



Conflict Factsheet

Santa Rita Dam Conflict in Guatemala

Type of conflict
Main

Intensity
3

Conflict Locality
Central America

Time
2010 –ongoing

Countries
Guatemala

Resources
Fish, Biodiversity, Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water, Ecosystem Stability

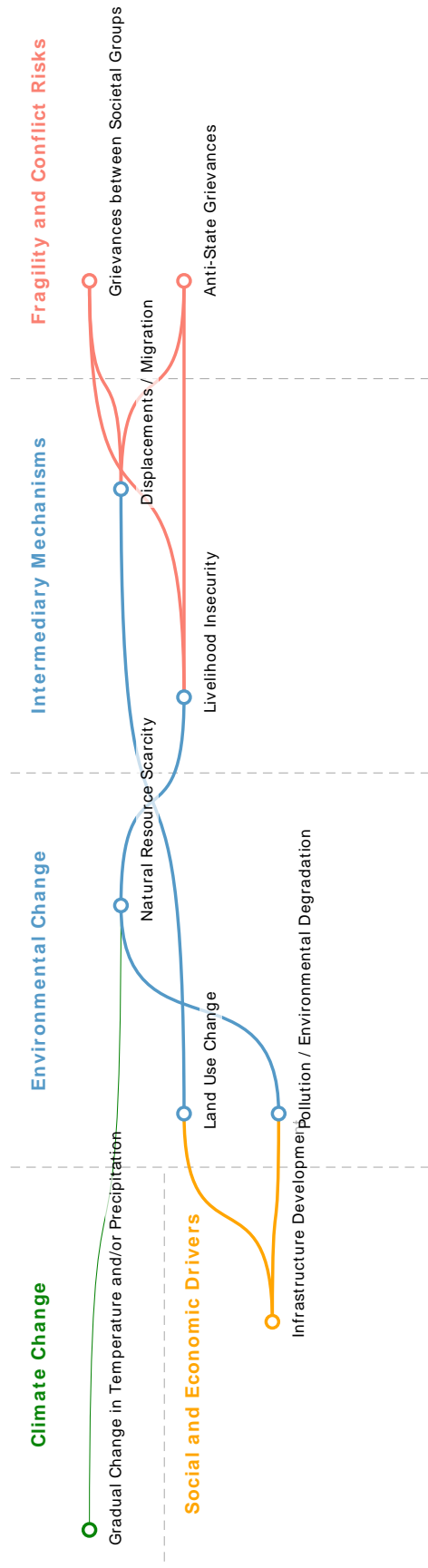


Conflict Summary

The ongoing construction of the Santa Rita Dam Project has sparked severe unrest among affected communities, state authorities and corporations involved in the project. To date, the conflict remains unresolved and there have been various human rights violations, including deaths.



Conceptual Model



Context Factors



Fish, Biodiversity, Agricultural / Pastoral Land,
Water, Ecosystem Stability

Unresponsive Government



Conflict History

In 2010, after a bidding process, the Guatemalan Ministry of Energy and Mines (MEM) gave the Hidroeléctrica Santa Rita S.A Corporation the license to construct the hydroelectric project on the Icbolay River. The Icbolay River is a tributary to the Chixoy River and the project located near the junction of the rivers Dolores and Canguinic in Monte Olivo in the department of Alta Verapaz. The involved area, which is 254 hectares in size, potentially affects 200,000 people, especially the Maya Q'eqchi and Poqomchi communities who inhabit the area (Navas, 2014).

Potential ramifications

The dam project entails concrete socio-economic factors, such as displacements, land dispossessions, as well as loss of livelihoods, biodiversity and habitat. Moreover, the upstream region has already been suffering from increasing water scarcity prior to the onset of the project. Ecologic repercussions in the form of biodiversity loss, groundwater pollution, reduced ecological and hydrological connectivity, deforestation and increased flood risks all stem from the dam construction.

The evolution of the conflict

The threat of adverse effects related to the project have sparked severe unrest between stakeholders, companies and the government since the approval of the Santa Rita Dam Project in the year 2010. Conflict between environmentalist, local farmers and indigenous Q'eqchi and Poqomchi communities, on the one hand, and Guatemalan national and municipal government, the National Civilian police as well as various corporations, most notably the Hidroeléctrica Santa Rita S.A, on the other hand, have steadily increased.

Since then, 22 communities have used several methods to mount their opposition to the project and enforce their legal rights. Tensions have grown over the lack of public consultation between the indigenous communities and the project developers, resulting in incidents of human rights violations as well as numerous acts of protests, including: injuries during violent evictions and repressive operations like arrests by the civilian police against the communities, murders of opponents, and the reported burning and destruction of facilities and items that belonged to the community (Peace Brigades International, 2014).

Since 2012, the violence linked to the dam construction has reached a peak upon the arrival of machinery and construction material. Such action disrespects the International Labour Organisation's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention 169 and triggered further demonstrations, blockages as well as other types of community mobilization (Navas,2014).

Despite opposition by environmentalists, local farmers and indigenous peoples, the construction works still continue. As of today, the construction work has entailed forced evictions, arrests and intimidation of community leaders, as well as 7 deaths according to human rights reports on behalf of the company (Telesur, 2014).

International involvement in the project

The private equity fund Latin Renewables Infrastructure Fund (LRIF) finances the Santa Rita Hydroelectric Plant's construction. Investors in the fund include the German development finance institution (DEG), the Netherlands Development Finance Company (FMO), the International Finance Corporation (IFC),



the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECID) and the Swiss Investment Fund for Emerging Markets (SIFEM).

Since June 2014, the Santa Rita hydroelectric dam is officially registered under the UN's carbon offsetting scheme Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) despite preceding pleas opposing its registration by the local communities to the CDM Board ([Peace Brigades International, 2014](#)).

Resolution Efforts

The conflict remains violent and, currently, without a foreseeable resolution.

In terms of the project management, human rights organizations deplore the absence of consent given by affected communities in accordance with the concept of a prior, free and informed consultation process, as well as a failure to observe the rights recognized in international covenants ratified by Guatemala.

During the conflict, the state is claimed to have failed to investigate and administer justice in the cases of attacks on residents. This is perceived as particularly unjust while, simultaneously, criminal harassment and arrest warrants are issued by the authorities with speed against leaders and residents within the community when responding to complaints made by companies and other non-government actors.

Finally, there is a lack of effective response in the form of state protection to physical and ecological threats that strongly affect the communities even though also explicitly reported to state authorities ([Peace Brigades International, 2014](#)).

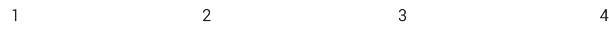
In a plea to support the indigenous peoples, 29 civil society organisations have asked the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to immediately address the issue. In 2014, a convention was signed between national authorities, companies and communities on the Santa Rita Dam project – however, violence continues in the region ([Navas, 2014](#)).

Disputable project backing

The UN carbon offsetting scheme Clean Development Mechanisms (CDM), under which the project was accepted, has also been strongly criticized. This criticism relates to shortcomings in integrating an adequate conflict prevention and management and for its underlying rules and procedures. A high-level panel associated with the CDM policy dialogue iterated recommendations, including the creation of a grievance mechanism for local stakeholders to voice social and environmental concerns and to help resolve issues that emerge after a project's registration. There is currently correspondence between the CDM board and the community councils of the affected region by the Santa Rita project. These in particular demand further information on legal incoherence, policy issues and inclusion of the local stakeholders in the decision making process ([Presbyterian Fellowship, 2014](#)).



Intensities & Influences



INTENSITIES

International / Geopolitical Intensity

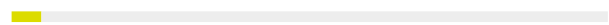


Human Suffering



INFLUENCES

Environmental Influences



Societal Influences



Violent Conflict

Yes



Salience with nation

National



Mass displacement

Less than 100.000 and less than 10% of the country's population are displaced within the country.



Cross Border Mass Displacement

No



Resolution Success

Reduction in Violence

There was no reduction in violence.

-

Resolve of displacement problems

Displacement continues to cause discontent and/or other problems.

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Reduction in geographical scope

There has been no reduction in geographical scope.

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Increased capacity to address grievance in the future

There is no increased capacity to address grievances in the future.

-

Grievance Resolution

Grievances have been completely ignored.

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Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity

There has been no reduction in intensity

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Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

Mediation & arbitration

2

The UN carbon offsetting scheme Clean Development Mechanisms (CDM), under which the project was accepted, iterated recommendations including the creation of a grievance mechanism for local stakeholders to voice social and environmental concerns and to help resolve issues that emerge. The CDM board and the community councils of the affected region are currently engaged in dialogue.

Treaty/agreement

3

A convention was signed between national authorities, companies and communities on the Santa Rita Dam project in 2014.

Social inclusion & empowerment

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International covenants ratified by Guatemala state that prior consultations with affected communities are required during the planning of hydroelectric projects. However, this requirement was not upheld.

Promoting social change

1

29 civil society organisations have asked the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to address the conflict.

Resources and Materials

References with URL

[Navas, G. \(2014\). Hidroeléctrica Santa Rita S.A. in Monte Olivo, Guatemala](#)

[Peace Brigades International \(2014\). Alert: Deterioration In Human Rights Situation In Monte Olivo](#)

[Telesur \(2014\). 2 Deaths, 5 Disappeared after Police Violence in Guatemala](#)

[Pres By Peace Fellowship \(2015\). Civil Society Groups Call on UN to Investigate Santa Rita Dam in Guatemala](#)

Further information

<https://factbook.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/santa-rita-dam>