Central America Indígena Project
Land Rights and Stability in Indigenous Societies of Central America
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Introduction

The CA Indígena project of the of the University of Kansas (KU) and the American Geographical Society (AGS) collaborates with the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán (UPNFM) in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and other academic partners in Central America.

The overall purpose of the our project is to “research the geographic factors that cause stability or instability in indigenous municipios of Central America.”

Together we operate the Mesa Geografíca Indígena, a research center at UPNFM where indigenous university students can learn by engaging in our research and doing geography.

Methodology

To understand the stability of indigenous municipios and other territorial jurisdictions we research at two different scales:

a) the regional, using municipio data on land and stability variables; and

b) the local, researching specific territorial jurisdictions of indigenous populations.

Indigenous Land Ownership

We hypothesize that secure land ownership is a key factor among the many influences affecting the stability of communities. In the Moskitia region of eastern Honduras, we are doing applied research in two different indigenous territorial jurisdictions:

a) Biospheres - Historic conservation units being re-designed for indigenous land rights; and

b) Concejos Territoriales - New indigenous territorial jurisdictions.

Tawahka Biosphere Reserve

We made 8 digital maps and a GIS database for Indigenous Tawahka Federation (FITH) and Honduran Government that have been in used in natural resource and conflict management.

Concejos Territoriales - Katainasta

Katainasta is the first "concejo territorial" and the first intercommunal property title established for the Honduran Miskitu people in 2012.

The creation of this, and seven other newly established concejos territoriales, poses challenges for the residents of Moskitia and the Honduran government, especially given overlapping uses and rights to natural resources.

In collaboration with educational, governmental, international, and indigenous organizations, the Mesa Geográfica Indígena team is working with the people of Katainasta to do participatory research mapping GIS of their resources while training them in geography.

Geographic Challenges

Making Digital Maps of Central America

Accurate GIS data, digital maps, and even print maps are widely unavailable in Central America. We build our own GIS database utilizing existing government and other databases. We discovered in the Moskitia region of Honduras (map on right), for instance, that government agencies sometimes disagree where municipio boundaries lie.

Broader Impacts

The CA Indígena Project is developing a GIS database and website of geographic information with the help of indigenous, university, and governmental collaborators.

The database and associated maps will serve as useful tools for indigenous communities as they strive to acquire legal access to their lands and resources. Even school children in remote villages have access to maps of their own territories: http://krausirpi.wordpress.com/fith/