



# THE CRY OF THE THIRSTY PEOPLE

SITUATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE SEMI-ARID  
REGION OF LARA STATE

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ENVIRONMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS IN  
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STATE

CLIMA21. CARACAS

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*[...] The picture is quite different today. The Tocuyo [River] has been reduced to a stream: all the others barely carry water during the rainy season; the xerophytic forests that used to cover the heart of Lara state have been reduced to isolated cardón communities at best, while in the worst cases, one can only see a few tunas and guasábaras scattered across immense clearings that herald the advent of the desert [...]*

*Francisco Tamayo (1953)*

*“Honestly, all is dead and gone. Fifty families used to call this place home, only 2 remain... Everything has fallen to the axe first, and later the chainsaws that came to finish the work...”*

# Contenido

**Executive Summary 5**

**Introduction 7**

**Sources of information 9**

**Results 14**

Deforestation: Effects of charcoal production, cocuy distilling and woodcraft 14

Cocuy distilling 23

Woodcraft 24

Non-metallic mining 25

**Obligations of the Venezuelan State regarding the protection of the environment  
and human rights in the semi-arid region of Lara state 28**

**Findings 31**

**Recommendations 34**

# Executive Summary

The unsustainable management of drylands, combined with droughts and climate change, accelerates desertification, giving rise to humanitarian crises attributable to water and food scarcity in communities.

In Venezuela, the semi-arid region of Lara state has been subjected in recent years to enormous pressure due to the extraction of natural resources by companies promoted or supported by local governments that fail to follow environmental criteria.

The objective of this report is to understand the current environmental situation of the semi-arid region of Lara State, as well as the impacts that exploitation activities may have on the human rights of the population in this area of the country.

Two situations were found that are potentially accelerating the desertification of the region: Deforestation generated by the extraction of wood for the production of charcoal, cocuy and crafts and the impacts of silica extraction on local water bodies.

The analysis reveals that the pressure exerted by these activities directly aggravates desertification and environmental degradation in the region.

Furthermore, the available information does not support the claims of companies and government officials that the exploitation activities follow sustainable environmental criteria.

The environmental degradation generated by the exploitation of natural resources is causing serious harm to the local population and their human rights.



Faced with this situation, the Venezuelan State is failing to comply with its obligations regarding environmental conservation, the protection of citizens and the defense of human rights.

Additionally, a problem of environmental justice is arising from this situation as environmental degradation disproportionately affects the poorest segment of the population.

Based on these findings, a series of recommendations is proposed to the Venezuelan State:

Declare an emergency in the area; Eradicate extractivism from the State's economic policy; Update and implement the National Plan to Combat Desertification and Drought, and Strengthen the actions necessary to meet SDG 15.

Furthermore, it is urgent to conduct judicial investigations to establish the possible commission of environmental crimes in the area and during the granting of exploitation permits.

Establishing programs to ensure decent livelihoods for residents currently engaging in resource exploitation activities is strongly advised, as well as strengthening the institutions of the State agencies tasked with desertification management strategies and promoting scientific research in the field.

Lastly, the Venezuelan State is urged to guarantee access to environmental information as a first step towards the signing and ratification of the Escazú Agreement.



# Introduction

According to the United Nations, drylands take up 41% of the planet's land surface and are home to 34.7% of the world's population. They support more than 44% of the world's crops,<sup>1</sup> and some are also among the most biodiverse regions in the world.<sup>2</sup>

These areas are characterized by low precipitation and high evapotranspiration, a condition reflected in relatively low and unpredictable levels of agricultural and livestock production.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to their limitations due to climatic reasons, the inadequate management of these territories is promoting processes of desertification,<sup>4</sup> a situation accelerated

1 Naciones Unidas (s.f.) Decenio de las Naciones Unidas para los Desiertos y la Lucha contra la Desertificación. [https://www.un.org/es/events/desertification\\_decade/index.shtml](https://www.un.org/es/events/desertification_decade/index.shtml)

2 Davies, J., Poulsen, L., Schulte-Herbrüggen, B., Mackinnon, K., Crawhall, N., Henwood, W.D., Dudley, N., Smith, J. and Gudka, M. (2012) Conservación de la biodiversidad de las tierras áridas. IUCN. [https://catalogue.unccd.int/124\\_2012-050-Es\\_0.pdf](https://catalogue.unccd.int/124_2012-050-Es_0.pdf)

3 FAO. (1994) Aspectos claves de las estrategias para el desarrollo sostenible de las tierras áridas. <https://www.fao.org/4/t0752s/t0752s00.htm>

4 The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification defines desertification as the degradation of land in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities.

by the interconnected processes of recurrent droughts and climate change.<sup>5 6 7</sup> This scenario is likely to accentuate existing restrictions, social inequalities and the potential for social conflict in the most vulnerable communities,<sup>8 9 10</sup> giving rise to serious humanitarian crises and the violation of the rights of the population.<sup>11 12 13 14</sup>

The semi-arid and sub-humid areas of Venezuela are mainly located in the northern part of the country,<sup>15</sup> including much of the states of Falcón and Lara.

These territories have been subjected to enormous pressure from human use since colonial times, which has led to an accelerated process of desertification that has left the local population faced with very high levels of poverty and human displacement.<sup>16 17 18</sup>

Recent studies anticipate that the semi-arid areas of Venezuela, particularly in the state of Lara, will be subjected to increasingly intense droughts as a result of climate change.<sup>19 20</sup>

Some of the proposed causes of desertification in Venezuela have a historical basis, including the usage of agricultural and livestock-raising practices that fail to take into account the territorial dynamics of the region.

However, in recent years, the promotion of business activities for the exploitation of natural resources by the Venezuelan State seems to be accelerating the degradation of these territories. This situation risks condemning residents to live in increasingly precarious conditions and to suffer the widespread violation of their human rights.

5 Mirzabaev, A., J. Wu, et al. (2019) Desertification. In: Climate Change and Land: an IPCC special report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009157988.005>

6 FAO. (2018) Agroecology: Adapting to Climate Change in Semi-arid Areas for a Sustainable Agricultural Development. FAO Regional Conference for the Near East. Thirty-fourth Session. Rome, Italy, 7-11 May 2018. [http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/bodies/NERC\\_34/MW200\\_4/MW200\\_NERC\\_18\\_4\\_en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/bodies/NERC_34/MW200_4/MW200_NERC_18_4_en.pdf)

7 FAO. (2018) Agroecology: Adapting to Climate Change in Semi-arid Areas for a Sustainable Agricultural Development. FAO Regional Conference for the Near East. Thirty-fourth Session. Rome, Italy, 7-11 May 2018. [http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/bodies/NERC\\_34/MW200\\_4/MW200\\_NERC\\_18\\_4\\_en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/bodies/NERC_34/MW200_4/MW200_NERC_18_4_en.pdf)

8 Castellanos, E., M.F. et al., (2022) Central and South America. In: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, et al. (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, pp. 1689–1816, doi:10.1017/9781009325844.014.

9 IFRC (2023) Venezuela. [https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/20221124\\_Plans\\_Venezuela.pdf](https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/20221124_Plans_Venezuela.pdf)

10 Madurga Lopez, I., Dutta Gupta, T., Castellanos, A. S., Martínez-Barón, D., y Pacillo, G. (2021). Climate Security Nexus in Latin America and the Caribbean: Venezuela and Colombia. CGIAR FOCUS Climate Security. <https://cgspace.cgiar.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/e07e6a81-f804-42e7-9740-db491b84eeb6/content>

11 OHCHR (2023) The Overlooked Environmental and Human Rights Crisis: Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought. Police Brief N° 4. [www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issuues/environment/srenvironment/activities/SR-Environment-PolicyBrief-4.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issuues/environment/srenvironment/activities/SR-Environment-PolicyBrief-4.pdf)

12 [http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/bodies/NERC\\_34/MW200\\_4/MW200\\_NERC\\_18\\_4\\_en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/bodies/NERC_34/MW200_4/MW200_NERC_18_4_en.pdf)

13 Population Matters (2024) Dried up futures: Drought and desertification. <https://populationmatters.org/news/2024/06/dried-up-futures-drought-and-desertification/>

14 OHCHR (2023) Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought. Police Brief N° 4. Executive Summary. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issuues/environment/srenvironment/SR-Environment-PolicyBrief-4-executive-summary.pdf>

15 MARN, 2004. Programa de Acción Nacional de Lucha contra la Desertificación y Mitigación de la Sequía de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela. Ministerio del Ambiente y Recursos Naturales.

16 MARN (2004) Programa de Acción Nacional de Lucha Contra la Desertificación y Mitigación de la Sequía de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela. <http://www.minrec.gob.ve/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Programa%20de%20Acción%20Nacional%20de%20Lucha%20contra%20la%20Desertificación%20y%20Mitigación%20de%20la%20Sequía%20en%20Venezuela.pdf>

17 Informe especial del IPCC sobre el Cambio Climático y la Tierra: ¿Qué significa para América Latina? [https://cdkn.org/sites/default/files/files/WEB-IPCC-Land\\_Latin-America\\_Spanish\\_24March2020-1.pdf](https://cdkn.org/sites/default/files/files/WEB-IPCC-Land_Latin-America_Spanish_24March2020-1.pdf)

18 FAO. (2018) Agroecology: Adapting to Climate Change in Semi-arid Areas for a Sustainable Agricultural Development. FAO Regional Conference for the Near East. Thirty-fourth Session. Rome, Italy, 7-11 May 2018. [http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/bodies/NERC\\_34/MW200\\_4/MW200\\_NERC\\_18\\_4\\_en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/bodies/NERC_34/MW200_4/MW200_NERC_18_4_en.pdf)

19 Chen, L., Brun, P., Faticchi, S., Gessler, A., McCarthy, M., Prilicotti, F., Stocker, B., Karger, D.N. (2025) Global increase in the occurrence and impact of megadroughts. Science <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.ado4245>

20 UNCCD (2024) World Drought Atlas, <https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2024-12/World%20Drought%20Atlas%202024.pdf>



In light of this situation, this report aims to provide knowledge and understanding of the current environmental situation in the semi-arid region of Lara state. It also seeks to establish the possible impacts of the exploitation of natural resources on the human rights of the population in this area of the country.

## Sources of information

This report was prepared with the aid of different documentary sources that provided an up-to-date overview of the current situation. The following sources of information were employed:

Academic articles and technical reports, the latter of which have been published by national and foreign institutions and organizations, as well as government agencies.

Interviews with key informants and opinions from experts and people involved in local environmental groups.

Media articles addressing the situation of the semi-arid region of Lara state.

In all cases, large information gaps were found owing to the loss of research capabilities of Venezuelan universities,<sup>21</sup> information opacity on the part of the government<sup>22 23</sup> and the lack of media coverage in the region.<sup>24</sup>

In view of this, an attempt was made to compare the information collected from the consulted sources in order to obtain the most reliable information.

A significant portion of the collected information came from testimonies and documents sent by researchers and environmental organizations in the state of Lara. In order to protect their safety, the names of the people consulted, as well as those who provided documentary information, are being kept confidential.

21 Tayler, L. (2024). 'Afraid to talk': researchers fear the end for science in Venezuela. Nature 27 September 2024. Disponible en: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-024-03144-4>

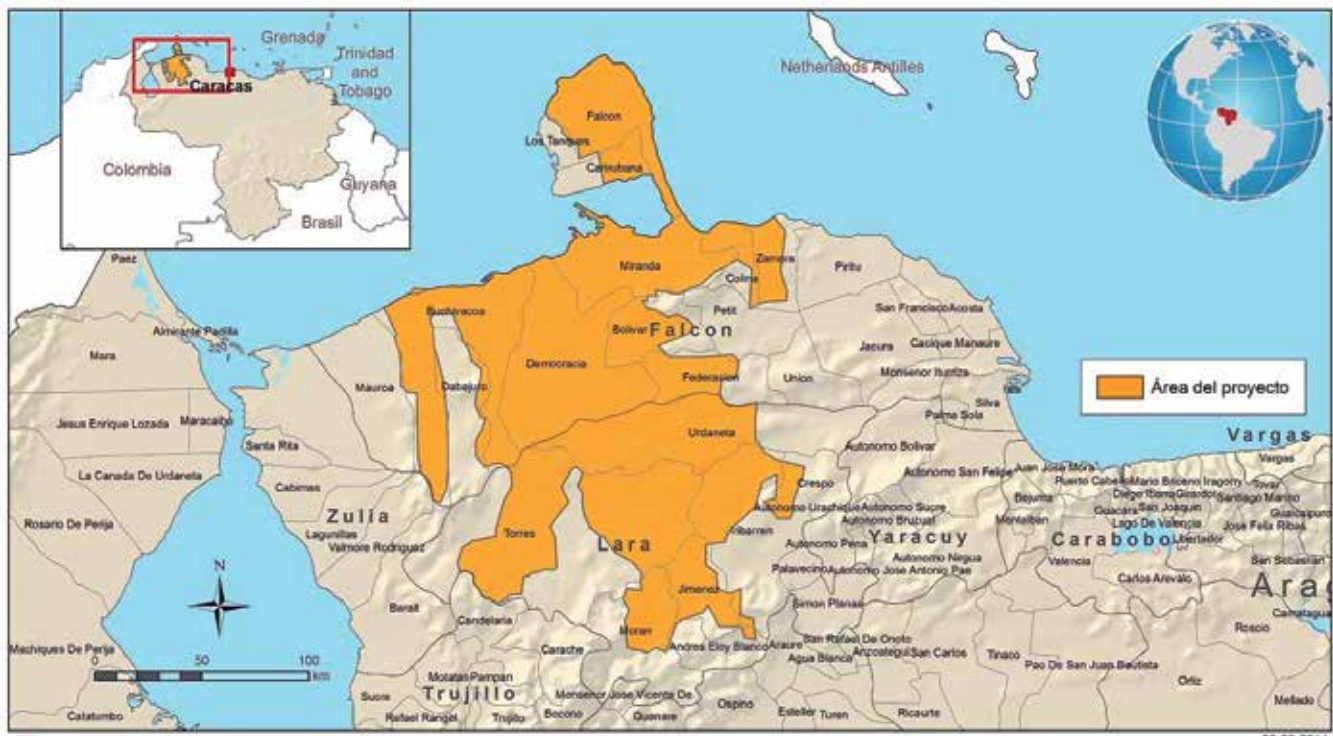
22 Transparencia Venezuela (2022) Opacidad en Venezuela. <https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Opacidad-en-Venezuelauna-forma-de-gobernar.pdf>

23 Espacio Público. 2020. Sin acceso a la información sobre el ambiente en Venezuela. <https://espaciopublico.org/acceso-a-la-informacion-publica-y-problemas-ambientales-venezuela/>

24 Clima21 (2024) La situación ambiental de Venezuela: una mirada desde los medios de comunicación. <https://clima21.net/informes/la-situacion-ambiental-de-venezuela-una-mirada-desde-los-medios-de-comunicacion/>

# Socio-environmental context of the semi-arid region of Lara state

The semi-arid region of Lara state is located in the northwest of Venezuela, along the Barquisimeto-Carora depression, with altitudes ranging from 400 to 700 meters above sea level within the territory of the Torres, Iribarren, Urdaneta and Jiménez municipalities (See Map 1).



Map of the western central region of Venezuela showing the semi-arid zone. This report focuses on the Torres, Iribarren, Urdaneta and Jimenez municipalities of Lara state. Lara state. Retrieved from <https://ciaraprosalafa.wordpress.com/nosotros/mapas/>

The environmental conditions of the area are determined by a predominantly dry climate with a pronounced water deficit and irregular rainfall.<sup>25</sup> These conditions determine the local vegetation, dominated by species adapted to arid conditions. In this sense, the typical plant formations in the region are the thorn scrub (mainly cactus scrubs) and the xerophytic forest<sup>26 27</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> Andrade-Benitez, O.C. (2012) Demarcaciones climáticas del municipio Torres en el estado Lara, Venezuela. *Agronomía Trop.* vol.62 no.1-4 [https://ve.scielo.org/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0002-192X2012000100008](https://ve.scielo.org/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0002-192X2012000100008)

<sup>26</sup> República de Venezuela (2004) Programa de Acción Nacional de Lucha Contra la Desertificación y Mitigación de la Sequía de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela. <http://www.minec.gob.ve/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Programa%20de%20Acción%20Nacional%20de%20Lucha%20contra%20la%20Desertificación%20y%20Mitigación%20de%20la%20Sequía%20en%20Venezuela.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Plataforma Semiáridos América Latina. <https://www.semiaridos.org/regiones-semiaridas/#:~:text=Semi%C3%A1rido%20venezolano,cultivo%20de%20hortalizas%20mediante%20riegos>.



Landscape of the semi-arid Lara in Cerro Saroche National Park. Image taken from Cabudare Digital.

The semi-arid regions of Venezuela have been under intense human pressure since colonial times with the introduction of goats and foreign agricultural practices and crops.<sup>28</sup>

This situation has already begun to show adverse effects since at least the mid-20th century, when researcher Francisco Tamayo, observing the loss of xerophytic forests, wrote that the situation “...herald[s] the advent of the desert”<sup>29</sup>.

On the other hand, the region has been affected by recurrent periods of meteorological drought that have aggravated the problems of agricultural production and water availability.<sup>30 31</sup>

28 Acción Campesina (2016) La Comunidad de Uriche - Estudio de caso en el semiárido venezolano y propuesta de desarrollo. <https://www.semiaridos.org/casos/la-comunidad-uriche-estudio-caso-semiarido-venezolano-propuesta-desarrollo-2016/>

29 Tamayo, F. (1953) ¿Dónde están las tierras, bosques y aguas de Lara? En Sanare y las Tierras de Lara. Tomado de: Hurtado Ragsen, O. (2002) Francisco Tamayo. Estudio de su vida y aproximación a la vigencia de su obra. Tesis Doctoral no publicada., Universidad Católica Andrés Bello. Caracas.

30 Olivares, B.O., Cortez, A., Parra, R., Lobo, D., Rey, J., y Rodríguez, M. (2016) Análisis temporal de la sequía meteorológica en localidades semiáridas de Venezuela. UGCiencia 22, 11-24. Disponible en: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/b603/203d2c0061f9ffe8c3d9e71ae0c52ad6a0ee.pdf>

31 Acción Campesina (2016) La Comunidad de Uriche - Estudio de caso en el semiárido venezolano y propuesta de desarrollo. <https://www.semiaridos.org/casos/la-comunidad-uriche-estudio-caso-semiarido-venezolano-propuesta-desarrollo-2016/>



Resident of the semi-arid Lara region. Photo by Ali Riera. Taken from: <https://hive.blog/spanish/@aliriera>. Environmental impact of agricultural practices in the northern Lara region.

Extreme weather events have also caused flooding with loss of life, damage to crops and infrastructure, and disruption of services such as water and electricity.<sup>32 33 34</sup>

On the other hand, the forests of the region are under intense human pressure, which makes them one of the most threatened types of vegetation in Venezuela.<sup>35</sup>  
<sup>36</sup> Environmental factors such as recurrent droughts have been identified as causes of this situation,<sup>37 38</sup> along with human factors such as the inadequate management of water resources and goat herds, as well as the poverty of the population<sup>39</sup>.

32 VPITV, 2022. El estado Lara está en alerta por lluvias. Andreína Ramos, 28 de septiembre 2022. Disponible en: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3XfGCf0MPnQ>

33 La Prensa Lara. Lluvias afectan a unas cuatro mil hectáreas de cultivos en Lara. Mayo 24, 2024. Disponible en: <https://laprensadelara.com/locales/lluvias-afectan-a-unas-cuatro-mil-hectareas-de-cultivos-en-lara/>

34 EL Caroreño (2024) La parroquia Reyes Vargas en emergencia. <https://www.instagram.com/mariososa84/reel/DCO5DrhRHmS/>  
[la-parroquia-reyes-vargas-en-emergencia-trav%C3%A9s-de-este-audiovisual-explican-com/](https://www.instagram.com/mariososa84/reel/DCO5DrhRHmS/)

35 Rodríguez, J.P., F. Rojas-Suárez y D. Giraldo Hernández (eds.) (2010) Libro Rojo de los Ecosistemas Terrestres de Venezuela. Provita, Shell Venezuela, Lenovo (Venezuela). Caracas: Venezuela.

36 FAO y Ministerio del Poder Popular para el Ecosocialismo (2023) Manual: Restauración del bosque. xerofítico de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela. Caracas. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc3819es>

37 Olivares Campos, B.O. (2016) Análisis temporal de la sequía meteorológica en localidades semiáridas de Venezuela. UG Ciencia, Vol. 22 Núm. 1. <https://doi.org/10.18634/ugc.22v.1i.481>

38 Asociación Civil Acción Campesina (2024) Sistematización del trabajo comunitario en Las Palmitas y Puz, Venezuela. <https://www.semiaridos.org/casos/sistematizacion-del-trabajo-comunitario-las-palmitas-puz-venezuela/>

39 FAO y Ministerio del Poder Popular para el Ecosocialismo (2023) Op. Cit.

All these factors are enhancers of desertification processes, mainly affecting the areas with the greatest water deficit.<sup>40 41 42</sup>

No recent estimation of the percentage of the territory of Lara state affected by desertification seems to be available. In 2004, the Ministry of Environment asserted that 80% of the state was affected by land degradation processes.<sup>43</sup> In 2008, Quiñones and Dal Pozzo estimated that 43% of the state was at risk of degradation due to water erosion.<sup>44</sup> In addition, Zambrano Carrera affirms that the Torres municipality of the Lara state lost 21,900 Ha of tree cover (4% of the total tree cover) to deforestation between 2001 and 2021, together with a further 820 Ha lost to wildfires.<sup>45</sup>

This human-induced pressure can cause irreversible damage to the ecosystems of the semiarid region of Lara State. The situation is alarming given that the deterioration can go unnoticed behind the high resilience of these ecosystems until it is too late to reverse.<sup>46</sup>

In this context, the local economy has traditionally revolved around goat raising, the cultivation of species adapted to the climate, such as sábila (*Aloe vera*), sisal (*Agave sisalana*) or cocuy (*Agave cocui*), and the cultivation of vegetables with irrigation.<sup>47</sup> However, due to severe environmental restrictions -mainly water scarcity-, local producers are unable to maintain significant yields.<sup>48 49</sup>

Together with the country's Complex Humanitarian Emergency, this situation is generating a serious increase in poverty levels in the area<sup>50 51 52</sup> and stimulating the migration of its inhabitants.<sup>53 54</sup>

40 República de Venezuela (2004) Op. Cit.

41 Lozano, J. (2024) IV Simposio: Humedales, crisis climática y conservación evaluación del proceso de desertificación en la microcuenca quebrada la Fundación del municipio Iribarren, estado Lara, Venezuela. Tomado de: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381966313\\_IV\\_SIMPOSIO\\_HUMEDALES\\_CRISIS\\_CLIMATICA\\_Y\\_CONSERVACION\\_EVALUACION\\_DEL\\_PROCESO\\_DE\\_DESERTIFICACION\\_EN\\_LA\\_MICROCUEENCA\\_QUEBRADA\\_LA\\_FUNDACION\\_DEL\\_MUNICIPIO\\_IRIBARREN\\_ESTADO\\_LARA\\_VENEZUELA](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381966313_IV_SIMPOSIO_HUMEDALES_CRISIS_CLIMATICA_Y_CONSERVACION_EVALUACION_DEL_PROCESO_DE_DESERTIFICACION_EN_LA_MICROCUEENCA_QUEBRADA_LA_FUNDACION_DEL_MUNICIPIO_IRIBARREN_ESTADO_LARA_VENEZUELA)

42 Sorondo Sánchez, L. J., Hidalgo López, C. R., y Zamora, E. (2021). Aproximación teórica sobre la agrobiodiversidad cultural del semiárido larense, desde la perspectiva docente. *Revista Latino-Americana de Estudios em Cultura e Sociedade*, 7(3), 2176. <https://doi.org/10.23899/relacult.v7i3.2176>

43 República de Venezuela (2004) Op. Cit.

44 Quiñónez, E. y Dal Pozzo, F. (2006) Distribución espacial del riesgo de degradación de los suelos por erosión hídrica en el estado Lara, Venezuela. *Geoenseñanza*, vol. 13, núm. 1, enero-junio, 2008, pp. 59-70.

45 Zambrano Carrera, A. (2023) Disminución de bosques y pérdida de la calidad del agua en el municipio Torres, estado Lara. <https://ecopoliticavenezuela.org/2023/03/20/disminucion-de-bosques-y-perdida-de-la-calidad-del-agua-en-el-municipio-torres-estado-lara/>

46 Matteucci, S.D. y Colma, A. (1997) Agricultura sostenible y ecosistemas áridos y semiáridos de Venezuela. *Inci*. 22(3): 123-130.

47 Plataforma Semiáridos América Latina (s.f.) Op. Cit.

48 República Bolivariana de Venezuela Proyecto de Desarrollo Rural Sustentable para la Seguridad Alimentaria de las Zonas Semiáridas de los Estados Lara y Falcón (PROSALAFa III) (2015) Informe final sobre el diseño del proyecto. <https://webapps.ifad.org/members/lapse-of-time/docs/spanish/EB-2015-LOT-P-19-Informe-de-dise-o-del-proyecto.pdf>

49 De Sousa Infante, J. (2019) 2019 Educar para conservar el semiárido. <https://ecopoliticavenezuela.org/2019/02/11/2019-educar-conservar-semiarido/>

50 Durán, O. (2024) Pobreza multidimensional como limitante del desarrollo humano en la comunidad 28 de Marzo de Santa Inés, estado Lara, Venezuela. *Mayéutica Revista Científica de Humanidades y Artes*, 12(1), 23-32. <https://revistas.uclave.org/index.php/mayeutica/article/view/4754>

51 Maldonado, L. (2023). Living in darkness: rural poverty in Venezuela. *Journal of Applied Economics*, 26(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/15140326.2023.2168464>

52 HumVenezuela (2024) Informe de seguimiento Emergencia Humanitaria Compleja. <https://humvenezuela.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Informe-de-Seguimiento-de-la-EHC-HumVenezuela-Noviembre-2023-2.pdf>

53 Acción Campesina (2016) La comunidad de Uriche – Estudio de caso en el semiárido venezolano y propuesta de desarrollo. <https://www.semiaridos.org/files/2017/04/Estudio-de-caso-Uriche.pdf>

54 At least three researchers consulted for this work report a process of human displacement as a consequence of the social and environmental situation in the region. In one recount, the younger local population is moving to live and work in the main cities of Lara state. Similarly, one testimony spoke of an abandoned town called Pajaritos, located in the La Otra Banda Sector of the Torres Municipality of Lara state.

# Results

The results obtained from the consulted sources were divided into two sections: First, the main factors of environmental degradation that have been affecting the semi-arid region of Lara in recent years are presented. Subsequently, the obligations of the Venezuelan State in the face of the situation of environmental degradation in the region are analyzed, with the objective of understanding whether the State has fulfilled its duty to protect the local population from the effects of environmental degradation.

Regarding the environmental issues affecting the semi-arid region of Lara state, the information compiled confirms that the main problems arise from historical issues such as the inadequate management of goat herds and water resources.<sup>55</sup> Added to these factors is the effect of projects promoted by the national and municipal governments.

This report focuses on the most recent situations: large-scale deforestation caused by the extraction of wood from native forests for the production of charcoal, cocuy and wooden crafts, as well as non-metallic mining in water-producing areas.

## Deforestation: Effects of charcoal production, cocuy distilling and woodcraft

Deforestation, particularly of xerophytic forests, is considered to be one of the main causes of desertification in the semi-arid region of Lara state.<sup>56 57 58</sup> Despite an ostensible unavailability of official figures on tree cover loss in the semi-arid region

<sup>55</sup> FAO y Ministerio del Poder Popular para el Ecosocialismo (2023) Op. Cit.

<sup>56</sup> FAO y Ministerio del Poder Popular para el Ecosocialismo (2023) Op. Cit.

<sup>57</sup> Lozano Calderón, J.L. (2011) Evaluación del proceso de desertificación en la microcuenca quebrada La Fundación del municipio Iribarren, estado Lara, Venezuela. IV Simposio: Humedales, crisis climática y conservación. [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jose-Lozano-43/publication/344072357\\_EVALUACION\\_DEL\\_PROCESO\\_DE\\_DESERTIFICACION\\_EN\\_LA\\_MICRO\\_CUENCA\\_QUEBRADA\\_LA\\_FUNDACION\\_DE\\_LA\\_PARROQUIA\\_AGUEDO\\_FELIPE\\_ALVARADO\\_MUNICIPIO\\_IRIBARREN\\_ESTADO\\_LARA/links/621b77039947d339eb6e50a8/EVALUACION-DEL-PROCESO-DE-DESERTIFICACION-EN-LA-MICRO-CUENCA-QUEBRADA-LA-FUNDACION-DE-LA-PARROQUIA-AGUEDO-FELIPE-ALVARADO-MUNICIPIO-IRIBARREN-ESTADO-LARA.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jose-Lozano-43/publication/344072357_EVALUACION_DEL_PROCESO_DE_DESERTIFICACION_EN_LA_MICRO_CUENCA_QUEBRADA_LA_FUNDACION_DE_LA_PARROQUIA_AGUEDO_FELIPE_ALVARADO_MUNICIPIO_IRIBARREN_ESTADO_LARA/links/621b77039947d339eb6e50a8/EVALUACION-DEL-PROCESO-DE-DESERTIFICACION-EN-LA-MICRO-CUENCA-QUEBRADA-LA-FUNDACION-DE-LA-PARROQUIA-AGUEDO-FELIPE-ALVARADO-MUNICIPIO-IRIBARREN-ESTADO-LARA.pdf)

<sup>58</sup> Matteucci, S. y Colma, A. (1997). Agricultura sostenible y ecosistemas áridos y semiáridos de Venezuela. *Interciencia*. 22. 123-130.

ara, Global Forest Watch estimates that forest cover in the area has decreased significantly in recent years.<sup>59</sup>

*Deforestation in arid and semi-arid areas increases soil erosion, accelerates biodiversity loss, alters local microclimates, increases vulnerability to socio-natural disasters such as floods and droughts, and reduces the availability of natural resources essential for communities.*

Logging is a traditional activity in rural communities in Venezuela. In the semi-arid region, it is reported that this activity is generally used to clear land for cultivation or to obtain wood for construction, handicrafts, cooking or charcoal production.<sup>60 61</sup>

A recent report by the national government affirms that deforestation in the area is associated with “a lack of access to services, which has led the communities settled in arid and semi-arid areas to *a relationship of voracious dependence* on external resources, a decrease in their quality of life and an undesirable socioeconomic condition” [emphasis added].<sup>62</sup> In other words, it lays the responsibility for the deforestation processes on the inhabitants and their socio-environmental context, with no mention of the factors external to the communities that act as agents of deforestation.

Despite the previous assertion, deforestation seems to have increased in recent decades as the development of activities aimed at creating products for external markets on an industrial scale is being promoted from outside local communities.

59 Global Forest Watch <https://www.globalforestwatch.org/map/country/VEN/14/8/?mainMap=>

60 FAO y Ministerio del Poder Popular para el Ecosocialismo. 2023. Op. Cit.

61 Matteucci, S.D. y Colma, A. (1997) Op. Cit.

62 FAO y Ministerio del Poder Popular para el Ecosocialismo. 2023. Op. Cit.

## Charcoal production for export

Charcoal is a form of fuel produced by heating wood at high temperatures in the absence of oxygen. Human use of this material can be traced back thousands of years; first associated with artistic uses and later for cooking and metalworking.

*Charcoal production has serious environmental impacts including deforestation, desertification and loss of biodiversity. It can also affect soil quality, vegetation and agricultural production.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, it can have negative effects on the health of workers involved in the process.<sup>64</sup> <sup>65</sup> In low-income countries, the forests providing wood for charcoal production are not managed in a sustainable manner. As they are depleted and wood becomes scarce, communities struggle to obtain the material,<sup>66</sup> even through the overexploitation of endangered species<sup>67</sup> and the extraction from protected areas.<sup>68</sup>*

63 Ali, M. M. (2023). Assessing the Impacts of Traditional Charcoal Production Sites on the Environment in Daynile District, Mogadishu-Somalia. *American Journal of Environment and Climate*, 2(3), 131–139. <https://doi.org/10.54536/ajec.v2i3.2264>

64 UNEP (2019) Review of Woodfuel Biomass Production and Utilization in Africa: A Desk Study. United Nations Environment Programme, Nairobi.

65 Eniola, P.O. (2021). Menace and Mitigation of Health and Environmental Hazards of Charcoal Production in Nigeria. In: Oguge, N., Ayal, D., Adeleke, L., da Silva, I. (eds) *African Handbook of Climate Change Adaptation*. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-45106-6\\_238](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-45106-6_238)

66 UNEP (2019) Op .Cit.

67 Arko, T., Mensah, A., Adomako, J., Denton, F. y Obani, P. (2024) The multifaceted socio-ecological impacts of charcoal production on the Afram Plains, Ghana. *Trees, Forests and People* Volume 16. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tfp.2024.100586>.

68 Amankwah, A. A., Quaye-Ballard, J. A., Kouassi, E. K., Porembski, S., Manu, E. A., y Adu-Bredu, S. (2024). Effect of anthropogenic activities on carbon stocks in protected areas within Ghana's forest-Savannah transition zone. *Trees, Forests and People*, 17, 100641. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tfp.2024.100641>





Circular kiln before being covered for artisanal charcoal production. Taken from Alzuru, A. I. (2005) Cited previously.

According to local testimonies,<sup>69</sup> the techniques of artisanal charcoal production typical of the area were introduced in the region in the 1940s. This form of charcoal production was mainly practiced during periods of little agricultural activity when no other sources of employment were available. In the words of a resident, *“People make charcoal out of necessity. Whenever there is work, they will not turn to woodfuel production. At least charcoal gives you enough to eat. You grab the axe whenever the other doors are closed.”*

<sup>69</sup> Alzuru, A. I. (2005) Op. Cit.

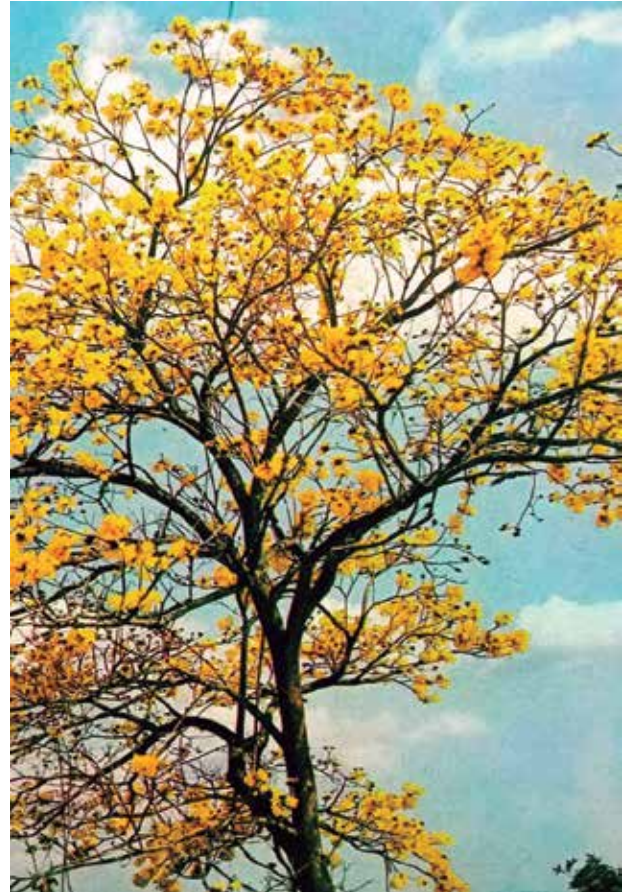
Between 1989 and 1999, Venezuela exported around 1,800 metric tons of coal per year from small factories mainly located in the states of Falcón, Zulia and Bolívar.<sup>70</sup>

This reality began to change in the late 2010s. A study by environmental activists in the state of Lara found that only three charcoal trade companies were registered before 2017.

Since then, a wave of registration of such companies has taken place. According to different sources, between 17 and 20 companies were dedicated to the trade of charcoal by 2024. One of them is a joint venture with the participation of the government of Iribarren municipality.<sup>71</sup> <sup>72</sup>  
<sup>73</sup>

Many of these companies claim to have permits from the Ministry of Ecosocialism (Minec) to exploit wood for charcoal production.

The business experienced a sharp growth; between 2022 and 2024, Venezuela exported charcoal briquettes to 29 countries, worth 9.8 million dollars. The international trade of charcoal is estimated to reach a little over 70 million tons in 2025.<sup>74</sup>



Curarí (*Handroanthus serratifolius*) Taken from: <http://svdb.minec.gob>.

This situation generated a significant increase in the demand for wood, especially from species such as vera (*Bulnesia arborea*), curarí (*Handroanthus serratifolius*; Image 6) and cují (*Neltuma juliflora*).<sup>75</sup> The first two are considered endangered species by the IUCN and the Ministry of Ecosocialism.<sup>76</sup> <sup>77</sup>

<sup>70</sup> FAO (2002) Estado actual de la información sobre madera para energía. En: Estado de la información forestal en Venezuela. <https://www.fao.org/4/ad401s/AD401s07.htm>

<sup>71</sup> Con el Mazo Dando (2021) Alcaldía de Iribarren y empresa privada crean empresa mixta para producir carbón vegetal. <https://mazo4f.com/alcaldia-de-iribarren-y-empresa-privada-crean-empresa-mixta-para-producir-carbon-vegetal>

<sup>72</sup> Boon, L. y Valverde, M. (2025) El apetito por el carbón vegetal arrasa el bosque xerófilo de Lara. <https://armando.info/el-apetito-por-el-carbon-vegetal-arrasa-el-bosque-xerofilo-de-lara/>

<sup>73</sup> Davies, V. (2024) Semiárido larense entre el carbón o la vida (II): Impacto ambiental forzaré el desplazamiento de las comunidades. <https://contrapunto.com/nacional/ambiente/semiarido-larense-entre-el-carbon-o-la-vida-ii-impacto-ambiental-forzara-el-desplazamiento-de-las-comunidades/>

<sup>74</sup> Boon, L. y Valverde, M. (2025) Op. Cit.

<sup>75</sup> The taxonomic names *Tabebuia serratifolia* and *Prosopis juliflora* are no longer considered valid.

<sup>76</sup> *Bulnesia arborea* En: <https://www.iucnredlist.org/es/search/map?query=Handroanthus%20serratifolius%20&searchType=species>

<sup>77</sup> *Handroanthus serratifolius* En: <https://www.iucnredlist.org/es/search/map?query=Handroanthus%20serratifolius%20&searchType=species>



Poster calling for a protest against the deforestation of Cerro Saroche National Park.

Wood extraction activities are not restricted to the traditional zones, and have extended to protected areas such as the Cerro Saroche National Park, according to different sources<sup>78 79</sup> (Image 7).

*Environmental groups in the state of Lara have reported that the loss of vegetation cover due to deforestation in different areas of the semi-arid region of the state has reached 60 to 70% of the original surface.<sup>80 81</sup> They also state that up to 80% of the vera trees have been cut down in some areas. Other assessments indicate that an estimated 10 million trees have been cut down and 500,000 hectares of the xerophytic forest of Lara state have been affected.<sup>82</sup>*

78 Movimiento Ecológico Cerro Saroche (2023) Carta Abierta: No al ecocidio del bosque seco en el semiárido larense. <https://ecopoliticavenezuela.org/2023/09/19/carta-abierta-no-al-ecocidio-del-bosque-seco-en-el-semiarido-larense/>

79 El Araguano. 2024. Deforestación y caza ilegal ponen en riesgo la biodiversidad de Lara. <https://elaraguano.com.ve/deforestacion-y-caza-ilegal-ponen-en-riesgo-la-biodiversidad-de-lara/#:~:text=%C2%ABSe%20ubica%20en%20zonas%20xer%C3%B3filas%20como%20Carora%2C,p%C3%A1gina%20web%20del%20Minec%2C%20no%20hay%20cifras>

80 Camargo, E. (2022) Empresas de carbón vinculadas con tala de bosques en el estado Lara. <https://ecopoliticavenezuela.org/2022/10/19/empresas-de-carbon-vinculadas-con-tala-de-bosques-en-el-estado-lara/>

81 Movimiento Ecológico Cerro Saroche (2022) Op. Cit.

82 Boon, L. y Valverde, M. (2025) Op. Cit.

They also denounce that hundreds of trees were cut down in a single sector of the Torres municipality despite the existence of a protection order by an Agrarian Court, to which the Office of the Public Prosecutor has failed to take action.<sup>83</sup>

This reality is reflected dramatically in the words of the residents: *“I wish charcoal production could finally be stopped in the Camacaro and Reyes Vargas parishes of Torres municipality, although the damage is done... 980 vera trees, 1000 cujíes, 560 curaríes and 250 cotoperí have been cut in our community. Who will compensate us for that when even the roots are taken out? There is too much destruction of the environment and trucks loaded with coal are still leaving the area.”*

On the other hand, serious irregularities on the part of charcoal companies have been reported, including the use of the State security forces to protect the illegal transportation of charcoal, threats to rangers stationed in Cerro Saroche National Park, the violation of the limits of production licenses, and the financing of illegal logging by providing chainsaws, fuel and tools to locals. The companies are reported to have armed the lumberjacks and harassed the population following the allegations.<sup>84 85</sup>

It is also noted that the companies buy charcoal directly from the residents, making it difficult to hold them directly responsible for the deforestation of the semi-arid forest.

Companies have also been reported to make direct payments in US dollars to charcoal producers, resulting in the exacerbation of the socio-economic conflicts in a region characterized by high poverty levels.<sup>86 87</sup> This practice has led to the abandonment of traditional livelihoods and an increase in school dropout in local communities.

On the other hand, environmentalists in Lara state express doubts about the legal validity of the permits granted to companies as they fail to comply with the fundamental legal elements for their granting.<sup>88 89</sup>

At the same time, the activists claim that even though a substantial number of complaints have been filed with various government agencies (11 before the Public Prosecutor’s Office and 300 with the Ministry of Ecosocialism), as well as

83 OEP (2023) Carta Abierta: No al ecocidio del bosque seco en el semiárido larense. <https://ecopoliticavenezuela.org/2023/09/19/carta-abierta-no-al-ecocidio-del-bosque-seco-en-el-semiarido-larense/>

84 Camargo, E. (2022) Empresas de carbón vinculadas con tala de bosques en el estado Lara. <https://ecopoliticavenezuela.org/2022/10/19/empresas-de-carbon-vinculadas-con-tala-de-bosques-en-el-estado-lara/>

85 Movimiento Ecológico Cerro Saroche (2023) Carta Abierta del Movimiento Ecológico Cerro Saroche para el Dr. Tarek William Saab, Fiscal General de la República. <https://clima21.net/noticias/no-al-ecocidio-del-bosque-seco-en-el-semiarido-larense/>

86 HumVenezuela (2022) Estado Lara. Hoja infográfica de impactos de la Emergencia Humanitaria Compleja en Venezuela. Datos comparados de marzo 2020, junio 2021 y marzo 2022. <https://humvenezuela.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Lara-Hoja-infografica-Marzo-2022.pdf>

87 Maldonado, L. (2023). Op. Cit.

88 Boon, L. y Valverde, M. (2025) Op. Cit.

89 “Permits, authorizations, approvals, concessions, or any other type of administrative act contrary to the principles established in this Law shall be considered null and void, and may not generate rights in favor of their recipients; and public officials who grant them shall incur disciplinary, administrative, criminal or civil responsibilities as the case may be.” Article 140 of the Venezuelan Law on Forests.

countless letters addressed to all levels of the State, no action has been taken to stop deforestation, nor has any action been taken against those responsible for the alleged environmental crimes.<sup>90</sup>

Even in cases where government officials have carried out supervision tasks in the area, they only report having confirmed: *“the presence of duly permitted forestry facilities for the production of charcoal, while detecting traces of artisanal ovens for the illicit manufacture of the product”*.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, these authorities are endorsing the activity of the companies and point to other actors for the conduction of illegal activities harmful to the environment.

In contrast to these allegations, the companies trading charcoal promote it as a sustainable product and present themselves as committed to the responsible management of natural resources. They also claim to have legal permits issued by the Ministry of Ecosocialism.<sup>92 93 94</sup>

The companies also claim to be developing reforestation programs to replace the trees used for charcoal production.<sup>95 96</sup>

Despite these claims, no reports were found on the companies' environmental or social sustainability indicators, including carbon emissions, impact on biodiversity and water, reforestation efforts, waste management, energy consumption, job creation and community investments.

A critical element of these sustainability assessments is the effectiveness of the reforestation programs that might be implemented, due to the technical complexities involved in the ecological restoration processes of arid and semi-arid areas.<sup>97 98</sup>

On the contrary, local specialists consulted for this report affirm that the reforestation activities carried out by these companies have been restricted to the planting of trees in urban areas, some of which have not been successful due to a lack of follow-up.

90 Movimiento Ecológico Cerro Saroche (2023) Op. Cit.

91 Dirección General de Fiscalización y Control de Impactos Ambientales del Ministerio de Ecosocialismo (2024) [https://www.instagram.com/p/DDHhjgKuvl2/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/DDHhjgKuvl2/?img_index=1)

92 CIIP (2024) Venezuela enciende llama de la sostenibilidad con el carbón vegetal. <https://www.ciip.com.ve/venezuela-enciende-llama-de-la-sostenibilidad-con-el-carbon-vegetal/>

93 Valero G., D. (2024) Carbón Vegetal en Venezuela. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/el-carb%C3%B3n-vegetal-en-venezuela-daniel-valero-g-dnbpc/?trackingId=wXF3eFyWTKOIR8xIOwpFFA%3D%3D>

94 Carbones de Venezuela. <https://carbonesdevenezuela.com/> Consultado el 11/2/2025

95 CIIP (2024) Op. Cit.

96 Carbones de Venezuela. Op. Cit.

97 Cortina J., Bellot J., Vilagrosa A., Caturla R.N., Maestre F.T., Rubio E., Ortíz de Urbina J.M. y Bonet A. Restauración en semiárido. (2004) En: Avances en el estudio de la gestión del monte mediterráneo / Editado por, V. R. Vallejo, J. A. Alloza. Valencia: Fundación Centro de Estudios Ambientales del Mediterráneo, 2004. ISBN 84-921259-3-4, pp. 345-406 <https://maestrelab.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/CEAM2004.pdf>

98 Gornish, E. S., Shaw, J., Farrell, H., & Roche, L. M. (2021). Novel Approaches to Ecological Restoration in Semi-Arid and Arid Habitats (AZ1934-2021). University of Arizona Cooperative Extension. <https://extension.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/2024-08/az1934-2021%2520.pdf>

Another aspect to consider in terms of environmental sustainability is the fact that charcoal production involves a high consumption of wood: between 4 and 5 tons are required to obtain a single ton of charcoal.<sup>99</sup> Despite the lack of consolidated data on exports and the regional deforestation rate, the information available suggests the region is being exposed to a significant environmental impact.

It was not possible to verify whether the permits complied with all the legal requirements, particularly regarding the submission of sustainable management plans and environmental and sociocultural impact studies (See requirements on the MINEC website<sup>100</sup>).



Warehouse inspection at a coal company in Barquisimeto, Lara state. Taken from: Minec Press.

Another relevant aspect is that different government agencies and officials have promoted and supported the extraction of wood from the semi-arid region of Lara state. These actions have been justified by the need to “*build a new economic model by promoting local activity*”<sup>101</sup> following the guidelines issued by the National Executive Branch.<sup>102</sup>

99 FAO (1983) Métodos simples para fabricar carbón vegetal. Capítulo 2. <https://www.fao.org/4/x5328s/X5328S00.htm>

100 MINEC (s.f.) [http://www.minec.gob.ve/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/planilla\\_chequeo\\_recaudos\\_patrimonio\\_37.pdf?form=MG0AV3](http://www.minec.gob.ve/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/planilla_chequeo_recaudos_patrimonio_37.pdf?form=MG0AV3) (Consultado el 11/2/2025)

101 El Informador (2021) Nace en Barquisimeto la empresa Carbón El Obelisco: una alianza entre sector privado y Alcaldía de Iribarren. <https://elinformadorve.com/19/10/2021/destacada/nace-en-barquisimeto-la-empresa-carbon-el-obelisco-una-alianza-entre-sector-privado-y-alcaldia-de-iribarren/>

102 Luzardo, C. (2024) Exportan carbón desde Lara a Italia. <https://ultimasnoticias.com.ve/noticias/lara/exportan-carbon-desde-lara-a-italia/>

Finally, it is worth noting that the former Minister for Ecosocialism, Josué Lorca, announced the preventive suspension and review of all charcoal extraction activities in Lara state, recognizing the unsustainability of the activities.<sup>103</sup>

The minister also announced the holding of meetings with artisanal charcoal producers to develop sustainable economic alternatives. He promised a comprehensive plan to provide attention to vulnerable populations and the creation of nurseries to grow native plants intended for reforestation.

In response to the announcements, the environmental groups of the region sent a letter to the minister expressing several remarks. These include the omission of the ministry's responsibility in activities recognized as unsustainable; the exclusion of private companies from reforestation actions; the lack of details on the reforestation plan, as well as the promised alternative means of livelihood; and the absence of an environmental education program aimed at schools and communities.<sup>104</sup>

To date, there is no information on whether the extraction activities have been halted or any of the promises fulfilled.

## Cocuy distilling

Another area of concern is the industrial production of cocuy, a traditional Venezuelan alcoholic drink obtained by processing the leaves of the *Agave cocui* plant.

In recent years, the national and state governments, in collaboration with the private sector, have promoted the industrialization of cocuy production for export.<sup>105 106 107</sup>

<sup>108</sup>

<sup>103</sup> @josuelorca. 25/1/25. ¡Vamos a reforestar! [https://www.instagram.com/josuelorca/p/DFRkRkQxn9U/?img\\_index=11](https://www.instagram.com/josuelorca/p/DFRkRkQxn9U/?img_index=11)

<sup>104</sup> Alzuru, N. y Cañizales, F. (2025) Los anuncios del ministro Lorca. El Chivato. N° 16.

<sup>105</sup> Díaz, M. y Sánchez, R. (2001) Del Programa Agave cocui o de cómo es posible hacer ciencia al servicio del hombre»; Croitzia 2 (3): 167-171

<sup>106</sup> PROINLARA. 2017. Atlas de Lara. Disponible en: [https://issuu.com/proinlar/docs/atlas\\_2017-04-27](https://issuu.com/proinlar/docs/atlas_2017-04-27)

<sup>107</sup> Bermejo, E. (2024) Saroche: el nuevo cocuy premium del mercado venezolano. <https://elestimulo.com/bienmesabe/bebidas-buen-provecho/2024-04-18/nuevo-cocuy-saroche-venezuela/>

<sup>108</sup> Banca y Negocios (2022) Exclusivo | Magno Cocuy abre mercados internacionales para el más tradicional e incomprensido licor venezolano. <https://www.bancaynegocios.com/exclusivo-magno-cocuy-abre-mercados-internacionales-para-el-mas-tradicional-e-incomprensido-licor-venezolano/>

The State agencies and the companies that distill the liquor affirm that cocuy is being produced under environmental sustainability standards.<sup>109 110 111</sup>

However, even today, cocuy production is based on the use of wood -mainly cují (*Neltuma juliflora*)-, as fuel for the heating and distillation stages of manufacturing.<sup>112</sup> This practice can have an impact on the degradation of the soil and the vegetation cover,<sup>113</sup> factors that contribute to the acceleration of desertification.

Testimonies from local researchers and environmentalists cast doubt on the claims made about the sustainability of industrial cocuy production. Unfortunately, no independent assessment seems to exist of the possible impact of this form of production on the forests of the semi-arid region of Lara state.

## Woodcraft

In the early 2000s, the Venezuelan State started to promote wood carving in the region, mainly in the town of Guadalupe, Jiménez municipality.<sup>114</sup>

This form of woodcraft was traditionally practiced by locals without a commercial purpose. The government's proposal was aimed at making use of this cultural custom to improve the quality of life of the community's residents.<sup>115</sup>

The initiative failed to take into account environmental considerations, leading to a significant decrease in the population of the tree species most commonly used in artisanal work. As a result, artisans began to depend on wood extracted from other municipalities and even from out of state.<sup>116</sup>

109 Valero, D. (2024) El Renacimiento del Agave Cocuy "Un Legado Venezolano". <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/el-renacimiento-del-agave-cocuy-un-legado-venezolano-daniel-valero-g-yvuhc/>

110 Villalobos Andrade, V.R. (2022) Condiciones ambientales y marco institucional en la construcción patrimonial del cocuy pecayero. CLÍO: Revista de ciencias humanas y pensamiento crítico Año 2, Núm 3. Enero / Junio (2022) pp. 50-63.

111 El Estímulo (2021) Innovation Eco presenta ganadores de la edición I de emprendimientos biosostenibles en Venezuela. <https://elestimulo.com/elinteres/emprendedores/2021-09-03/innovation-eco-presenta-ganadores-de-la-edicion-i-de-emprendimientos-biosostenibles-en-venezuela/>

112 Savedra, S., Padilla, A., Padilla, D. (2006) Especies forestales usadas en la producción de Cocuy Pecayero en el estado Falcón, Venezuela. Rev. For. Lat. N° 40. Págs. 71- 84.

113 Rodríguez, J.P., F. Rojas-Suárez y D. Giraldo Hernández (eds.) (2010) Op. Cit.

114 Barquisimeto.com (2009) I Feria Artesanal en Guadalupe estado Lara. <https://www.barquisimeto.com/2009/04/i-feria-artesanal-en-guadalupe-estado-lara/?form=MG0AV3>

115 Hidalgo, C. y Castillo, M. (2010) Consideraciones sobre ambiente y desarrollo. Caso de estudio de la artesanía en madera de Guadalupe-Municipio Jiménez del estado Lara-Venezuela. Revista Compendium, vol. 13, núm. 25, julio-diciembre, 2010, pp. 5-22. UCLA, Barquisimeto, Venezuela.

116 Gregorio Infante, J. (2017) Jiménez: un municipio sin política ambiental. <https://www.aporrea.org/regionales/a256348.html>





Silica extracted from Cerro El Plan. Photo retrieved from Observatorio de Ecología Política de Venezuela

## Non-metallic mining

Non-metallic mining is the extraction of materials or minerals that do not have metallic properties, such as sand, clay, gravel, limestone, gypsum or salt, among others.

*The mining of non-metallic materials can have significant environmental and social impacts if not supported by environmental management plans that promote environmental sustainability in the development of projects.*

*The repercussions include damage to local basins and water heads; soil degradation; dust and particle emissions; biodiversity loss; noise pollution, and landscape deterioration.<sup>117 118</sup>*

117 IUCN (2009). Guía de gestión ambiental para la minería no metálica. IUCN, Oficina Regional para Mesoamérica y la Iniciativa Caribe. ISBN: 978-9968-938-49-5. <https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2009-131.pdf>

118 Hidalgo López, C. (2022). Amenaza de la minería no metálica sobre la integridad de la cuenca del Río Tocuyo Compendium, 25(49). [http://www.ucla.edu/ve/dac/compendium/revista49/Compendium\\_49\\_Diciembre\\_2022\\_2.pdf?form=MG0AV3](http://www.ucla.edu/ve/dac/compendium/revista49/Compendium_49_Diciembre_2022_2.pdf?form=MG0AV3)



Spring on El Plan Hill, Torres Municipality, Lara State. Taken from La Patilla <https://www.lapatilla.com/2022/03/29/los-chanchullos-del-chavismo-en-la-explotacion/>

Although the extraction of non-metallic minerals in the state of Lara dates back many decades, no information on its possible environmental impact was available until the late 2000s.<sup>119</sup>

In 2017, protests began to take place over the start of silica extraction activities in Cerro El Plan, a hill located in the Los Quediches district of Torres Municipality.<sup>120</sup>  
<sup>121</sup> <sup>122</sup> The concerns pointed to the possibility that the mining activities would affect the springs and streams, local biodiversity and even threaten the Los Quediches Reservoir<sup>123</sup>.

<sup>119</sup> Hidalgo López, C. (2022). Op. Cit.

<sup>120</sup> Terán Mantovani, E. (2018) Naturalezas y territorialidades en disputa: Los ecologismos populares venezolanos y el eco-socialismo realmente existente en la Revolución Bolivariana. Pgs. 7- En: Gabbert K. y Martínez A. (Comp.) Venezuela desde adentro. Ocho investigaciones para un debate necesario. Fundación Rosa de Luxemburgo. [https://www.rosalux.org.ec/pdfs/VENEZUELA-DESDE-ADENTRO\\_12.pdf](https://www.rosalux.org.ec/pdfs/VENEZUELA-DESDE-ADENTRO_12.pdf)

<sup>121</sup> El Impulso (2017) #ESPECIAL VIDEO: Explotación de sílice abre debate ambiental en Torres (Parte I) <https://www.elimpulso.com/2017/02/26/especial-fotos-explotacion-silice-abre-debate-ambiental-torres-parte-i/>

<sup>122</sup> El Impulso (2017) #ESPECIAL VIDEO: Proyecto minero en Torres crea división entre parceleros (Parte II) <https://www.elimpulso.com/2017/02/26/especial-fotos-proyecto-minero-torres-crea-division-parceleros/>

<sup>123</sup> La Patilla (2022) Los chanchullos del chavismo en la explotación de sílice amenazan con dejar "secos" a habitantes en Carora. <https://www.lapatilla.com/2022/03/29/los-chanchullos-del-chavismo-en-la-explotacion/>

In this context, people taking part in a community assembly reaffirmed: *“For us, the first thing is water, the second thing is water and the third thing is water”*.<sup>124</sup>

Regarding the allegations, the mining company stated that their activities were legal and that the environmental impact had been analyzed, guaranteeing that no damage would occur.<sup>125</sup> It also claimed to have legal authorization for the exploitation of silica and a tree-planting program.<sup>126</sup> The company condemned the accusations as defamatory and imprudent.<sup>127</sup>

For their part, local environmentalists questioned the technical grounds of the environmental impact assessment presented by the companies involved in the exploitation.<sup>128 129</sup>

It was not possible to verify the issuance of statements from the Ministry of Ecosocialism on the allegations of the community, the legality of the permits, and the existence or validity of an environmental and sociocultural impact assessment.

The protests continued in subsequent years,<sup>130 131</sup> with no evidence of measures taken by the Venezuelan State to solve the conflict between the communities and the mining companies. On the contrary, the government of Lara state is currently promoting and engaging in silica mining and trade as an important form of economic activity in the region.<sup>132</sup>

From a legal point of view, the promotion, regulation and supervision of non-metallic mining is a competence of each state under the 2009 Organic Law on the Decentralization, Delimitation and Transfer of Powers of the Public Administration. In this sense, the state of Lara enacted in 2020 a Law on Non-metallic Minerals.<sup>133</sup>

This legal instrument establishes that the use of non-metallic minerals must be oriented towards the conservation and protection of the environment. It also determines that the Strategic Plan for Non-Metallic Mining Developments in Lara

124 Terán Mantovani, E. (2018) Op. Cit.

125 Alvarado, M. (2022) En defensa del Cerro El Plan. <https://provea.org/opinion/en-defensa-del-cerro-el-plan/>

126 El Informante (2022) Inesco expone programa de desarrollo minero. <https://www.elinformanteve.com/2022/08/inesco-expone-programa-de-desarrollo.html>

127 Bautista Salas, J. (2022) Inesco S.R.L: Intereses comerciales y de competitividad por detrás de campaña contra sílice de Lara #2Jun. <https://www.elimpulso.com/2022/06/02/inesco-s-r-l-intereses-comerciales-y-de-competitividad-por-detras-de-campana-contra-silice-de-lara-2jun/>

128 Torres, K. (2022) Mina de sílice en Carora: entre la explotación y denuncias de daño ambiental. <https://elpitazo.net/reportajes/mina-de-silice-en-carora-entre-la-explotacion-y-denuncias-de-dano-ambiental/?form=MG0AV3>

129 OEP (2023) Disminución de bosques y pérdida de la calidad del agua en el municipio Torres, estado Lara. <https://ecopoliticavenezuela.org/2023/03/20/diminucion-de-bosques-y-perdida-de-la-calidad-del-agua-en-el-municipio-torres-estado-lara/>

130 Voces por el Agua (2020) Lara: Alertan que explotación de sílice en Carora podría dejar sin agua a más de 400 mil familias. <https://ecopoliticavenezuela.org/2020/02/20/lara-alertan-que-explotacion-de-silice-en-carora-podria-dejar-sin-agua-a-mas-de-400-mil-familias/>

131 OEP (2021) Habitantes de Carora protestan contra minería de sílice en el Cerro El Plan. <https://ecopoliticavenezuela.org/2021/03/23/habitantes-de-carora-protestan-contra-mineria-de-silice-en-el-cerro-el-plan/>

132 Gobernación del estado Lara (2023) Gobierno de Lara continúa apostando al crecimiento económico y productivo de la región. <https://lara.gob.ve/14771/>

133 Ley de minerales no metálicos del estado Lara de 2020. Gaceta Oficial del estado Lara Ordinaria N° 24.551, Barquisimeto, 18 de marzo de 2020, Revisada en: <https://www.studocu.com/latam/document/universidad-politecnica-territorial-de-lara-andres-eloy-blanco/introduccion-a-la-universidad-y-a-los-pnf-grupo-a/ley-de-minerales-no-metalicos-del-estado-lara-18-02-2020-con-modificaciones-solicitadas-gobernadora/90679275>

state must establish a policy of rational and environmentally sustainable use, exploration, exploitation, oversight, trade and conservation of non-metallic mineral resources in the region.

Despite these legal provisions, no information was found on the existence of a Strategic Plan for Non-Metallic Mining Developments in Lara state, nor the agency is responsible for enforcing the guidelines and standards established in the Law.

## Obligations of the Venezuelan State regarding the protection of the environment and human rights in the semi-arid region of Lara state

The environmental obligations of the Venezuelan State are established in Articles 127, 128 and 129 of the National Constitution.

The essence of these articles is the State's recognition of the human right to a healthy, safe and ecologically balanced environment.

The fulfillment of this right requires a triple obligation from the State: respecting the right, protecting citizens from violations by third parties, and guaranteeing its effective enjoyment through concrete measures.

Likewise, the National Constitution establishes the State's obligations in the management and protection of the environment in matters of biological diversity, ecological processes, national parks or areas of ecological significance, among others. It also establishes the duty to protect citizens from pollution, while safeguarding the country's air, water, soil and climate, guided by the principles of sustainable development.

The Constitution also establishes the duty of the State to promote environmental democracy by ensuring access to information and participation in territorial order processes.<sup>134 135</sup>

<sup>134</sup> Hernández-Mendible, V.R. (2022) La legislación ambiental en Venezuela. Acceso a la Justicia. <https://accesoalajusticia.org/la-legislacion-ambiental-en-venezuela/>

<sup>135</sup> Blanco-Uribe, A. (2019) Obligaciones del Estado frente al Derecho al Ambiente. <https://albertoblancouribe.com/obligaciones-del-estado-frente-al-derecho-al-ambiente/>

The regulatory body that frames the rights and obligations contained in the Constitution is made up of Laws, Decrees and Resolutions issued by the pertinent authorities.

Analyzing this broad and complex legal framework<sup>136</sup> is out of the scope of this investigation.

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning Article 4 of the Organic Law on the Environment, which establishes that: “*environmental rights have preeminence over economic and social rights, limiting them in the terms established in the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and special laws.*” Therefore, no State body may justify actions that cause serious or irreparable environmental damage in the pursuit of economic objectives or objectives of another nature.

These constitutional and legal mandates seem to conflict with the inaction of the environmental bodies, despite the claims of activists, representatives of communities in Lara state, and studies by researchers suggesting the commission of very serious environmental crimes.

On the other hand, Venezuela has ratified a significant number of international agreements and treaties on environmental matters.

Some of the most relevant international instruments in the field include the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD);<sup>137</sup> the Convention on Biological Diversity;<sup>138</sup> the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC),<sup>139</sup> and the 2015 Paris Agreement.<sup>140</sup> Also relevant is the commitment of the Venezuelan State to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>141</sup>

The first three international instruments establish the design and implementation of national environmental management policies to ensure the fulfillment of their specific objectives.

In this regard, Venezuela presented in 2004 the National Action Program to Combat Desertification and Drought,<sup>142</sup> followed by the 2014 National Strategy for Neutrality in Land Degradation.<sup>143</sup>

In the context of the UNCCD, the Venezuelan government developed a technical

136 Hernández-Mendible, V.R. (2022) Op. Cit.

137 Ley Aprobatoria de la Convención Internacional de Lucha contra la Desertificación. Gaceta Oficial n.º 5.239 del 23 de junio de 1998.

138 Ley Aprobatoria del Convenio sobre la Diversidad Biológica. Gaceta Oficial n.º 4.780 del 12 de septiembre de 1994.

139 Ley Aprobatoria de la Convención Marco de las Naciones Unidas sobre el Cambio Climático. Gaceta Oficial n.º 4.825 del 27 de diciembre de 1994.

140 Ley Aprobatoria del Acuerdo de París de la Convención Marco de las Naciones Unidas sobre el Cambio Climático. Gaceta Oficial n.º 40.819 del 30 de diciembre de 2015.

141 República de Venezuela (2016) Presentación Nacional Voluntaria (PNV) ante el Foro Político de Alto Nivel sobre Desarrollo Sustentable (FPAN) de Naciones Unidas. [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10527Venezuela-%20PNV%20DEFINITIVO%20JUNIO%202016%20-%20DEFINITIVO%2017062016%20\(1\).pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10527Venezuela-%20PNV%20DEFINITIVO%20JUNIO%202016%20-%20DEFINITIVO%2017062016%20(1).pdf)

142 República de Venezuela (2004) Op. Cit.

143 República Bolivariana de Venezuela (2014) Estrategia Nacional Neutralidad en la Degradación de las Tierras (NDT) hacia el 2030 Informe Final [https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/ldn\\_targets/2019-10/Venezuela%20](https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/ldn_targets/2019-10/Venezuela%20)

manual for the restoration of xerophytic forests,<sup>144</sup> which aims to provide guidelines and strategies for the rehabilitation of this type of forest in Venezuela.

Regarding the conservation of biological diversity, Venezuela has developed several national strategic plans, the most recent of them for the period 2010-2020.<sup>145</sup> Regarding the fight against Climate Change, Venezuela presented in 2017 its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), updated in 2021.<sup>146</sup>

Target 3 of Sustainable Development Goal 15, aimed at the conservation and sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, seeks to *combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world.*

Although the national government has declared progress in the implementation of these plans,<sup>147 148 149</sup> studies carried out by researchers and civil society organizations have found delays, omissions or lack of concrete measures in specific areas.<sup>150 151 152</sup> <sup>153</sup> There is not enough information to assess the implementation of the guidelines established by these obligations in the context of the semi-arid region of Lara State.

Regarding environmental management, the human rights framework establishes the obligation of States to respect, protect and fulfill the human rights threatened by the negative effects of environmental degradation.<sup>154</sup>

Additionally, it is worth mentioning Advisory Opinion OC-23/17 of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which established prevention, precaution, cooperation and procedural obligations in environmental matters.<sup>155 156</sup>

144 República Bolivariana de Venezuela (2023) Manual: Restauración del bosque xerofítico. FAO / Ministerio del Poder Popular para el Ecosocialismo. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/1f57fcea-da2b-4fdc-97f2-d782ee5c8c76>

145 República de Venezuela (2010) Estrategia Nacional para la Conservación de la Diversidad Biológica 2010-2020 y su Plan de Acción Nacional. <https://www.cbd.int/doc/world/ve/ve-nbsap-v2-es.pdf>

146 República de Venezuela (2021) Actualización de la Contribución Nacionalmente Determinada de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela para la lucha contra el Cambio Climático y sus efectos. <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/Actualizacion%20NDC%20Venezuela.pdf>

147 MINEC (2019) Venezuela trabaja para combatir el fenómeno de la desertificación y la sequía. <http://www.minec.gob.ve/venezuela-trabaja-para-combatir-el-fenomeno-de-la-desertificacion-y-la-sequia/#:~:text=Hay%20estimaciones%20que%20indican%20que,el%2042%25%20de%20la%20poblaci%C3%B3n>

148 Prensa Ecosocialismo (2020) Venezuela presentó VI Informe Nacional sobre la Diversidad Biológica. <http://www.minec.gob.ve/venezuela-presento-vi-informe-nacional-sobre-la-diversidad-biologica/>

149 VTV (2024) Venezuela y FAO realizan taller sobre desarrollo sostenible y cambio climático. <https://www.vtv.gob.ve/venezuela-fao-taller-desarrollo-sostenible-cambio-climatico/>

150 Sinergia (2023) Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible En Venezuela 2016-2022 Revisión de cumplimiento a medio término (2016-2022) Revisión a medio término. [https://cepaz.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/SINERGIA-ODS-en-Vzla-Revision-a-medio-termino-2023\\_230719\\_135745.pdf](https://cepaz.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/SINERGIA-ODS-en-Vzla-Revision-a-medio-termino-2023_230719_135745.pdf)

151 Núñez Cobo, J. y K. Verbist (Eds.). 2018. Atlas de Sequía de América Latina y el Caribe. UNESCO y CAZALAC, 204p. [https://www.academia.edu/40386771/El\\_desafio\\_de\\_la\\_sequ%C3%ADa\\_en\\_Venezuela](https://www.academia.edu/40386771/El_desafio_de_la_sequ%C3%ADa_en_Venezuela)

152 Clima21 (2023) Derechos humanos y gestión de desastres en Venezuela: Una historia de silencios olvidados y omisiones. <https://clima21.net/informes/derechos-humanos-y-gestion-de-desastres-en-venezuela-una-historia-de-silencios-olvidados-y-omisiones/>

153 Clima21 (2022) Bosques en desaparición: Deforestación en Venezuela 2016-2021. <https://clima21.net/informes/bosques-en-desaparicion-deforestacion-en-venezuela-2016-2021/>

154 OHCHR (2024) OHCHR (2018) Principios marco sobre los derechos humanos y el medio ambiente. [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Environment/SREnvironment/FP\\_ReportSpanish.PDF](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Environment/SREnvironment/FP_ReportSpanish.PDF)

155 Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos (2017) Opinión consultiva OC-23/17 de 15 de noviembre de 2017 solicitada por la república de Colombia. Medio ambiente y derechos humanos. [https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/opiniones/seriea\\_23\\_esp.pdf](https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/opiniones/seriea_23_esp.pdf)

156 For more information see: Clima21 (2025) ¿Cuáles son las obligaciones de los Estados en materia de derechos humanos ambientales? <https://clima21.net/nuestra-opinion/cuales-son-las-obligaciones-de-los-estados-en-materia-de-derechos-humanos-ambientales/>

The obligation of prevention encompasses all the measures that promote the safeguarding of human rights in the safe of environmental degradation. The precautionary principle refers to the obligation to avoid damage, even in the absence of scientific certainty about the impact that an activity could have on the environment. Likewise, States are obliged to cooperate in the event of possible transboundary harm resulting from environmental degradation.

For their part, the procedural obligations refer to the duty of States to promote access to information, participation and justice in environmental matters.

No information could be found on the actions aimed at ensuring compliance by the Venezuelan State with these provisions. On the contrary, the available information seems to indicate that the State has omitted its obligations in terms of environmental human rights.

## Research findings



**The information confirms that the semi-arid region of Lara state is being subjected to very serious human pressure, which is accelerating the processes of desertification affecting the area.** This situation has multiple causes, including climate change, but is currently exacerbated mainly by the unsustainable extraction of natural resources in the region.

Although it is not possible to determine with precision the current extent of degradation of ecosystems in the semi-arid region of Lara state, the available information allows us to infer that it is very high.

A significant consequence of this situation is that the ecosystems of the semi-arid region of Lara state risk suffering irreversible and unforeseeable damage in the event of reaching a point of no return.

**In recent years, an extractive model of exploitation of natural resources has prevailed in the region.** Extractive activities in the area are aimed at the exploitation of natural resources for export, as has occurred in other sectors of the Venezuelan economy.<sup>157 158 159</sup>

The information available suggests that these activities are carried out without environmental considerations, through unethical procedures and based on authorizations of dubious legality.

Even in cases where the exploitation of natural resources is not intended for export (e.g. firewood for cocuy production) or focuses on materials other than wood (e.g. silica), the available information suggests that it is not being carried out under the procedures established by the national environmental regulations.

**It was not possible to verify the claims of companies and government officials according to which the extraction of the resources follows sustainability criteria.**

On the contrary, the information collected indicates that the current activities are clearly unsustainable. In addition, essential information is lacking in order to ascertain the environmental sustainability of forestry operations, including territorial management criteria, local biological diversity, soil and water characterization, and socioeconomic context. No information is available on the relation between wood extraction rates and forest regeneration and other environmental impact indicators that affect biodiversity, water and soil quality, and the sustainable management of forests, including reforestation rate, selective cutting programs and conservation of protected areas, among others.<sup>160 161</sup>

157 Terán Mantovani, E. (2023) Desfalco ecológico: la forma de corrupción de la que no estamos hablando en Venezuela. <https://ecopoliticavenezuela.org/2023/04/10/desfalco-ecologico-la-forma-de-corrupcion-de-la-que-no-estamos-hablando-en-venezuela/>

158 Fergusson, A. (2024) La política de saqueo extractivista en Venezuela se consolida, mientras el pueblo muere de hambre. [https://www.eldebate.com/internacional/latinoamerica/20240310/politica-saqueo-extractivista-venezuela-consolida-mientras-pueblo-muere-hambre\\_180082.html](https://www.eldebate.com/internacional/latinoamerica/20240310/politica-saqueo-extractivista-venezuela-consolida-mientras-pueblo-muere-hambre_180082.html)

159 Terán Mantovani, E. (2021) Venezuela – extractivismo 2021: geografías del ajuste, nuevas estrategias de re-colonización y luchas por la vida <https://ecopoliticavenezuela.org/2021/05/20/venezuela-extractivismo-2021-geografias-del-ajuste-nuevas-estrategias-de-re-colonizacion-y-luchas-por-la-vida/>

160 FAO (1992) Criterios e indicadores de la ordenación forestal sostenible: procesos internacionales, situación actual y perspectivas. Resumen de los procesos internacionales de desarrollo y armonización global de criterios e indicadores utilizados a nivel nacional en una unidad de manejo forestal. <https://www.fao.org/4/x8080s/x8080s06.htm?form=MG0AV3>

161 Pérez Martínez, J., Fernández Hernández, M.E. y de la Nuez Hernández, D. (2021). Criterios e indicadores de gestión forestal por la excelencia. *Cooperativismo y Desarrollo*, 9(1), 93-115. [http://scielo.sld.cu/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S2310-340X2021000100093&lng=es&tlng=es](http://scielo.sld.cu/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2310-340X2021000100093&lng=es&tlng=es).



**The environmental degradation resulting from natural resource exploitation activities is affecting communities in the region.** There is information that the growing environmental degradation in the region could be causing damage to the population in the form of:

- Declining food production and food insecurity, which increases poverty levels and inequality.
- Deterioration of the population's health attributable to water scarcity, air pollution and malnutrition, among others.
- Acceleration of forced migration.
- Increasing social conflict attributable to inequity in the distribution of the benefits of resource exploitation and the use of business practices that incite violence.
- Loss of cultural values, particularly the understanding, appreciation and use of local biodiversity in people's nutrition.

All these processes constitute a serious situation of environmental injustice because the local population is being disproportionately affected by the environmental degradation resulting from the implementation of policies that prioritize the profits of economic groups over the protection of people's human rights.

**The government fails to comply with its obligations regarding environmental conservation, protection of citizens and defense of human rights.** In the specific case of the semi-arid region of Lara state, a contradictory stance can be observed. Although the government complies with the formalities established in international agreements, it acts in practice as a promoter and implementer of unsustainable natural resource extraction activities, without exercising the necessary task of oversight to mitigate environmental degradation.

Additionally, the available information suggests that the Venezuelan State is not on track to meet the target of SDG15 relating to the fight against desertification (Target 15.3).

Finally, the Venezuelan State is ignoring its responsibility to protect human rights in the face of environmental degradation in the semi-arid region of Lara state, affecting people's rights to life, health, water, education, a decent standard of living, a healthy environment, and access to information and timely response.

# Recommendations

*The semi-arid regions represent a small fraction of Venezuela's territory. However, they have held enormous historical, social and cultural significance for the country since ancient times. In this corner of our geography, equivalent to 4.5% of the territory, unique ways of life have been created to cope with the scarcity of natural resources from pre-Columbian times to the present day.<sup>162</sup>*

The analysis of the collected information allows for the conclusion that urgent action is needed to recover and preserve the semi-arid region of Lara state on environmental, social, human and ethical grounds.

To this end, a series of recommendations is proposed as a starting point for this process:

- **Declare an environmental emergency in the region** to mobilize financial and human resources and international support aimed at solving the problem.
- **Implement effective and gradual actions to eradicate extractivism** as a means of State financing.
- **Update the National Action Plan to Combat Desertification and Drought** to incorporate an assessment of the current state of desertification in the semi-arid region of Lara state; measures for the implementation of sustainable land and water management practices; a program to promote the restoration of degraded ecosystems; the promotion of resilient and adaptive agricultural practices, and a program for monitoring and evaluating environmental and social processes. This updated National Action Plan shall also include a poverty reduction policy, the promotion of education to build resilience against desertification, and the participation of civil society and communities in the stages of decision-making and implementation. The Plan must be articulated with the National Strategy for the Conservation of Biological Diversity and a future National Plan for Climate Change Adaptation, under a human rights framework. Likewise, it is essential to strengthen the actions necessary to meet the targets of SDG 15 on desertification.

<sup>162</sup> Cortés Riera, L.E. (2015). Una mirada al semiárido larense venezolano. Las posibilidades de un territorio. Revista Enlace Científico. Año 16, Nro. 12, 2015. pp 135-146. [https://www.uptaeb.edu.ve/documents/publicaciones/enlace\\_cientifico/EC\\_V12\\_UPTAEB.pdf](https://www.uptaeb.edu.ve/documents/publicaciones/enlace_cientifico/EC_V12_UPTAEB.pdf)

- **Conduct administrative and judicial investigations into the activities that are causing the environmental degradation of the semi-arid regions.** The claims of the communities about ongoing activities must be given priority attention, and legal proceedings must be initiated in all cases where evidence of an environmental crime exists. In addition, it is essential to conduct a thorough review of the permits granted for the exploitation of natural resources in the region and impose sanctions on those responsible for any irregularity, in strict compliance with the applicable law.
- **Establish a program to ensure decent livelihoods and care for residents who are currently involved in resource extraction activities.** This initiative must be paired with the poverty reduction policy established in the National Action Plan to Combat Desertification and Drought.
- **Strengthen the institutional capacities involved in addressing desertification, drought and climate change.** This process shall include the capacities of the concerned environmental institutions and the institutions that conduct scientific research on the topic of desertification and drought.
- **Guarantee the right to access environmental information,** as established in Article 28 of the National Constitution, as the first step towards the signing and ratification of the Escazú Agreement.

