Exploitation and Degradation of Waorani Culture in Ecuador

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Abstract
Located in Ecuador, the Yasuni Man and the Biosphere Reserve contain both the Yasuni National Park and the Waorani Ethnic Reserve. The Waorani tribe had been peacefully thriving on this land for many generations before colonization interfered. The oil industry, one of the main colonizers, has caused irreversible indirect and direct effects on the environment which are influencing climate change from a local to global scale. This ecosystem is a highly valuable region as it contains threatened species, crude oil reserves, valuable timber, and an immense number of different plant and animal species. The Waorani have been directly affected by the hunt for oil due to deforestation, degradation of their resources, and unwanted human contact. These indigenous communities are in peril due to the actions of large oil corporations and also a lack of action from the government.

Hypothesis
The Waorani culture is endangered due to damage of their resources, misunderstanding of their way of life, and backlashes from the oil industry.

Introduction
The Waorani tribe has lived in Eastern Ecuador for many generations. They are a semi-nomadic tribe who reside as hunter and gatherers; there are three recognized sanctions. Oil exploration is occurring in the Waorani’s backyard. Their territory, which has been reduced over the years due to oil, is right next to the Yasuni National Park which holds some of Ecuador’s largest crude oil fields. Oil and its extraction processes are detrimental to the environment and have a direct correlation in inducing climate change. Indigenous tribes are often not included in government affairs; free, prior, and informed consent is something that is necessary yet not utilized by the government to respect Waorani culture.

Conclusions
- Ecuador has a very large ecological debt to the globe due to deforestation and the process of crude oil extraction.
- Waorani tribe have had to change their lifestyle - change in diet, starting jobs with oil companies, permanent settlements, start of agriculture and loss of native crops, and a loss of traditional ecological knowledge.
- Change in diet and effect from oil leakage into the environment correlated with increase of diseases - diabetes and many types of cancer.
- Tension/murders between divisions of Waorani tribe due to unwanted contact by the oil corporations.
- Introduction of religion (Christianity) to the Waorani culture due to influence missionaries controlled by oil corporations.
- Oil pits leak into the water supply causing the Waorani to relocate to continue to survive healthily.
- Increase in tribal unity to attempt to gain environmental justice.
- Loss of trust between the Ecuadorian government and Waorani tribe.

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Future Directions
Indigenous peoples around the globe are being affected by climate change at alarming rates. In order to help preserve this culture there is a necessary balance between western science and traditional ecological knowledge. I am curious to view the processes the oil industry utilizes when deeming old oil pits ‘safe’. This calls for an investigation in the environmental science field to discover how to properly dispose of leftover oil exploration sites so that they do not pollute the surroundings environments.

References: