



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Costa Rican communities defeat U.S. oil companies to protect local environment, 1999-2002

November

1999

to: February

2002

Country: Costa Rica

Location City/State/Province: *Talamanca*

Location Description: *Talamanca Region of Southeastern Costa Rica including Puerto Limón*

Goals:

To prevent MKJ and Harken Energy, American oil companies, from gaining rights to drill for oil in Costa Rican communities. Residents feared that oil exploration would disrupt ecosystems and threaten local economies.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 004. Signed public statements
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 015. Group lobbying
- 048. Protest meetings

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 4th segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 5th segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 015. Group lobbying
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 6th segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Environment

Group characterization:

- Environmentalists
- community groups
- eco-tourism organizations
- farmers organizations
- fishermen's union
- indigenous groups
- indigenous rights organizations
- marine biologists
- religious groups
- small-business owners

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Anti-Petroleum Action (ADELA)

Partners:

Not Known

External allies:

Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (E-LAW), Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)

Involvement of social elites:

Not Known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (ELAW)
- Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

- President Abel Pacheco

Segment Length: *Approximately 6 months*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

MKJ Xplorations, Harken Costa Rica Holdings, Harken Energy, President Miguel Ángel Rodríguez, Costa Rican Government

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Oil company representatives used radio stations to

broadcast their pro-petroleum message

Campaigner violence:

Not known.

Repressive Violence:

Not known.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The ADELA coalition successfully achieved its goal of stopping the MKJ-Harken oil drillings in the Talamaca region.

ADELA has continued to promote ecologically sustainable development and environmental protection. It works to hold the Costa Rican government accountable for upholding environmental laws and regulations that protect the Costa Rican environment from oil companies and their interests.

ADELA has grown both nationally and internationally. It has garnered the support of international environmental groups, including the Natural Resources Defense Council and Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide

Famous for its ecological wildlife, tropical rainforests, beaches, mangroves, and coral reefs, the Talamanca region of southeastern Costa Rica is one of the most biologically rich areas in the world. It has gained protection as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and ecological conservation efforts have helped spur the region's flourishing eco-tourism industry. In addition to fishing, coffee, and banana exports, eco-tourism is a major source of income for local communities and indigenous groups,

which include the Bribri and Cabecar.

In November 1999, newspaper reports and other local media outlets informed Talamanca residents of a deal that had been brokered between the Costa Rican government and the US oil company MKJ Xplorations. Hoping to attract foreign investment, government officials including President Miguel Ángel Rodríguez had made concessions to the foreign oil company, allowing it to drill for petroleum in the Talamanca region and along its coasts.

Angered by the fact that their communities had not been consulted in the deal, and foreseeing the ecological devastation and economic exploitation that would result from oil exploration in their region, Talamanca residents formed the Anti-Petroleum Action (ADELA) coalition to protest the concessions. Comprised of environmentalists, indigenous groups, indigenous rights organizations, religious groups, community groups, farmers' organizations, fishermen's unions, small-business owners, marine biologists, and eco-tourism organizations, ADELA sought to repeal the decision of allowing oil companies to drill in their communities.

At a meeting in December 1999, about 250 ADELA members discussed this threat to their local economies and communities and drafted a declaration that opposed the oil concessions and demanded a pause to the deal. In September 2000, after having received national attention, ADELA was able to pressure the Costa Rican Supreme Court into ruling the oil concessions to be null and void on the grounds that local communities had not been properly consulted.

Just two months later, however, the Supreme Court modified its previous ruling after government officials and MKJ (which was partnered with the Texas-based oil company Harken Energy), appealed the Court's decision. The Court allowed for MKJ-Harken to drill offshore where indigenous communities did not reside. Oil company representatives welcomed the ruling, understanding that most of the company's profits would come from offshore drilling.

In addition to this legal setback, the ADELA coalition faced many difficulties. Oil company representatives attempted to garner local support for the petroleum exploration by speaking at public meetings and promising jobs to poor and unemployed residents. They also bought up radio time to broadcast their message of 'beneficial oil exploration'. With the additional support of the Costa Rican government, the oil companies gained an advantageous position.

The ADELA coalition addressed these obstacles by appealing to local, national, and international groups. ADELA members, who were often trusted community leaders, debated with oil company representatives at public meetings and warned their fellow residents of the dangers that were threatening their economic autonomy and natural environment. Despite being out-funded, ADELA members also broadcasted their opposition to the oil drilling on the radio. They held many demonstrations, waving banners and signs on which they wrote "Say NO to petroleum exploration!" ADELA's campaign continued to raise public awareness about the dangers of oil exploration in the Talamanca region, and international support quickly began to pour in. By January 2001, groups including the Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (E-LAW) and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) provided ADELA with research, legal resources, financial support, and international publicity. With their support, anti-petroleum advocates were able to send close to 27,000 emails, faxes, and letters of protest to the oil companies and Costa Rican government.

By February 2002, this continued pressure from local, national, and international groups pushed the national technical secretariat, SETENTA, into prohibiting MKJ-Harken from drilling offshore. With research provided by ADELA and international groups, the secretariat was able to cite over fifty reasons that showed how the oil exploration would not meet environmental safety regulations. In addition, newly-elected President Abel Pacheco signed a presidential decree in June 2002 that banned open-pit mining (however, this ban only applied to future, rather than all, mining projects). Pacheco also supported an ADELA-drafted bill that would repeal the 1994 Hydrocarbons Law that had partitioned Costa Rica into 22 blocks for oil and natural gas exploration by foreign firms.

In response to their denied exploration permit, MKJ-Harken demanded that the Costa Rican government repay the oil company for the money it spent on the exploration. It went so far as to sue the Costa Rican government for \$57 billion in lost projected

profits, but the company later withdrew its claim.

Foreign oil companies, with the support of their governments and neo-liberal free trade agreements, have continued to pressure the Costa Rican government. Although these companies have filed various lawsuits, ADELA members continue to defend local ecosystems by using both legal means and grassroots campaign strategies to fight oil development.

Research Notes

Influences:

Not known.

Sources:

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Engler, Mark and Nadia Martinez. "True Gold of Our Future: Costa Ricans say 'No!' to oil exploration companies". New Internationalist. October 2003.

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Natural Resource Defense Council and Friends of the Earth. "The threat to the environment from the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA): The case of Harken Costa Rica Holdings and offshore oil."
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Additional Notes:

The Harken Energy oil company had close ties to former U.S.

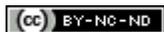
President George W. Bush. He had once been a major shareholder in the company, and had served as a member of its board of directors. This direct link to the U.S. government may have helped provide Harken Energy with the necessary pressure to influence the Costa Rican government.

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Aden Tedla 25/02/2010

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