
Case Study: Hope and Gold: Open Pit Mining in Mexico



Miacatlán

Manuel was born in Miacatlán, a community located in the state of Morelos, Mexico.

Miacatlán is very close to Xochicalco, an important archaeological zone recognized as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

The inhabitants of this region are heirs to a pre-Hispanic past, particularly the Tlahuica and Nahua, and still retain many customs and

practices. Traditionally, the people are dedicated to agricultural activities, growing the crops necessary for their day-to-day survival. Manuel's community, like many others in this region, maintains a deep relationship with nature. For them, nature is the source of life, the heart of culture and the origin of identity.

It has not been easy for the people of Miacatlán to retain their way of life. Large state and corporate sponsored 'megaprojects' have sought new capital by uprooting the land and its people in search of natural resources. A major example of this phenomenon is the open pit gold and silver mines excavated by the mining company Esperanza Silver de México. Open pit mines involve the destruction of large land areas by heavy machinery and explosives to expose the desired minerals.

Closer Look



Watch this [video](#) about Xochicalco

Once the minerals are found, they are separated and treated with chemicals such as cyanide, mercury, and sulfuric acid--materials that contaminate groundwater and produce toxic gases.

In addition to the removal of land, the extraction of ground water, and the threat of water



Gathering medicinal plants at the hills of El Jumil and Colotepec

and air pollution caused by the mines, Manuel and his community know that the extracted resources will be exported from Mexico and never benefit their community.

Of particular concern to the people of Miacatlán are the hills of El Jumil and Colotepec, places of great material and symbolic value for the community. The hills provide important resources such

as jumiles, hat palm (*Brahea dulcis*), firewood, and medicinal plants. Recent explorations in the area found archeological remains on the top of the El Jumil hill.

To protect their land, villagers in the region have organized demonstrations against the mine. With long experience dealing with angry villagers, however, the mining companies have many tactics for undermining protests. Usually these tactics involve bribing villagers with money. This divides the community against itself, as some people will take the bribe and others will not. It is common, then, for the company to support the bribed villagers and spread misinformation about protests in the media and to government officials. Violence often ensues in the community due to these tactics. The rise in state-sponsored 'neo-extractivism' has increased the likelihood that the powerful will use the peoples' condition of poverty and marginalization to bribe them out of their heritage.

Despite these tactics, Manuel and his community, with the support of the local university and other civic organizations, were able to convince the government in 2013 to suspend mining permits in the area. This was a great victory. But vigilance must be maintained

because the company will surely push for new permits if the political and social winds change.

People like Manuel in the Miacatlán community actively participate in the defense of their land because they believe their "hope is not in gold", but in a sustainable way of life with the land that nurtures them. The people believe water and land are not to be sold but loved and defended.

-  Science shows the negative environmental impacts of open pit mining. What are some of these impacts for the Miacatlán community? Are there any 'megaprojects' in your region that threaten the environment?
-  What do you think about the company's strategy of offering money to the community in exchange for accepting the open pit mines? Why do you think some members of the community accept these offers and some do not?
-  How are the community's cultural and spiritual values threatened by the open pit mines? Are there any features of nature in your region that, if extracted, would harm the cultural and spiritual condition of people in the region?
-  What do you think it is that keeps people like Manuel fighting? Is there a cause for which you would fight? Is there any action you can undertake to support the struggle of people like Manuel?

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