



Caring for our Common Home:

Collective Responsibility in Latin
America and the Caribbean and
Beyond

Policy Brief
April 2021



Executive Summary

The effects of climate change have been felt across Latin America and the Caribbean at an increasing rate in recent years. The consequences of climate change go beyond environmental degradation and include physical and socioeconomic implications. The success and wellness of future generations depends on our renewed commitment to care for our common home and understand our interconnectedness and interdependence with nature.

Pope Francis calls us to “replace consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, and wastefulness with a spirit of sharing” in his second encyclical, “Laudato Si”. Climate justice is not merely a goal to be achieved, it is rather a lifelong process that requires constant reflection and advocacy. We can address climate change by changing our own relationship with the environment, supporting the work of organizations who are at the frontlines of this issue and pushing for a change in policies that uphold the sacredness of our common home.





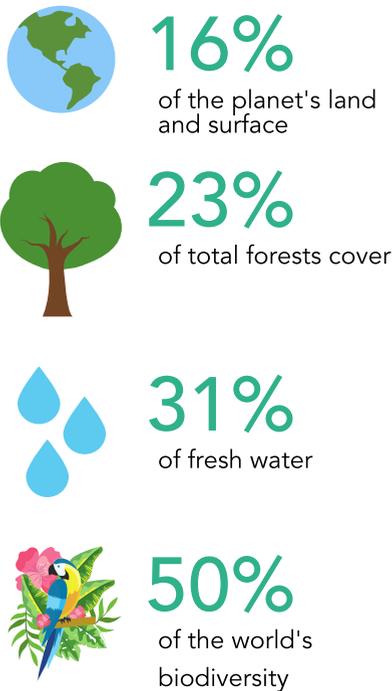
Key Messages

1. **Climate change** in Latin America and the Caribbean is increasingly having detrimental **health, nutrition, well-being, and economic implications** on local communities, especially among the most vulnerable.
2. COVID-19 has highlighted the **importance of natural resources** in addressing global health crises.
3. It is our collective responsibility to move towards an attitude of mutual respect and **care for our common home**. We must shift our perception of the **Earth** to something that is deeply interconnected to our own health and wellbeing, rather than merely a resource to take from.
4. **Caring for our common home** is a lifelong commitment. We must look at how our own actions, as well as the actions of larger entities are affecting **our common home**.
5. Regional and international frameworks, like the Paris Agreement, exist to support a global effort to address **climate change**, strengthening resilience, and reducing vulnerability.
6. Organizations who are doing intentional work to educate future generations about **sustainable practices** that shift away from exploitative and extractive practices must be supported.

Environmental Factors in Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is the most biodiverse region in the world. It is home to the largest freshwater reserves and the Amazon, which is considered the world's largest carbon sink. Over 40% of the world's biodiversity and a quarter of the world's forests are located on the continent of South America.

Figure 1: Latin American and Caribbean Environmental Statistics



FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean "Regional Initiative and resilient agriculture"

When used wisely, natural resources and biodiversity could have many benefits for countries, especially in the creation of opportunities for economic

advancements through agricultural exports and job creation. Today, 45% of the region's agricultural GDP comes from exporting beef and poultry. Fisheries and aquaculture provide direct employment for more than 200,000 people and indirect employment for an additional 500,000 people in the region.

The efficient and responsible use of natural resources is considered to be the basis of an effective strategy for poverty reduction. Natural resources such as land and water are needed for industries such as farming and fishing, which are increasingly becoming important for LAC economies. It is estimated that by 2028, LAC is estimated to account for 25% of all global agriculture and fisheries exports.

Environmental Concerns in Latin America and the Caribbean

Increased agriculture and livestock production in LAC leads to the use of more water and the potential to degrade land. Livestock, especially cows, are estimated to generate 14.5% of all greenhouse gas emissions that are

related to human activity, further contributing to climate change. Unsustainable farming practices may lead to an increased use of pesticides and fertilizers which can contaminate drinking water and soil, reduce biodiversity and increase deforestation, ultimately leading to the depreciation of the quality and availability of natural resources. This may have negative effects on the agriculture and fishing industries and decrease employment opportunities.

Climate change has led to an increase in extreme weather events, and LAC has felt these effects disproportionately. According to the UN Office on Disaster Risk Reduction, climate-related disasters have nearly doubled in the last 20-year period. In 2010, 98 of the world's most serious natural disasters took place in Latin America, and out of these 79 of these were related to climate change. In Central and South America, there is a decrease in water availability and an increase in flooding and landslides. Reduced food production as a result of droughts and other severe weather

events can place communities at risk of malnutrition and increased financial hardship for farmers. The effects of climate change are not felt equally, and disproportionately affect people living in poverty. According to Mercy Corps, three out of four people living in poverty globally rely on agriculture and natural resources to survive. In the Caribbean, hurricanes have become more intense and lead to losses in ecosystems, which in turn negatively impact people's livelihoods. Homes in the low-lying coastal areas are also at risk of being destroyed due to rising sea levels. Climate change also contributes to an increase in illnesses stemming from cardiovascular and insect and waterborne diseases. These can include malaria, yellow fever, cholera and diarrheal.

COVID-19

The impact of COVID-19 has been immense in LAC, a region that was already facing the highest rates of inequality in the world COVID-19 has exacerbated this situation, leading to new economic implications and serious educational impacts.

F FAO, "Key Facts and Findings", available at <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/197623/icode/>

FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, available at <http://www.fao.org/americas/priorities/cambio-climatico/en/>
UN, 2020, "Staggering rise in climate emergencies in last 20 years" available at <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/10/1075142>

FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, "Climate Change and environmental sustainability in Latin America and the Caribbean", available at <http://www.fao.org/americas/priorities/cambio-climatico/en/#:~:text=safeguard%20natural%20resources,Climate%20change%20and%20environmental%20sustainability%20in%20Latin%20America%20and%20the,such%20as%20drou>

gths%20and%20floods.

Mercy Corps, 2019, "The facts: How climate change affects people living in poverty", available at <https://www.mercycorps.org/blog/climate-change-poverty#:~:text=The%20increased%20frequency%20and%20intensity,of%20conflict%2C%20hunger%20and%20poverty>.

World Food Programme, 2020, "Innovating for Climate Resilience in Latin America and the Caribbean" available at https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000110746/download/?_ga=2.105807299.1336536415.1616171353-1763752456.1616171353

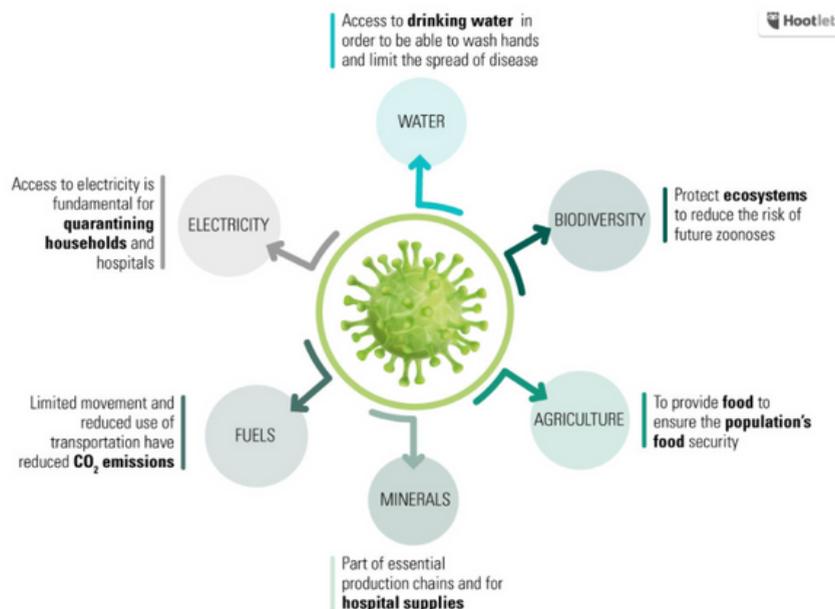
UN News, 2020, "Address 'unprecedented' impact of coronavirus on Latin America and the Caribbean, urges Guterres", available at <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/07/1068051>

These impacts disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, including Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, women, migrants and refugees, elders, and individuals with disabilities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of natural resources, such as food, water, biodiversity, and electricity, in mitigating the effects of the pandemic. Access to clean water for handwashing is essential to slowing the spread of the virus. However, 26% of the population in LAC does not have adequate or permanent access to safe drinking water or water inside their homes. Among rural populations, this amount is more than double (58%).

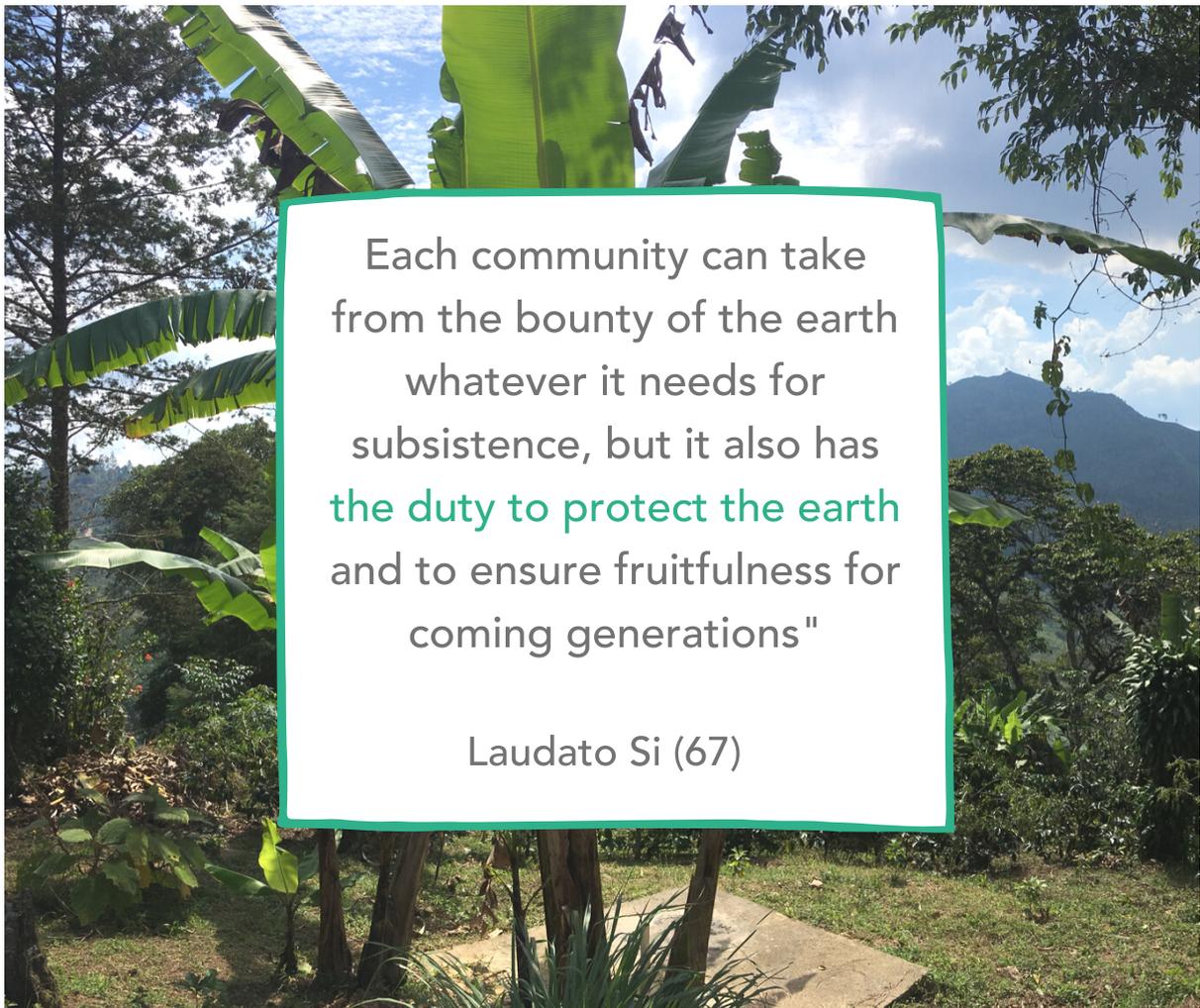
Lockdown measures have also led to an increase in illicit exploitation of natural resources due to a reduction in inspection, guardianship and deference of territorial rights. Activities include logging, trafficking exotic commercial species, mining and fishing. Deforestation has increased by 64% in Brazil as compared to the amount reported between January-April 2019. Colombia saw a surge in deforestation rates in 2020 compared to significant declines that had happened between 2018-2019. Subsistence strategies are anticipated to increase as poverty increases, which will translate into an increase in local community consumption of firewood, food, and ingredients used in traditional medicine.

Figure 2: The part played by natural resources in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic in LAC



Appeal from the Catholic Church

Pope Francis addressed the urgency of caring for the environment in his second encyclical "Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home". He identified climate change as one of the principal challenges facing humanity, and calls for a shift in the relationship we have with the environment towards one of mutual responsibility. This shift calls us to make radical changes in our "lifestyles, models of production and consumption, and the established structures of power which govern societies today". Although this appeal is aimed at members of the Catholic Church, it is built upon collective knowledge from scientists, philosophers, civic groups, and theologians and has a broader global application.



Global Climate Change Policies

The Paris Agreement

In 2015, the United Nations Framework Convention of Climate Change came to an agreement regarding climate change. The goal was to strengthen the global response to climate change, decrease global temperature rise, provide climate finance to developing countries, and decrease country emissions.

Figure 3: Paris Climate Agreement



<https://ednh.news/the-paris-agreement-key-points/>

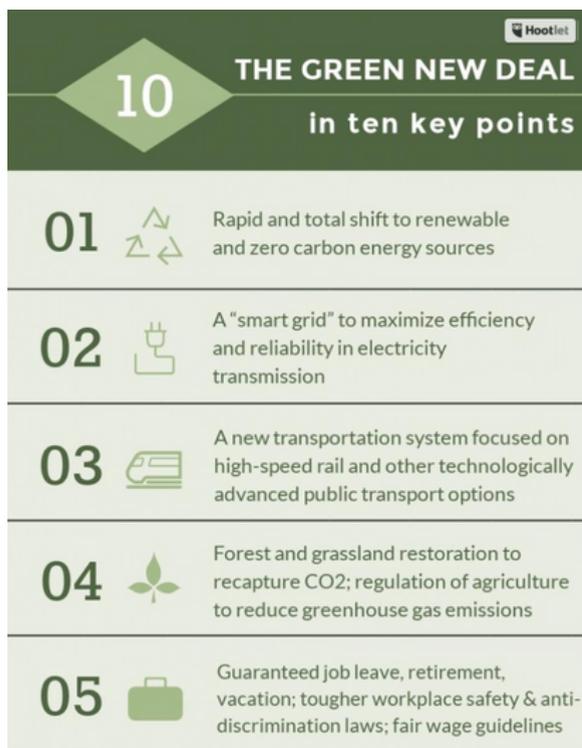
UN Climate Change Conference UK 2021

The 26th UN Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP26) will take place in November 2021. This will provide a space for conversation, collaboration and action relating to policy, economics, and civil society. A Pre-COP26 UN Youth Climate Summit will take place in September 2021 and gives young people an opportunity to create concrete proposals for COP26.

Green New Deal

In the United States, the Green New Deal is a resolution that has been proposed as a way to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions and shift the economy away from the use of fossil fuels. Originally introduced in 2019, it was reintroduced on April 20, 2021. It includes a transition towards zero-emission energy sources such as wind and solar power as well as decreasing manufacturing and agricultural carbon emissions, and the creation of an economic safety net for people and communities affected by climate change.

Figure 4: Green New Deal Key Points



How Locals are Taking Action

Communities in LAC have been working towards climate justice for generations. It is important that solutions are being created by the communities that are directly impacted as they have lived experiences and knowledge that will help them shape interventions that make sense for the specific needs of their communities. Below are a few examples of communal actions being taken to impact lasting change in LAC. Although these examples are those of local organizations, there must also be collective work done across sectors to address these issues.

UN Climate Change Conference, 2020, available at <https://ukcop26.org/>

UN Climate Change Conference, 2021, available at <https://ukcop26.org/pre-cop/the-youth-summit/>

Aljazeera, 2020, "AOC, Democrats relaunch 'Green New Deal' before climate summit", available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/4/20/aoc-democrats-relaunch-green-new-deal-ahead-of-climate-summit>

Aljazeera, 2020, "AOC, Democrats relaunch 'Green New Deal' before climate summit", available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/4/20/aoc-democrats-relaunch-green-new-deal-ahead-of-climate-summit>

Amazon River Basin

The Amazon River Basin is home to incredible biodiversity, with over 30,000 plant species, 60 species of reptiles, and 1,800 species of birds. It also holds an abundance of natural resources, including wood, gold, bauxite, iron and steel. Rapid deforestation and an increase in droughts and fires has contributed to erosion and reduced biodiversity.

The Jesuit Pan-Amazon Service (SJPAM) has launched a pilot project in 26 schools across five countries in the Amazon River Basin. Intercultural and bilingual education curriculum is being developed to support the specific cultural needs of local communities. This curriculum will raise awareness about ecological and social justice issues that are relevant to each community and schools will identify and implement actions that will protect natural resources.

Haiti

Deforestation is a critical concern in Haiti and has led to flooding, increased soil erosion, and declines in agricultural productivity. In Haiti, there is also a dependency on small family farms. Agricultural production has been

negatively affected by climate change due to an increase in extreme weather events including droughts.

A Foi et Joie Haiti school in the northeastern town of Bedou, St. Ignace de Loyola School, has a beekeeping initiative that aims to provide students with tangible skills, such as caring for hives and harvesting honey to sell as the bees continue supporting stronger crops and forests, which in turn assists in the nutrition and maintenance of biodiversity. By integrating education, ecology, and economy, this project aims to improve the quality of life of their students, their families, and the surrounding community.

The benefits of beekeeping for rural communities living in poverty include increased levels of income, nutritional and medicinal products to keep or sell, and improved pollination that leads to increased crop yields. Apiculture has been long practiced in Haiti using traditional mud and grass hives. By building on this traditional knowledge, beekeepers in Haiti can both keep cultural practices alive and create new economic opportunities for themselves.

OAS, 2005, "Amazon River Basin", available at https://www.oas.org/dsd/Events/english/Documents/OSDE_8Amazon.pdf

Canadian Jesuits International, "Latin America-Pan-Amazon Initiative" available at <https://www.canadianjesuitsinternational.ca/projects/latin-america-pan-amazon-initiative/>

USAID, n.d., "Haiti Environment", available at <https://www.usaid.gov/haiti/environment>

Liebsch, 2020, available at <https://www.jesuits.org/stories/how-beehives-are-transforming-education-and-the-economy-in-rural-haiti/>

Amulen, et. al., 2017, "The buzz about bees and poverty alleviation: identifying drivers and barriers of beekeeping in sub-Saharan Africa", available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5325527/>

FAO, 2020, "World Bee Day", available at <http://www.fao.org/in-action/action-against-desertification/news-and-multimedia/detail/en/c/1276091/>

Venezuela

Venezuela is a country that is rich in natural resources, including oil, natural gas, iron ore, gold, bauxite, diamonds, and other minerals. However, unsafe and exploitative extractive practices have had damaging effects on the environment. Illegal mining has resulted in damage to the ecosystem through illegal logging in protected areas to make room for mines, roads, and mining camps. In addition, mining has led to an increase in mercury in sources of drinking water and within freshwater fish, affecting the health of people consuming them. Mercury has also negatively affected hydroelectric plants, reducing the ability to generate electricity for Venezuelans. The Boarding School of San Ignacio del Masparro, run by Fe y Alegría Venezuela, houses more than 300 students. The focus of the high school is on forestry and farming. Students have the opportunity to gain hands-on learning experience on the 500-hectare farm where the school is located. There are livestock, forest plantations of teak, mahogany and other species as well as the original forest. Students learn planting techniques as well as how to care for each species, skills they can

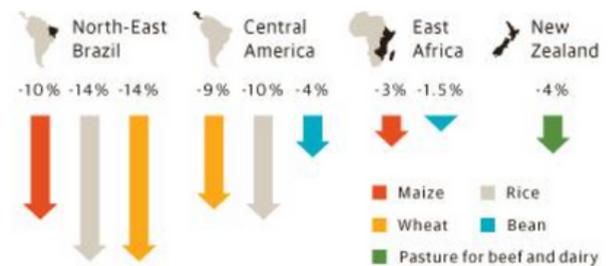
take back home to their communities, many of which are in rural areas in Venezuela. The goals of this program include developing economic productivity and aid in the social transformation of Venezuela, as well as an opportunity to teach skills to help people “live better”.

Figure 5: Climate Change and Farming

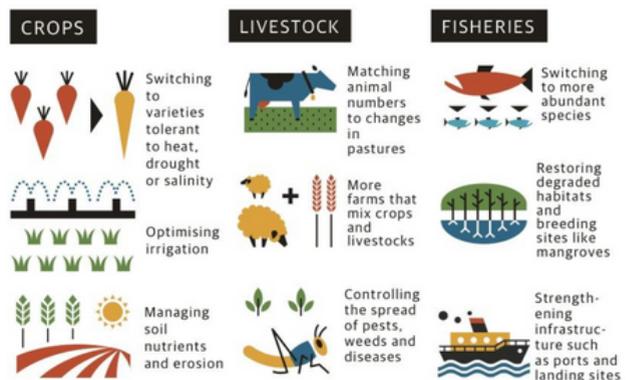
The future of food and farming: 2030s

In the 2030s, climate change will affect food and farming more strongly, particularly small-scale producers in poor countries.

Crop and pasture yields are likely to decline in many places



Adaptation will be key



The Future of Food and Farming: 2030 – a graphic overview of the impact of climate change on agriculture and food security. Adaptation of our crops and farming methods will be key to a sustainable future. Source: Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)

Conclusion

Latin America and the Caribbean has an abundance of biodiversity and natural resources, which are essential for community wellbeing and poverty reduction strategies. Unfortunately, we have seen an increase in unsustainable practices and attitudes of greed over the past years that have led to the destruction or hurt of many of these essential resources.

Addressing climate change is a collective responsibility, and it is vital to center the knowledge and expertise of impacted communities who are already doing this work. Global policies such as the Paris Climate Agreement and COP26 give countries concrete global goals to work towards long-term change, and the Green New Deal offers the U.S. opportunities to transition towards a more sustainable economy. We must also hold companies and corporations accountable for their work regarding sustainability, and push for more comprehensive legislation that targets the root causes of climate change. The work of caring for our common home is illustrated in the work of amazing community organizations throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. With continued support and advocacy, we can transform our relationship with the environment and share a collective responsibility of being stewards of the environment.

