
WHY IS LATIN AMERICA NOT CONCERNED ABOUT DROUGHT AS IT SHOULD?

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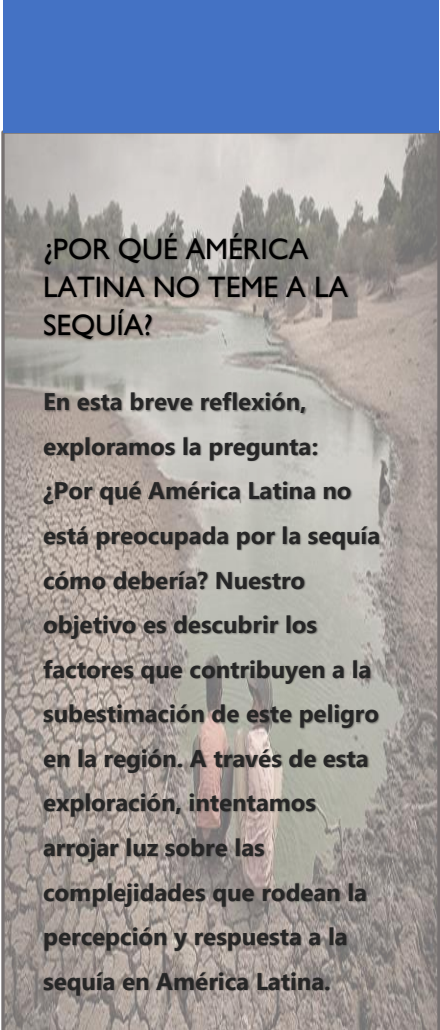
In this brief reflection, I explore the question: Why isn't Latin America more concerned about drought than it should be? This question prompts a deeper exploration into the socio-political and environmental landscape of Latin America, where despite its recurrent incidence and severe impacts, drought often fails to evoke the same level of concern as other natural disasters. Through my doctoral investigation at the University of Wageningen (WUR) and my early experiences as a member of the Community of Learning and Practice on Drought Management (CLP) by the UNCCD, I aim to uncover the underlying factors contributing to the underestimation of drought as a significant hazard in the region. Additionally, we pose several questions to guide our understanding. Through this exploration, we attempt to shed light on the complexities surrounding drought perception and response in Latin America, which serves as a premise for further study.

Drought is often overlooked as a disaster in Latin America, where disasters are typically attributed more to weather and climate change than to human activities. In the case of Ecuador, my PhD study area, disasters like landslides or floods receive more attention than drought, despite its recurring incidence since 1968. Population growth and internal migration drive water demand; however, drought remains an "invisible" and underestimated disaster, undervalued for its contribution to humanitarian emergencies. Another reason is that its impact is not measured. Floods accounted for 60% of economic losses in the last 40 years. This is approximately \$81 billion. So, drought is "losing out" because it also does not affect areas with export products.

This investigation adopts a positivism approach [sociology method that relies on empirical evidence], analyzing historical precipitation data from meteorological stations to understand drought drivers and impacts. However, existing drought management frameworks in Ecuador focus solely on current and forecasted drought hazards, with limited historical data and empirical evidence, neglecting the long-term risks and impacts on agriculture, economies, and the environment.

"Can the limited availability of meteorological and hydrological data hinder the formulation of effective policies to address communities' demands for water availability and accessibility in Ecuador and neighboring countries?"

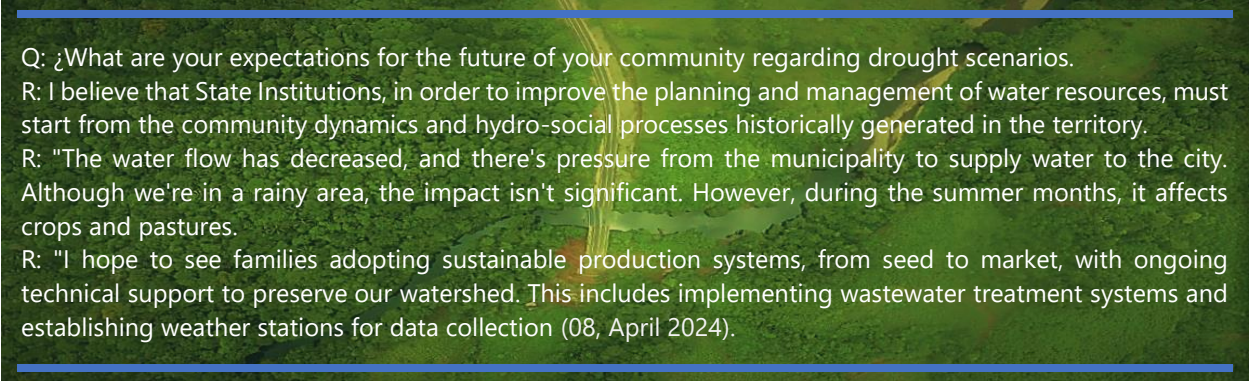
Recent climatic extremes, such as heat waves, and water deficits, signify a new normal, impacting ecosystems and communities. The absence of a comprehensive drought management plan heightens conflicts over water resources, especially in Andean provinces like Imbabura and Carchi, near the Colombia-Ecuador border, underscoring the transboundary nature of these challenges. Adopting a post-positivist critical approach is crucial for understanding the socio-political dimensions of drought governance and community responses [utilizing various experiences to enhance the validity of the content.], influenced by unequal power relations. Despite this, many water management decisions in this region prioritize current conventions over national water policies, given their ability to address challenges that transcend



¿POR QUÉ AMÉRICA LATINA NO TEME A LA SEQUÍA?

En esta breve reflexión, exploramos la pregunta: ¿Por qué América Latina no está preocupada por la sequía cómo debería? Nuestro objetivo es descubrir los factores que contribuyen a la subestimación de este peligro en la región. A través de esta exploración, intentamos arrojar luz sobre las complejidades que rodean la percepción y respuesta a la sequía en América Latina.

international borders. Moreover, in the turbulent Colombia-Ecuador border region, these transboundary conventions aid in mitigating conflicts over water resources, promoting integrated water resource management, and enhancing resilience to water-related risks and disasters regionally. Consequently, they play a vital role in fostering peace, stability, and sustainable development in recognizing the interconnected threats posed by drought and other extreme events, policymakers can enhance water resource planning and management to alleviate hydro-political tensions and mitigate the impacts of drought on vulnerable communities. Take a look at this short interview featuring a government official from the Northern Prefecture of Carchi and a young indigenous leader residing in a town near the border with Colombia. The woman is affiliated with the Coya Foundation and actively supports her community's initiatives in responding to water shortage scenarios.



Q: ¿What are your expectations for the future of your community regarding drought scenarios.

R: I believe that State Institutions, in order to improve the planning and management of water resources, must start from the community dynamics and hydro-social processes historically generated in the territory.

R: "The water flow has decreased, and there's pressure from the municipality to supply water to the city. Although we're in a rainy area, the impact isn't significant. However, during the summer months, it affects crops and pastures.

R: "I hope to see families adopting sustainable production systems, from seed to market, with ongoing technical support to preserve our watershed. This includes implementing wastewater treatment systems and establishing weather stations for data collection (08, April 2024).

Centered on regions like the Mira transboundary river basin, the objective is to identify drought patterns in Ecuador, specifically. These areas are inhabited by Afro-Ecuadorian and Indigenous peoples, contributing to the multicultural construction of society. Providing empirical evidence of comparable drought-related challenges in other regions of South America, such as Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, and Peru, will contribute to achieving the objectives of the legally binding international agreement bridging environment and development to sustainable land management, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). Specifically, this research can support efforts to reduce land degradation resulting from climate change, deforestation, and unsustainable practices in land and water use. However, overlooking the significance of culture and tradition within transboundary regions could potentially hinder the development of effective policies to address water crises, given the potential decision-making power of informal networks.

"Does the presence of international conventions on transboundary basins impede national policies from adequately addressing water management challenges, such as water scarcity?"

Highlighting the significance of managing drought as a disaster in Latin America, where its impacts are often overshadowed by other natural hazards, underscores the need for a paradigm shift. Relying solely on a positivist approach to analyze historical precipitation data reveals the inadequacies of current drought management frameworks, which prioritize short-term hazards over long-term risks. Thus, the transboundary nature of drought challenges, exemplified by conflicts over water resources in Andean provinces like Imbabura and Carchi, underscores the urgency of developing a comprehensive understanding of drought governance that addresses socio-political dimensions and unequal power dynamics. Furthermore, International conventions on transboundary basins may inadvertently hinder national policies from effectively addressing water management challenges, warranting a critical reevaluation of existing frameworks. By acknowledging the interconnected threats of drought and extreme events, policymakers

can improve water resource planning and management to alleviate hydro-political tensions and protect vulnerable communities.

To sum up, addressing drought crises comprehensively requires the integration of cultural and traditional factors into drought governance. Moreover, future research should prioritize strategic engagement with indigenous organizations to understand how shifts in discourse within these structures can influence decision-making regarding water management and governance, particularly concerning drought.

"In conclusion, a paradigm shift is imperative in managing drought as a significant disaster in Latin America, extending beyond viewing it merely as an occasional crisis. This shift necessitates the development of new comprehensive policies that address its transboundary challenges and socio-political dimensions, while also embracing cultural and traditional factors to enhance resilience. S. Megens 15 April 2024"