**Introduction**

Natural resources such as land, minerals and oil are vitally important sources of livelihoods, income and influence for countries and communities. However, when these are poorly managed or when business operations are implemented without due consideration of the context and communities, they can contribute to tensions that can escalate into conflict, or feed into and exacerbate pre-existing conflict dynamics. This has been the case in some Latin America countries, where conflicts and tensions have emerged as a result of extractive activities in indigenous lands.

Colombia possesses natural resources such as oil, coal, precious metals and minerals. In the last couple of years, it has taken decisive steps towards making the extractive industry grow and play a predominant role in the country’s economy. The Colombian authorities have registered mining applications and granted mining titles to multinational companies on the territory of Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. This has raised issues with ethnic communities, as they see land as an intrinsic part of their identity and their existence as communities.

This analysis intends to map spaces of possible environmental disputes where extractive activities overlap with ethnic communities in the Colombian territory.

**Methodology**

Land is the primary variable studied. Given that this analysis wants to map potential spaces of dispute, it identifies which are the spaces extractive companies and ethnic communities have an interest and a stake in. It geo-spatial terms, it identifies the intersection between polygons representing mining and exploration and polygons representing the ethnic communities.

First, the primary lands occupied by the afro-Colombians and the multiple indigenous groups (including indigenous reserves) are identified. Second, mining projects and oil and gas exploration areas are singled out. The spaces occupied by both actors, the extractive industry and the ethnic communities, are considered zones prone to social opposition to projects and potential social conflict.

**Spaces of Environmental Disputes**

*Type of Project: Coal Mining and Oil and Gas*
- Department: Guajira
- Municipalities: Rioacha, Albaña, Mansare and Mataco
- Ethnic Community in the area: Wayu tribe
- Estimated Indigenous families: 17,223
- Estimated Indigenous population: 94,181

*Type of Project: Oil and Gas*
- Department: Arauca and Santander
- Ethnic Community in the area: U’wa tribe
- Estimated Indigenous families: 749
- Estimated Indigenous population: 4,050

*Type of Project: Oil and Gas*
- Department: Putumayo
- Municipalities: Puerto Asis
- Ethnic Community in the area: Inga tribe
- Estimated Indigenous families: 46
- Estimated Indigenous population: 237

**Conclusions**

This analysis mapped potential spaces of environmental dispute in the Colombian territory between ethnic groups and extractive companies. It finds that mineral resource exploration and exploitation takes place only on indigenous territories and reserves. Therefore afro-Colombian communities are not as affected as indigenous communities are by extractive projects.

These spaces are located in the northern, eastern and south western regions. The project that has an impact on a larger number of indigenous families and individuals of the Wayu tribe is the coal mining project in the northern part of the country, in the Guajira department. Other departments affected are Putumayo, Arauca and Santander.

To avoid social tension and conflict, renewed attention needs to be paid to mechanisms for mitigating and resolving natural resource disputes in these areas.

**Limitations**

The study delimitates which are the areas where conflict might arise as a result of overlapping interests over land. However, it does not take into account which are the factors that might make a space more predisposed to social conflict, like population density, political representation and well established social movements.

Taking into account that Colombia has over ninety different ethnic groups, some who are not sedentary, it is difficult to determine an accurate population density or the presence of strong social movements. Furthermore, this study only takes into account legal mining. In reality, illegal mining is also currently taking place in ethnic territories, which has sparked conflict in some areas. Because of its illegal nature, information about its prevalence in the territory is not available.

**References and Data**

Data:
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