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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 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 our project is to "research the geographic factors that cause stability or instability in indigenous *municipios* of Central America."

Together we operate the *Mesa Geográfica 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:

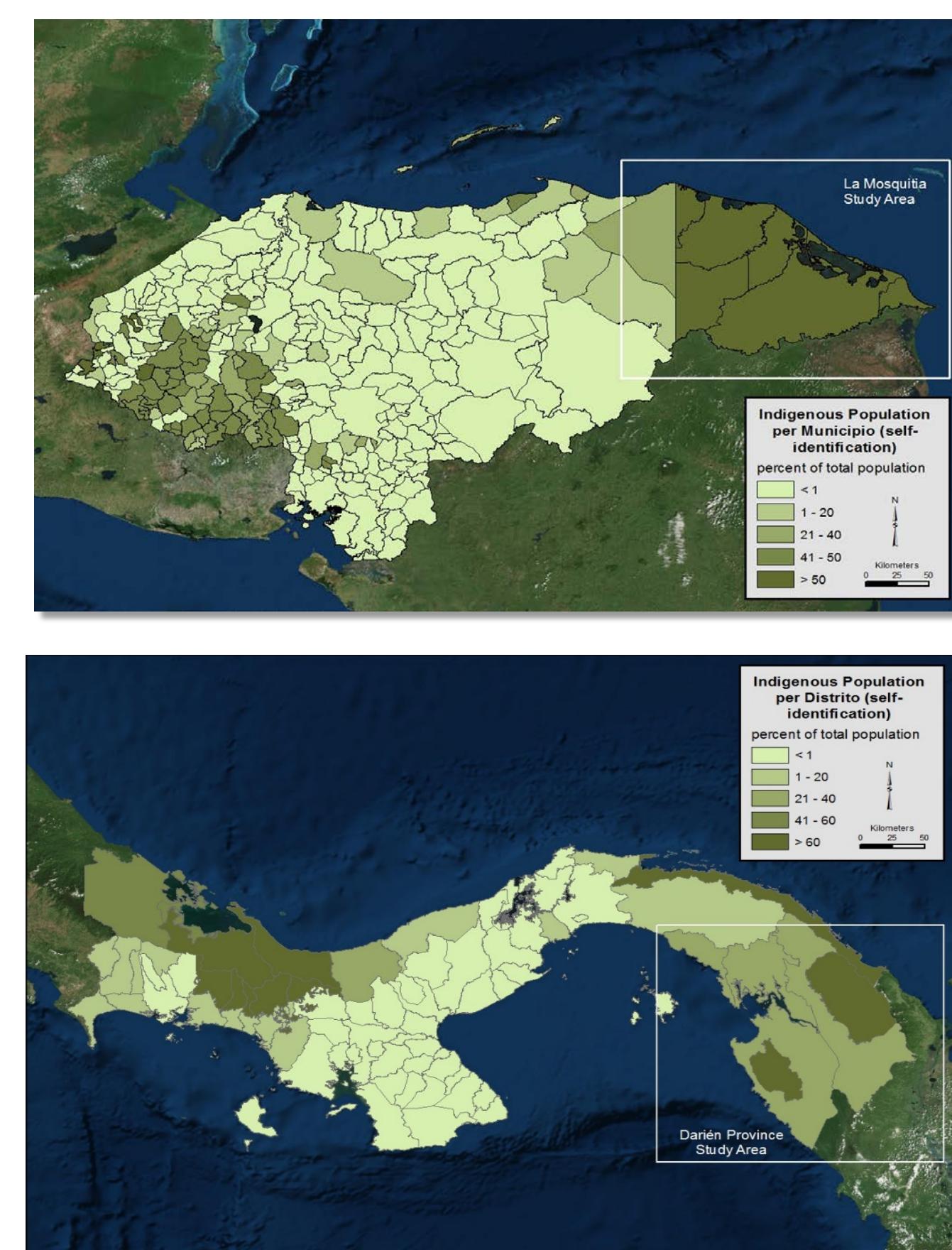
- the regional, using *municipio* data on land and stability variables; and
- the local, researching specific territorial jurisdictions of indigenous populations.

Indigenous Municipios

We develop baseline geographic data at both the regional and local levels, producing new maps and digital data, to understand land and cultural stability in indigenous *municipios* of Central America.

We populate the *municipio* cells in each CA country with select variables representing stability and resilience. Our first significant variable for the GIS database is percentage indigenous population.

Darker shades on maps below show indigenous populations covering much of Honduras and more of Panama. Some shaded areas show indigenous territorial jurisdictions (biosphere reserves, *comarcas*, *concejos territoriales*, etc.).



Geographic Challenges

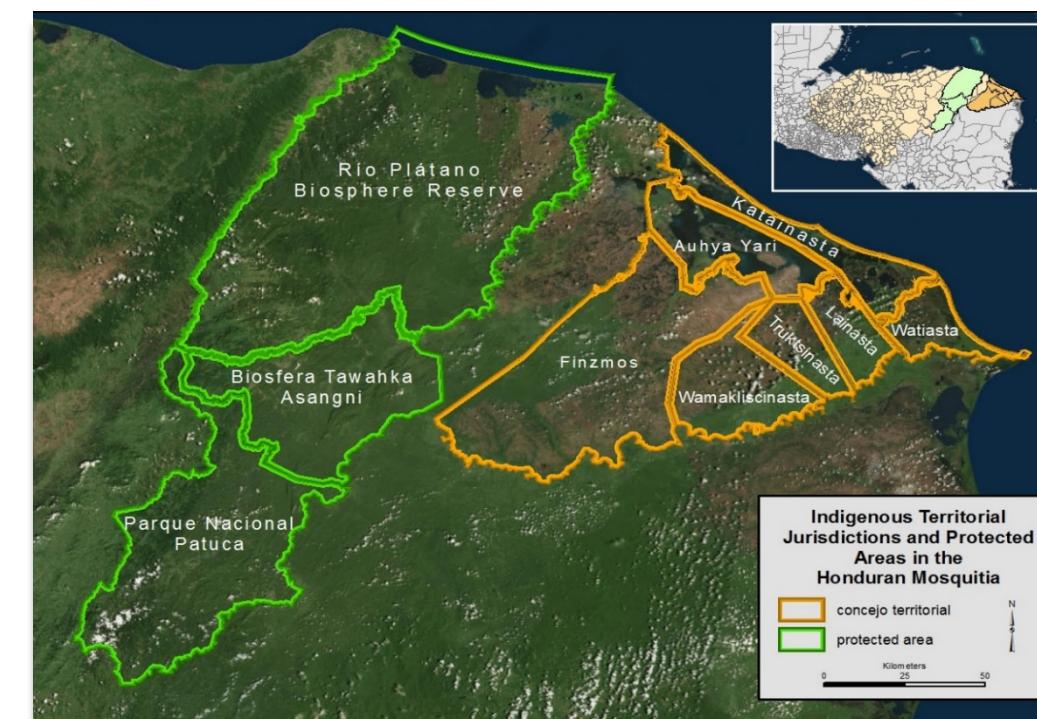
Making Digital Maps of Central America

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.

Indigenous Land Ownership

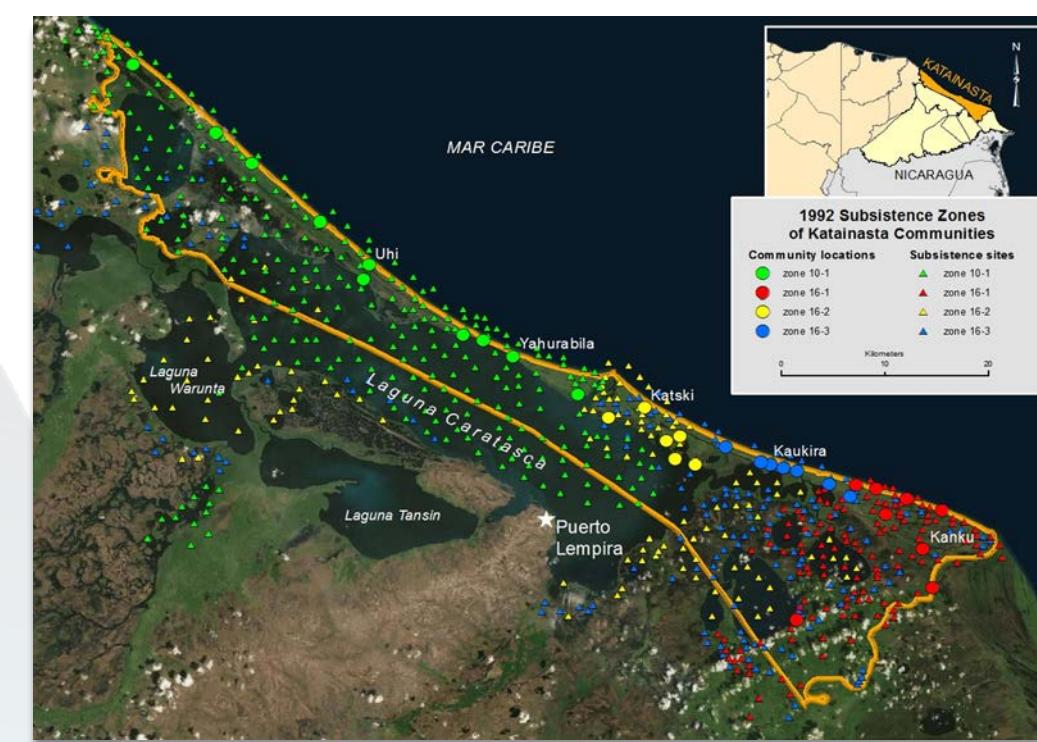
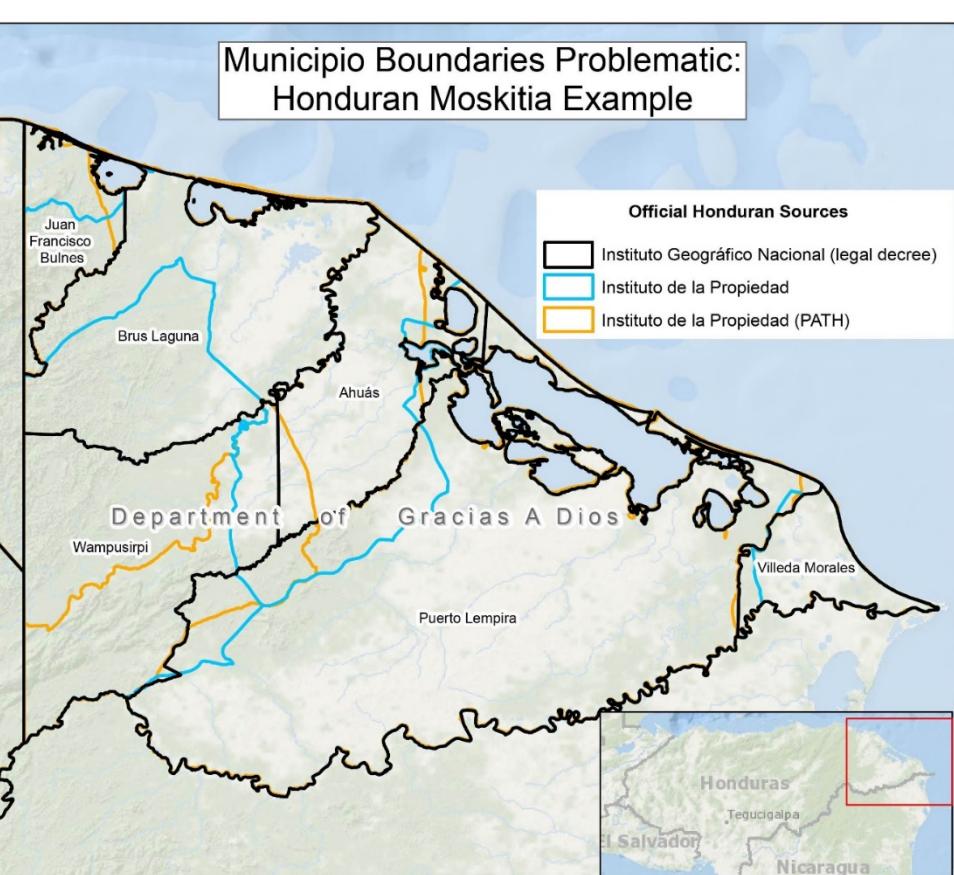
We hypothesize that secure land ownership is a key factor among the many influences affecting the stability of communities. In the Moskitia region of eastern Honduras, we are doing applied research in two different indigenous territorial jurisdictions:

- Biosphere Reserves** - Historic conservation units being re-designed for indigenous land rights; and
- 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 used in natural resource and conflict management.

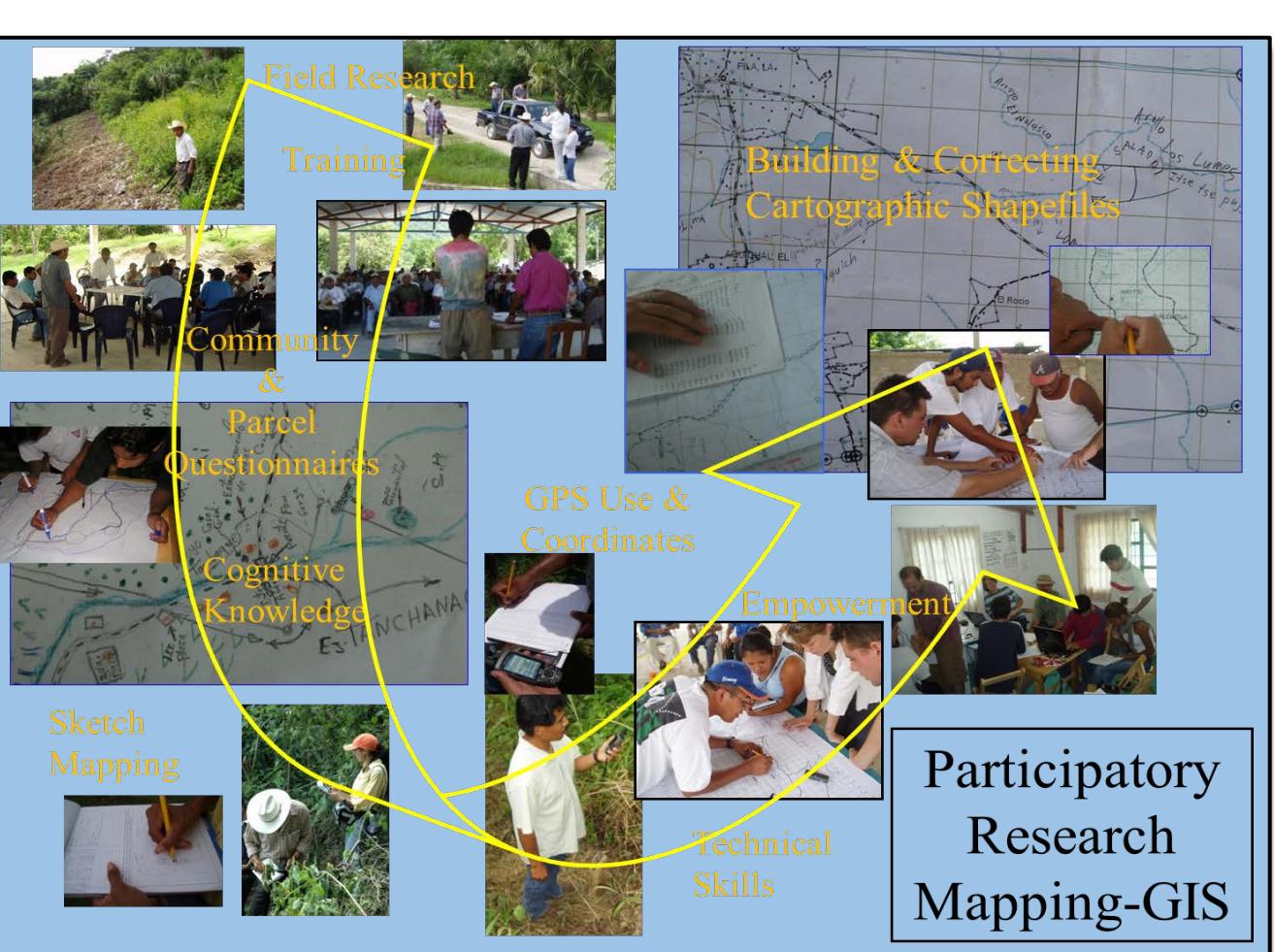


Concejos Territoriales - Kataínasta

Kataínasta 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.

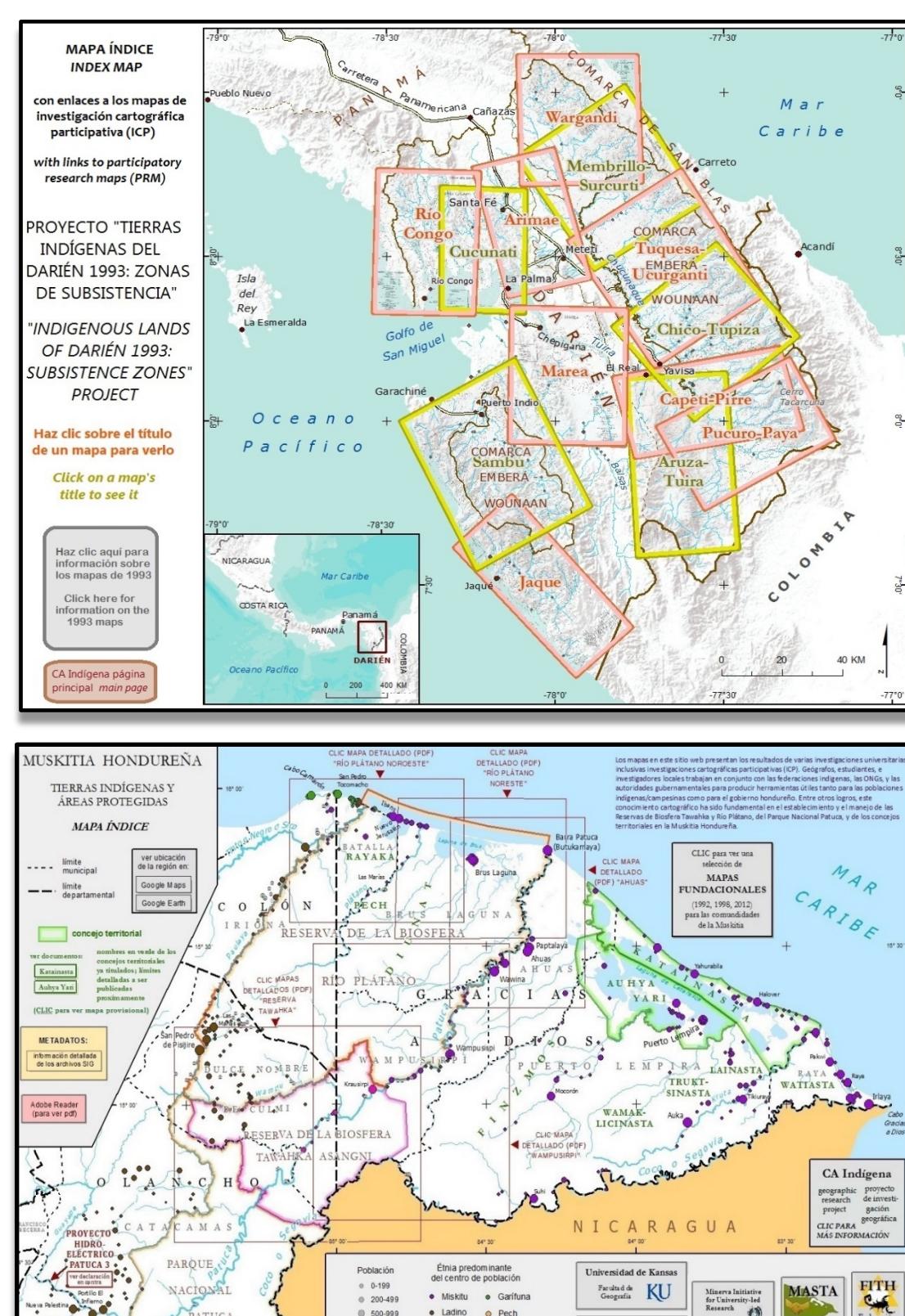
In collaboration with educational, governmental, international, and indigenous organizations, the *Mesa Geográfica Indígena* team is working with the people of Kataínasta to do participatory research mapping-GIS of their resources while training them in geography.



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/>



CA INDÍGENA PROJECT WEB SITE
<http://prmapping.res.ku.edu>

Thank You to Our Sponsors



Lisa Troyer,
Project Officer