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The many contradictions of holding COP13 in Cancún

Helena Paul, EcoNexus

It is ironic that we are in Cancún for COP13, since this area represents some of the worst impacts of tourist development on biodiversity to be found anywhere. Cancún's string of more than 500 hotels are built alongside the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef, the world's second longest coral reef. Prior to development from the 1970s onwards, this was an area of forests and mangroves - and of course the long white sands that the developers knew would bring the crowds. Development simply paved over and buried the mangroves along the coast. Even that beautiful sand has had to be heavily supplemented with millions of cubic metres brought in from local marine sandbanks, against local opposition.

The hasty construction of hotel complexes, golf courses, roads, sewers and the rest has caused pollution of many kinds. 'Every year more than 14,000 tons of faeces are filtered into the ground, while more than 11.2 million cubic meters of wastewater contaminate groundwater as a result of leaks in managed Aguakan networks in the municipality of Benito Juárez.' (Riviera Maya News, 2015). Aguakan is a company responsible for drinking water in the area. Much of the sewage is not properly treated and some ends up in the lagoons. Unsurprisingly, Cancún effluent is also having negative impacts on the Mesoamerican coral reef.

Cancún also produces huge amounts of garbage. Some of this is allegedly dumped in landfills close to marginal communities composed of people from all over the region who have settled here, drawn by the possibility of jobs in the hotels. Toxins from this garbage leach into the mangroves and lagoons.

But perhaps the worst abuses are suffered by indigenous communities. Famous archaeological sites such as Tulum and Chichen Itza receive more than a million tourist visits a year. They are a major feature of the government programme Mundo Maya, which promotes the notion of sustainable tourism, and highlights the involvement of local communities. However, it appears that local people who have communal land rights based on old systems of shared land use called *ejidos* are vulnerable to violent evictions for development.

For example in a land conflict in Tulum, according to a Maya community member:

Even though the agrarian court issued a judgement in favour of the people with common rights to the land (ejidatarios) and annulled the property titles of the entrepreneurs, evictions, impunity and corruption continue in Tulum. This has resulted in the death of the lawyer who defended the ejidatarios, 19 of whom were unjustly imprisoned. There have also been death threats, disappearances, torture of women and clear proof of collusion with official authorities, ranging from state governors to judges. Meanwhile the lands of the dispossessed are guarded by municipal and state police.

Cancún is thus the perfect setting for a confrontation with the contradictions of our world, with the destruction of biodiversity for tourism development, and the violence shown to indigenous and local communities seeking to uphold their rights in such a world especially in the face of climate change..

Read also: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2010/dec/09/Cancun-mangrove-paradise-megasprawl>;

<https://www.riviera-maya-news.com/contaminated-groundwater-big-problem-for-Cancun/2015.html>;

Developing pollution problems due to tourism in Cancún, Mexico: <http://web1.cnre.vt.edu/lsg/3104/Cancun/gaku/Cancun.html>;

Ending a Touristic Destination in Four Decades: Cancún's Creation, Peak and Agony by Elva Esther Vargas Martínez, Marcelino Castillo Nechar and Felipe Carlos Viesca González: International Journal of Humanities and Social Science; Vol. 3 No. 8 [Special Issue -April 2013] http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_3_No_8_Special_Issue_April_2013/2.pdf

Recognise and support the contributions of indigenous peoples and local communities to achieve the Aichi Biodiversity Targets by 2020

Nadia Stone, Forest Peoples Programme

The role and contributions Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLC) must be put front and centre of the discussions taking place at COP13 on how to make progress on the implementation of the CBD's Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020.

Numerous case studies collected and presented in *Local Biodiversity Outlooks; Indigenous Peoples' and Local Communities' Contributions to the Implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020* evidence the important work being carried out at local and national levels towards the achievement of all 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

This publication highlights the successes and challenges faced by IPLCs in relation to biodiversity, conservation and sustainable use and development. It is also a useful tool that suggests ways forward if the significant progress needed to achieve the targets and the 2050 Vision is to be made. Most of the world's biodiversity is found within areas customarily governed by IPLCs; it is obvious that these targets could be achieved only by engaging and supporting the peoples who have been custodians of biodiversity for generations. Recognising and further supporting IPLCs offers an effective way to protect and sustainably use ecosystems and the precious biodiversity on Earth.

Cultural and biological diversity are deeply interrelated. Community initiatives aimed at preserving the endangered Red panda in Nepal, for example, directly contribute to Target 12's aim to reduce the risk of extinction for threatened species, but equally showcases the cultural beliefs behind communities' efforts to protect the species. Likewise, initiatives by the Maori in Aotearoa/New Zealand aimed at resolving the issue of kauri dieback combine traditional knowledge with evidence-based approaches in order to improve understanding and fight this threat to

biodiversity. Kauri dieback is an invasive alien disease affecting kauri trees in the country. The trees have important spiritual value for the Maori and are linked to great Maori of the past and present. This value means many Maori are motivated to save this species. The holistic ecosystem approach to developing responses to kauri dieback shows the importance of including indigenous perspectives in the achievement of Aichi Target 9 and all targets.

Threats to the transmission of traditional knowledge and continuation of customary livelihoods threaten biodiversity and ecosystem integrity. Around 70% of all

languages are found in high biodiversity areas, and indigenous languages contain a wealth of traditional ecological knowledge, including of species that are relatively unknown. It is essential that long-campaigned-for policy commitments on traditional knowledge and customary sustainable use are translated into projects and programmes and that they are in partnership with IPLCs. This knowledge must be held, protected, understood and shared.

The issue of human rights is intrinsic to these debates; IPLCs are being displaced from their lands, both by unsustainable extractive industries and in some cases by top-down conservation, despite this being in contravention of international law. Governments should be facilitating legal recognition of IPLCs' lands, territories and resources as this would contribute to the protection of most of the remaining biodiversity on the planet. The Ogiek in Kenya, for example, are striving towards rights-based conservation within the protected area of Mount Elgon in Kenya. Without the protection of peoples whose long-term existence is based on sustainable relationships with lands, resources and animals, these ecosystems are left vulnerable.

Online available at www.localbiodiversityoutlooks.net

