them correctly, and do so for any infringement or irregularity. Take photos, record video of illegalities, deforestation, pollution of rivers, eruptions of violence, etc. Evidence is very important for reporting them abroad; it is often more effective to report them outside the country, rather than inside. **These archives are only useful if they are published**, so it will be necessary to use social networks. Otherwise, only you and your community will know what is happening. **It is absolutely essential that the rest of the region, the country, and the whole world be informed.** In this context, is important to contact the regional and national press and keep them up-to-date with **accurate and true information**. For the management of social networks (like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, among others), try to get free support from a family member or friend who are proficient in their use.

3. Be careful with the socialisation. The right to prior consultation and prior consent is a right consecrated in several Constitutions and/or international treaties. These rights are very important to communities and ancestral peoples, and may be a good tool for stopping extractive projects. For this reason, companies and governments that survive on extractivism manipulate communities by making it seem like those communities and ancestral peoples have been duly consulted. The easiest way to do this is by making community members sign documents during meetings that have little or nothing to do with the project (parents meetings at the school, for example). This may be done by the Government or by the companies during the project's socialization phase. It is best not to sign anything if you suspect that the signatures can be used to support the project or the company.

4. The more allies you have, the greater your chances of success. These fights tend to be long and costly. Look for allies at the local, national, and international level. As soon as possible, contact organizations in your country that are defenders of human rights and try to involve them in the resistance. On an international level, contact organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, ELAW, MiningWatch Canada, International Rivers, and Cultural Survival. National organizations will probably help you establish contact.

This has been a concise overview of the first steps that your community may take in the event of being threatened by extractive companies. **It is by no means the only thing that can be done.** For this reason, it is essential that you and other persons in your community prepare well, by learning about other experiences and reading manuals produced by communities that have faced this evil.

Manuals available on protecting communities confronted by extractivism:

Protecting your community www.culturalsurvival.org/node/9212

Second edition

<http://www.source-international.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Guia-de-las-Resistencias.pdf>

<http://endefensadelosterritorios.org/2015/03/04/manual-antiminero-guia-practica-para-comunidades-contra-las-minas/>

http://www.greenpeace.org/mexico/Global/mexico/Docs/2016/ManualMiner%C3%ADa13%20may%202016_VF.pdf