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A more democratic environmental governance



The ICTA-UAB has participated in the European research project ENGOV who wrote a Policy Brief that was distributed to the Latin America and the European Union chief of States Summit held in Santiago de Chile. The document draws attention on the need to include more effectively local communities in the environmental governance of extractive activities, like mining or industrial agriculture, taking place in their territories.

While investments in extractive activities in Latin America and the Caribbean are booming, there are growing concerns about their social and environmental consequences. Extractive activities, which include metal mining, the extraction of fossil fuels, hydroelectricity and biomass, are expanding and moving into more remote areas that are often inhabited by indigenous and peasant communities.

These activities have far-reaching consequences. On the one hand, they generate economic development, jobs, infrastructure and government revenues that partly pay for social programs. On the other hand, they often bring damage to nature and local livelihoods, require large volumes of energy and water, and produce large amounts of waste. Many local communities claim that their needs and their concerns about these negative effects of extractive activities are being neglected, and resistance is mounting. Existing regulatory and institutional frameworks, including consultation mechanisms, are unable to prevent and solve these problems.

Various studies show that local social and environmental concerns need to be genuinely taken into account in decision-making processes on extractive activities in Latin America and the Caribbean. Local communities are the most directly impacted by mining as well as by oil and gas exploration, hydroelectric dams and new forms of biomass extraction as oil palm and soybean plantations.

They also have extensive knowledge of the natural resources that are affected by these activities. National policy-makers, foreign investors, importing countries and international organisations have to seriously involve local communities in decision-making, in order to reach sustainable and equitable development.

Unless local voices are genuinely included, and institutional and technical practices are improved, extractive activities will lead to more tensions, which may result in violent clashes. Extractive activities are susceptible to creating conflicts, especially if local community calls for meaningful participation are not properly addressed. Inclusive democratic measures are necessary to prevent this from happening.

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