



Conflict Factsheet

## Conflict over Land in the Amazon Basin, Ecuador

Type of conflict <b>Main</b>	Intensity <b>2</b>
Conflict Locality <b>South America</b>	Time <b>2011 –ongoing</b>
Countries <b>Ecuador</b>	Resources <b>Agricultural / Pastoral Land</b>



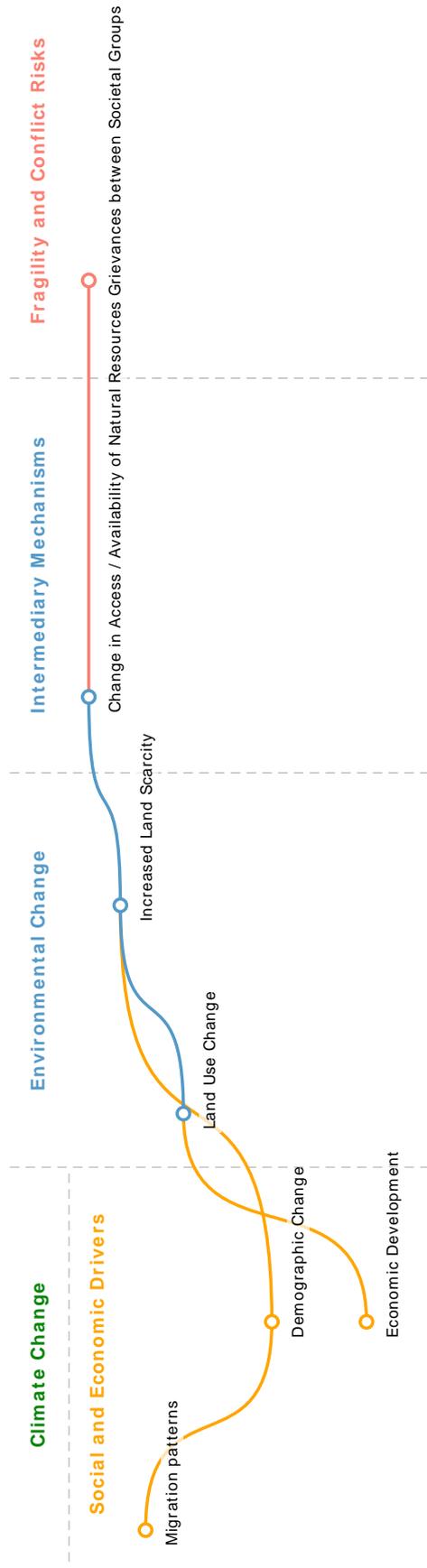
Local resource competition

### Conflict Summary

As is true for the entire Amazon region, the Ecuadorian Amazon region has undergone different phases of colonization. This has created land and territorial conflict between settlers from the highlands, and indigenous peoples of the Amazon region. Meanwhile, rising interest for productive land and other natural resources, as well as development plans on the national scale, have further fueled conflict. The tensions between families of the Shuar people and settlers over access to land in the Province of Morona Santiago, Ecuador shows how current infrastructure projects in the Amazon region worsen the conflicts generated during homesteading settlement and reflect the complexity of resolving them in intercultural contexts.



### Conceptual Model



### Context Factors



Agricultural / Pastoral Land



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## Conflict History

By the early 1970s, approximately 43,000 agricultural colonists from the highlands had moved to the Ecuadorian Amazon Basin, also known as the Oriente, in a state-led effort to integrate the Oriente through settlement. Most migrants settled in Morona Santiago and Zamora Chinchipe in the southern region, where direct routes to Cuenca and Loja in the nearby highlands existed ([Southgate et al. 2009](#)). This homesteading changed the social and political structure of the Amazon region and led in some cases to peaceful coexistence, to violence in others, between different ethnic and cultural groups. Meanwhile, the biodiversity of the Amazon Basin - which covers 44% of the land area of the South American continent - is threatened by deforestation, changes in the hydrologic cycle associated with changes in the global climate and water pollution ([OAS 2005](#)).

### Disputed property rights

Two decades ago, farmers settled in the parish of Shaimi, who formed the Puma Association (ASOPUMA, some 80 members) and got property titles. In the parish of Shaimi, up to 2008 the farmers and Shuar people lived peacefully together. The conflict began when, starting in 2011, there were the first irregular Shuar settlements in the urban zone of the parish. The four Shuar families involved were demanding their right to settle that land, because they felt that the land distribution done during colonization times was illegal, and they never received the payment that had been agreed to at the time. There is no documentary support to confirm or contradict their version.

### Rising speculative land values

This conflict developed in the context of rising speculative land values in the urban zone of the parish, because the Méndez – Morona highway linking the parish with the urban centers of the Province was completed. There were also rumors that a port was to be built, with the idea of making a connection by river and overland between Ecuador's Pacific Ocean port of Manta with Manaus in Brazil, and from there to the Atlantic coast of South America. This strategic project is part of the Initiative to Integrate South American Regional Infrastructure (IIRSA) which includes improving regional transport, energy and telecommunications infrastructure.

### Worsening of the conflict

Beginning in 2012, Shuar families made new squatting settlements, denouncing illegal tenure and ownership of the land in the Shaimi sector, arguing that they had ancestral rights to the territory. These families squatted on several farms, leading to verbal and physical aggression and death threats between the two population groups. In May 2012, the conflict increased, resulting in the death of a youth. This caused more mistrust and an environment of insecurity. For the first time, regular police and army stations were set up.

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## Resolution Efforts

Because of the scale of the conflict, an Inter-Ministry Commission intervened, led at the time by the Ministry to Coordinate Policy, and later by the Ministry of the Interior, the National Secretariat to Manage Policy and the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Aquaculture and Fishing (MAGAP) of the Province, to help



organize urban planning under the leadership of the Municipality of Tiwintza, to legalize land tenure, help validate their Intercultural Life Plan, and establish lasting order.

### **Conflict mediation committee**

A conflict mediation committee was formed with the Shuar representative (President of the Interprovincial Federation of Shuar Centers - FICSH), the Municipality of Tiwintza, and three societal leaders. Under the mediating committee, the parties prepared different proposals but no agreement was reached among the stakeholders in the conflict. Therefore, the Inter-Ministry Commission and FICSH prepared a proposal for final resolution, which was presented in July and August 2014. This proposal was based on the findings of the report on land tenure in the area, prepared by the MAGAP Conflict Management Unit, which had gathered information since mid-2012 and updated it to June 2014; and proceedings from the dialogues which had lasted nine months (17 December 2013 to 02 September 2014). This proposal recognized titles to 38 properties (26 farmer families and two Shuar families) and proposed to grant the other eight properties to the Shuar people, totaling 1772 hectares, which were basically land with no owner and no one in possession; or lots that the mestizos had allegedly abandoned.

### **The Shuar families' rejection of the proposed agreement**

The farmers accepted the proposal in writing. The Shuar families rejected it and have stated that they would sign a peace and coexistence agreement when the ownership titles by the farmers for properties where the Shuars are currently settled have been canceled. In view of this situation, the Governor's Office, on behalf of the Inter-Ministry Commission, has stated that this proposal had already been analyzed by government agencies and is not sustainable, and anyway it would require a series of legal actions that would require time. In this context, government institutions – members of the Inter-Ministry Commission – have exhausted all administrative options for dialogue, concluded their intervention, and will let any other administrative or judicial bodies take over and resolve these disagreements.



## Intensities & Influences



### INTENSITIES

International / Geopolitical Intensity



Human Suffering



### INFLUENCES

Environmental Influences



Societal Influences



Violent Conflict

**Yes**



Salience with nation

**National**



Mass displacement

**None**



Cross Border Mass Displacement

**No**



## Resolution Success

Reduction in geographical scope

**There has been no reduction in geographical scope.**



Increased capacity to address grievance in the future

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



Grievance Resolution

**Grievances have been mostly ignored.**



Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity

**There has been no reduction in intensity**





## Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

### Mediation & arbitration

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Several mediation attempts were made by way of a conflict mediation committee, which included representatives from all stakeholder groups, as well as an Inter-Ministry Commission tasked with preparing a proposal for final resolution. However, these interventions have failed to resolve the disagreements between the farmers and the Shuar families. The Inter-Ministry Commission has concluded its mediation efforts.

### Social inclusion & empowerment

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Shuar families have been represented in dialogues by the President of the Interprovincial Federation of Shuar Centers (FICSH) and have had an opportunity to present their own proposals for review. The latest proposed agreement prepared jointly by the Inter-Ministry Commission and FICSH granted eight properties (1772 hectares) to the Shuar people. Nonetheless, the Shuar families have rejected this proposal and are demanding rights to land where they are currently settled.

## Resources and Materials

References with URL

[Southgate, D., Wasserstrom, R. and Reider, S. \(2009\) Oil Development, Deforestation, and Indigenous Populations in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Latin American Studies Association in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 11 - 14 June 2009](#)

[Organization of American States: Office for sustainable Development & Environment. \(2005\). Amazon River Basin – Integrated and sustainable management of transboundary water resources in the Amazon River Basin. \(Water project series, Number 8 - October 2005\)\)](#)

Further information

<https://factbook.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/conflict-over-land-amazon-basin-ecuador>