## Conflict Factsheet

### Lead Pollution Conflict in El Salvador in Central America

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of conflict</th>
<th>Intensity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main</td>
<td>1</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Locality</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central America</td>
<td>2003–2012</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Resources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water</td>
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### Conflict Summary

Although the economies of Latin American countries remain primarily agrarian, some industrialization has also generated socio-environmental conflict, especially in relation to polluting. A prime example is the conflict concerning lead and the alleged environmental pollution of between Baterías de El Salvador/Acumuladores Récord and the people living near the factory, located outside San Salvador. This case also illustrates the inability of governmental institutions to ensure environmental health and care. The conflict reached its highest level of intensity between the years 2003-2012.
Conceptual Model

Climate Change

Environmental Change

Intermediary Mechanisms

Fragility and Conflict Risks

Social and Economic Drivers

Economic Development

Public Health Risks

Change in Access / Availability of Natural Resources

Natural Resource Scarcity

Pollution / Environmental Degradation

Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water

Context Factors

Anti-State Grievances
Conflict History

The Baterías de El Salvador S.A. Company, located at Sitio del Niño, San Juan Opico, La Libertad, 30 Km from San Salvador, began operations in 1994 as a distributor of batteries for the domestic and regional market. In 2000, they began assembling batteries, using recycled material. Their operations consisted of manufacturing electrical batteries for vehicles, for which they set up a lead recycling plant to generate their own raw material.

Hazardous waste import

There was no other battery recycling facility in Central America, so the company began importing large volumes of used batteries and lead scrap to process in their plant. Lead-acid batteries are made with various alloys involving other metals, and use sulfuric acid to conduct electricity. These components are in the category of hazardous substances, both under the Basil Agreement and by National Legislation. The Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN) granted the company its environmental permit under Resolution Nş 628 2003, setting the mandatory environmental conditions.

Non compliance with environmental standards impacts public health

Nevertheless, the environmental monitoring by that institution in March 2007 found non-compliance with at least 7 of the 13 environmental measures (CESTA, 2009). A report by the Salvadoran Appropriate Technology Center (CESTA) says that the first health issues arose among local inhabitants in 2004, among a semi-rural community with 1,339 homes, with a total approximate population of 7,000. The symptoms, above all, in children, were bodily aches, falling hair, nosebleeds and nausea (CESTA, 2009). Before then they had not been fully aware of the problem and the people unknowingly got used to the pollution. The first serious case was a little girl who came to a health center as an emergency. The company covered the costs of the medical treatment and chelation procedure, which is quite expensive (CESTA, 2009). When several more children had similar symptoms, the school principal asked the Health Center to test the schoolchildren and reported this situation to the Environmental Directorate of the community. Blood tests of 50 schoolchildren yielded alarming results, so they lodged a complaint with the authorities for the pollution, since many of them had health issues that could affect them for the rest of their lives. The pollution later began to become evident for the rest of the inhabitants, crops, domestic animals, water, and land.

Resolution Efforts

Environmental Committee for Sitio del Niño

In view of these increased public health issues, the Environmental Committee for Sitio del Niño was organized. Leaders brought their first complaints about the pollution to public institutions and societal organizations. However, actions by the directors of this committee were unsatisfactory and gave rise to mistrust, as they were suspected of having contacted and reached agreements with the company management.

The "Unleaded Movement"
For this reason, in late 2006 the "Unleaded Movement" was created with community leadership, reactivating the motivation and social backing for the fight to close the factory. The Unleaded Movement made the problem public and submitted letters to the different government institutions to denounce pollution by the Baterías de El Salvador S.A. Company. Community information activities were also conducted. In 2007, the first march was stopped by a barricade of soldiers and police with barbed wire, according to the testimonies of a leader interviewed by CESTA (CESTA, 2009). However, this march achieved media coverage of the problem and other agencies joined forces, such as the Human Rights Defense Agency.

**Baterías de El Salvador's answer**
Company representatives have rejected these accusations. They claim that there is no pollution of the air or the wells around the factory and that they operate under the Law and within the parameters established by the Ministry of Environment. They have also denounced non-enforcement of institutional procedures, and rights under the Constitution and laws of El Salvador (La Pagina, 2013).

**Government fines Baterías de El Salvador**
Nevertheless, different investigations of environmental impacts led the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources, in 2008, to fine Baterías de El Salvador US$ 93,000 dollars, but without ordering reparations of the environmental damage caused, pursuant to the Law on the Environment (1998) in Article 96 regarding the assessment of damages to the environment (CESTA, 2009).

**Ongoing legal action**
In 2010, after six years of investigation, the Attorney-General’s Office (FGR) determined that the environmental damage caused by the former Baterías de El Salvador factory totaled approximately four billion dollars. This judgment was appealed and on 18 October 2012, the Constitutional Division of the Supreme Court of Justice admitted an appeal against two companies and several government authorities regarding the lead pollution in the zone of San Juan Opico, La Libertad.
### Intensities & Influences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intensities</th>
<th>Influences</th>
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| **Intensities** | \n| International / Geopolitical Intensity | \n| Human Suffering | \n| **Influences** | \n| Environmental Influences | \n| Societal Influences | \n
### 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 completely taken into account.**

**Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity**
- **Conflict resolution strategies have been clearly responsible for the decrease in conflict intensity.**
Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

Mediation & arbitration
In 2006, the “Unleaded Movement” was created with community leadership and sought to close the battery company. The movement raised awareness to the pollution and health issues, and demanded a response from government institutions. Other agencies, such as the Human Rights Defense Agency, supported the movement.

Promoting social change
In 2006, the “Unleaded Movement” was created with community leadership and sought to close the battery company. The movement raised awareness to the pollution and health issues, and demanded a response from government institutions. Other agencies, such as the Human Rights Defense Agency, supported the movement.

Resources and Materials

References with URL


Further information
https://factbook.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/lead-pollution-conflict-el-salvador-central-america