

SDG's, global commodity chains and environmental justice: Understanding how environmental justice conflict impacts achievement of the SDGs

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BACKGROUND

We set out to understand how environmental justice (EJ) conflicts linked to global commodity chains impact Ecuador's ability to achieve the SDGs. This was expanded through a 27-month project funded by the British Academy Sustainable Development Programme to work in 6 countries (Bangladesh, Brazil, Cambodia, DRC, Ecuador & Guinea-Bissau) to investigate how environmental defenders experience atmospheres of violence from development projects (mis)labelled as sustainable. Funding by the IDCF (University of Sussex) will allow mapping of indigenous rights violations in Brazil and we will co-host an exhibit at ONCA (Brighton, 5-7 November 2019) sharing artwork reflecting on experiences of violence by indigenous people and environmental defenders from Brazil, Bangladesh and Cambodia supported by the ESRC Festival of Social Science.



Fig 1: communities in Ecuador protest against encroachment of mining on their lands

METHODS

Building on environmental justice (EJ) conflicts identified by the EJAtlas (www.ejatlus.org) we examined differences in social indicators, based on the national census data for 2010, for regions in Ecuador with extractive industries linked to oil, mining, and timber, and those without. We also assessed the feasibility of monitoring progress towards the SDGs using existing data from Ecuador - and whether indicators can detect local level EJ conflicts and their impacts. With the EJAtlas team we undertook a review of EJ and the SDGs (Menton et al in review) and Dr Menton contributed to a study of the factors influencing murders rates of environmental defenders globally, comparing Global Witness' database of murders to other global datasets (e.g. Rule of Law Index, area under agricultural production, area under mining concessions, number of hydroelectric dams) (Butt et al 2019).

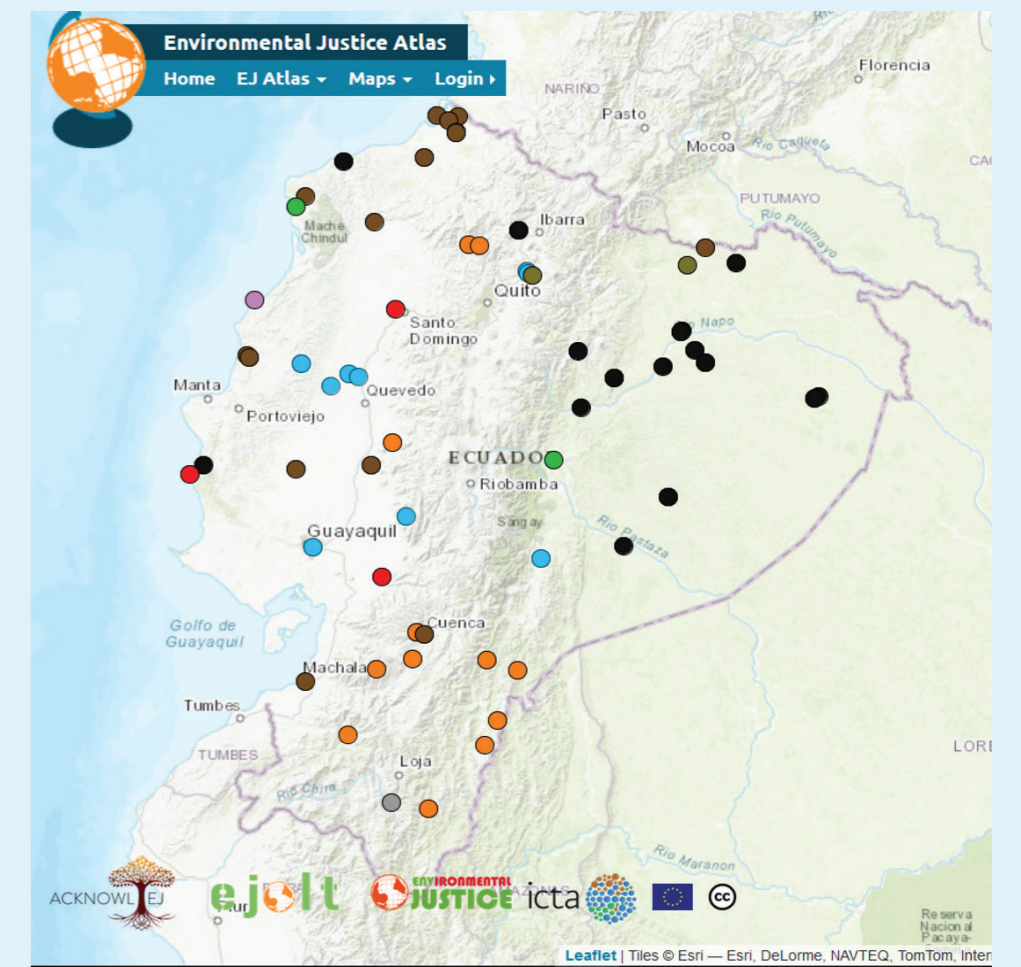


Fig 2: EJAtlas map of environmental justice conflicts in Ecuador. Source: www.ejatlus.org

FINDINGS

Urban areas of oil extraction zones in the Ecuadorian Amazon had lower social indicators than those outside extraction zones (e.g. access to water, 76% vs 37%; households in poverty, 19% vs 27%; doctors per thousand populations, 77% vs 39%). Our review of SDG indicators linking global commodities and EJ conflicts found data lacking for many indicators at national and particularly local level. Importantly, even with adequate data, existing indicators were unlikely to capture local level impacts of EJ conflicts. Our review of SDGs in light of EJ conflicts and EJ frameworks identified a predominant focus on legal justice and rule-of-law that lacked attention

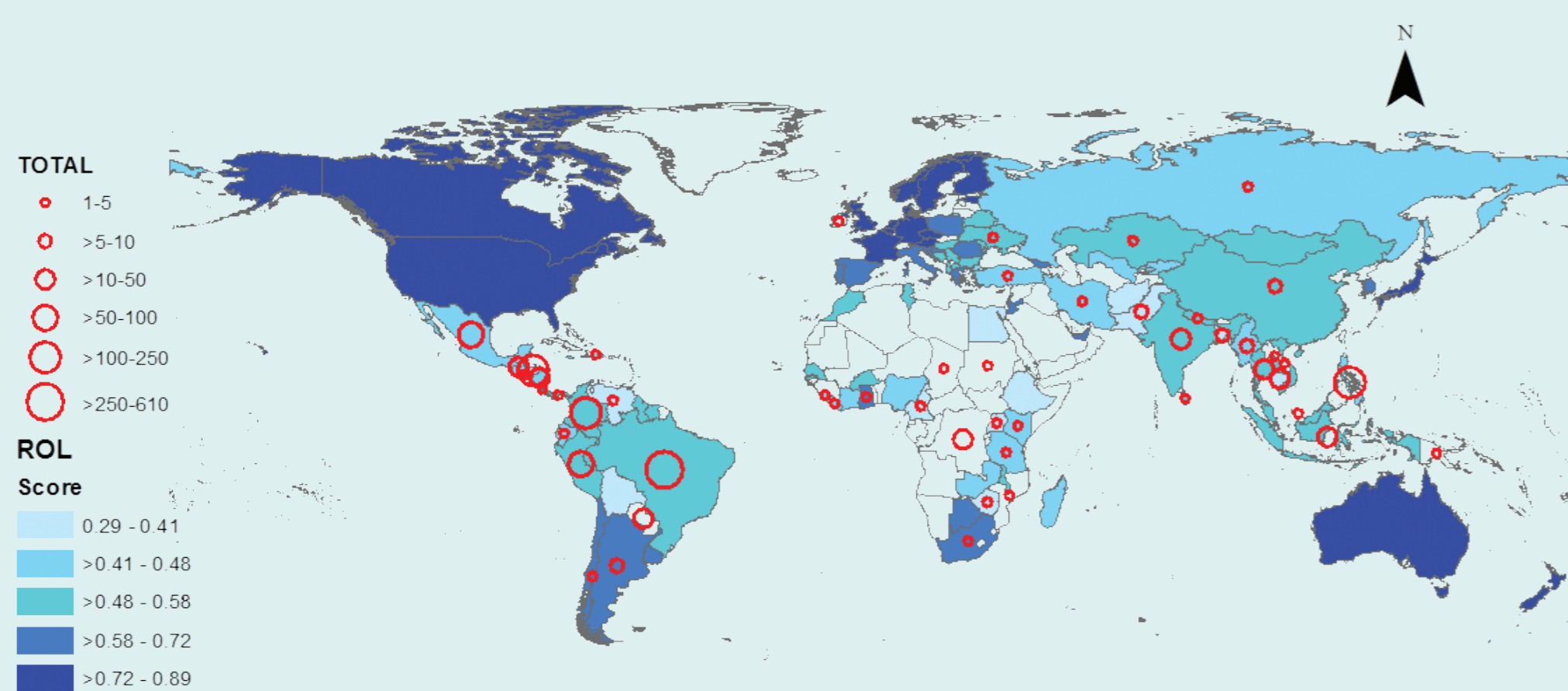


Fig 3: National rule of law index and total number of murders of environmental defenders from 2014-2017. Source: Butt et al 2019

to key dimensions of EJ (distribution, procedure and recognition). We found that cases with potential synergies between SDGs, wind farms for example appear to bring benefits for energy (SDG7) and climate action (SDG13), can still have negative impacts on local communities in terms of EJ (e.g. displacement from lands, conflicts with companies, lack of free prior informed consent) which are inadequately addressed within the SDG framework. The global level meta-analysis found murders of environmental defenders were more frequent in countries with high levels of corruption and weak rule of law and countries with more mining and hydro-dams.

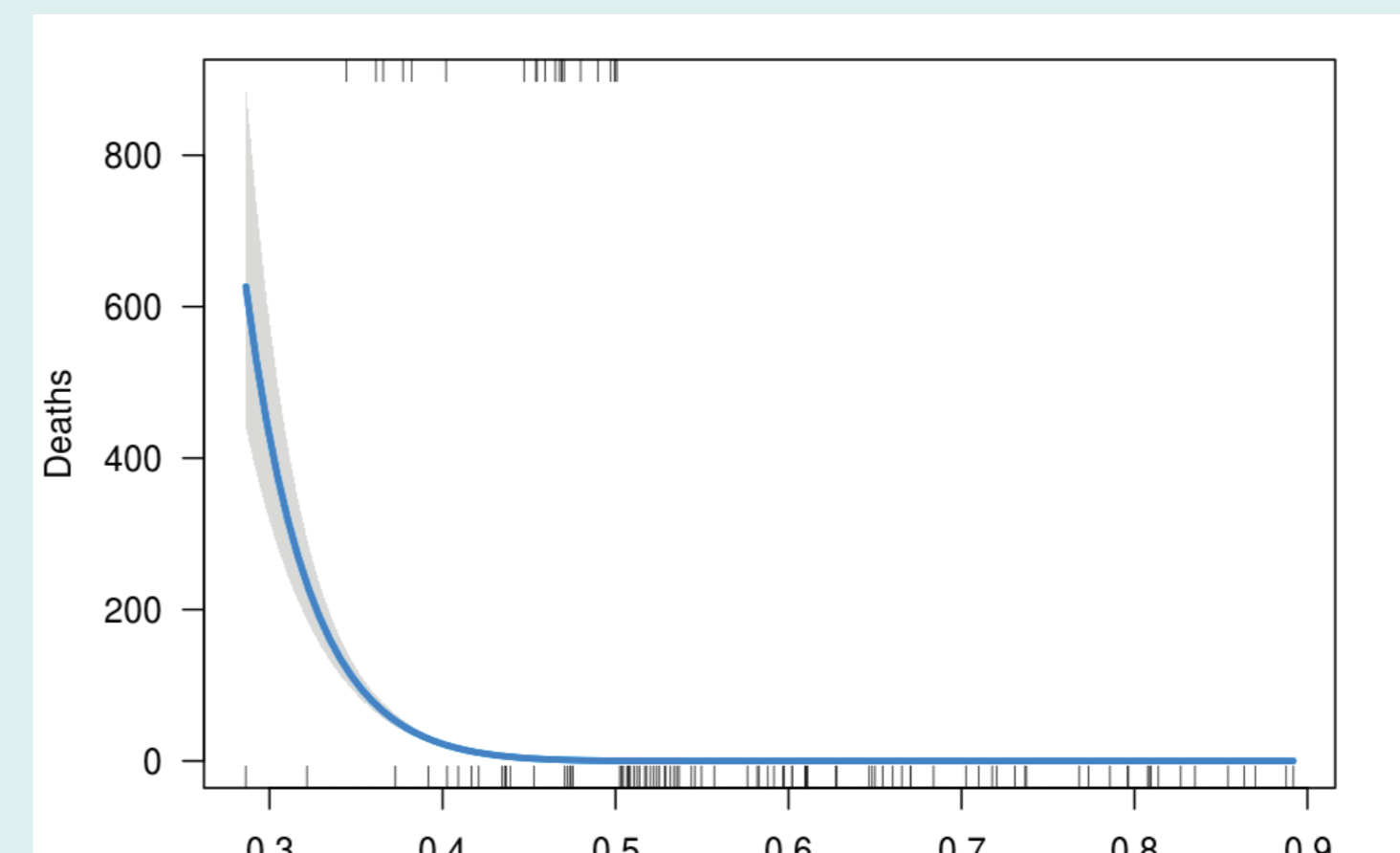


Fig 4: Fitted GLM of rule of law index vs number of murders of environmental defenders from 2014-2017. Source: Butt et al 2019

CONCLUSIONS

SDGs need to do more to account for EJ implications of projects supporting subsets of SDGs, as negative consequences to local communities are not captured by SDG indicators. Future work focuses on working with local communities suffering EJ conflicts to co-produce locally relevant indicators of the SDGs and minimise extensive monitoring burdens.

