



Fact Sheet:

VENEZUELA: AN OIL COUNTRY GOES GREEN

Venezuela is well known as an oil rich country, however, less is known about the nation’s natural wealth, beyond petroleum. In fact, **Venezuela ranks among the 12 most bio-diverse countries in the world**, being home to over 650 vegetation types, 20,000 plant species, more than 5,700 varieties of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and fish, and more than 110,000 species of insects.

The United Nations considers Venezuela a “mega-diverse country”.¹

While the environment has always been of concern to Venezuelan governments, what has changed with the Chavez administration is the realization that effective environmental policy can only be carried out hand-in-hand with the Venezuelan people. This resulted in various initiatives directly including communities in the creation and implementation of environmental action plans. Since taking office, it was one of President Chavez’s main concerns to establish a clear policy to secure a clean environment for generations to come. In one of his official addresses he made clear that: *“We are an oil producing country and that, obliges us to take even more care of the environment—as a matter of urgency—and to avoid contamination, and reduce contamination in all areas: earth, water and air.”*²

What has been done and what are the achievements of the government’s environmental policies so far?

The 1999 Constitution

For the first time in the constitutional history of the country, a whole Chapter of the Constitution (Chapter IX) is dedicated to the environment,

establishing that: *“it is a fundamental duty of the State, with the active participation of society, to ensure that the populace can live in a pollution-free environment in which air, water, soil, coasts, climate, the ozone layer and living species receive special protection, in accordance with the law.”* (Article 127) Environmental rights are understood as human rights that belong with the right to life,

health and education and sustainable development and are established as a constitutional mandate. In 2006, the **“Comprehensive Law of the Environment”**³ was ratified, in which the various constitutional guarantees find expression. Furthermore, new educational laws in Venezuela include a statutory requirement for environmental education at all levels of schooling.⁴

“We are an oil producing country and that obliges us to take even more care of the environment—as a matter of urgency—and to avoid contamination, and reduce contamination in all areas: earth, water and air.”
President, Hugo Chávez

International Environmental Agreements

Venezuela is a signatory to more than 20 international environmental agreements.⁵ Among those is, for example, the **Kyoto Protocol**, ratified by Venezuela in 2004, which aims at reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Venezuela also participated in the UN Climate Change Conference in Bali, where it declared that current models of economic development are threatening the planet. Furthermore Venezuela cooperates with countries such as Bolivia, Cuba and Nicaragua through the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) on various environmental initiatives. The international accords signed have all been thoroughly implemented and the government has even gone beyond them. This is evidenced, for instance in the fact that **Venezuela is one of the countries with the most protected geographical areas in the world, in which over 67% of national territory is under protection.**⁶



Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the UK and Ireland

However, Venezuela’s commitment to the environment and to complying with international agreements is also demonstrable in its water management policy.

Water Management

Venezuela met the United Nations Millennium Development Goals for water twelve years ahead of time

These goals established that Venezuela, , needed to reduce by half the number of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015. “The achieving of those millennium goals means that over 7 million people now have access to sanitation services and over 6 million to drinking water networks, with coverage of 95% in urban areas and 79% in rural areas...Regarding the collection of waste water, coverage rose from 62% in 1999 to 82% in 2008. . . [and] treatment rose from 9% in 1999 to 27% currently.”⁷

Venezuela met the United Nations Millennium Development Goals for water twelve years ahead of time.

What is the secret of Venezuela’s successful water management policy?

- Include the communities through “Water Community Boards”

Water Community Boards (WCB) are grassroots organizations accountable for the management of water-related issues within a particular community, such as supply shortage, leaking pipes, pollution, sanitation, etc. To date, there are 3000⁸ WCBs in Venezuela, mostly in poor urban neighbourhoods. They provide benefits to more than 400,000 persons.⁹ Today there is an understanding in Venezuela that it is impossible to solve water problems without community participation.

- Water as a fundamental human right, as foreseen in the 1999 Constitution

Water in Venezuela is celebrated as a human right. It is a fundamental component of ecosystems that **may not be privatised since it is a non-negotiable human right.** Therefore the conservation of water takes

priority over economic interests. These principles found expression in the “**Water Legislation**” as ratified in 2006.¹⁰

- National Parks to preserve water reserves

Venezuela has over 1,000 rivers, 2,500 lagoons and two important lakes. This places Venezuela among the top 15 countries with fresh water reserves on the planet. One strategy to protect water basins has been the creation of National Parks. Today, 95 % of the water consumed in the country comes from 18 national parks. This emphasis is recognised by the international community and Venezuela is seen as a model of water management and conservation.¹¹

Climate Change

Venezuela, as any other country on this planet, has felt the effects of climate change, although only about 0.48 % of all greenhouse gas emissions worldwide are produced by Venezuela.¹² Venezuela has repeatedly pointed out that developing countries are to a lesser extent responsible for climate change than industrialised nations and that climate change can only be successfully tackled if industrialised countries also demonstrate their serious commitment to do so. Despite the fact that Venezuela is clearly not a major contributor to climate change, it has taken serious steps to prevent further deterioration of our climate:

a. Promote renewable energies

- Hydroelectricity

The country’s water abundance offers a great potential for hydroelectricity, particularly in the southern parts of the country, where the Caroní River alone has the potential to produce 26,000 megawatts of power, equivalent to 800,000 barrels of oil a day. In fact, ¹³ **more than 70% of electricity generated in Venezuela comes from hydroelectric power.**¹⁴



Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the UK and Ireland

- Solar and wind power

Various changes have been introduced in Venezuela to replace less environmental friendly energy installations with wind and solar power. For example, the government is currently working on a solar-panel project in the Guajira, a desert zone in the northern part of Venezuela. The new solar electric plant should benefit indigenous communities who inhabit this area.¹⁵ President Chávez also mentioned plans to open a **solar energy research centre**. Furthermore, with the help of the Vietnamese government, solar-powered street lighting has been installed in central Caracas.¹⁶ In July this year, the first **hybrid energy system**, which draws on three different energy sources, wind, solar and diesel, was introduced in the department Falcon in the very northern part of Venezuela. In this same region, the government is also working on a “Wind Power Park”.¹⁷

b. Energy Mission

Mission Energy is a government-sponsored program, which aims at promoting energy efficiency. This initiative has proven very successful so far:

- 68 million incandescent light bulbs were replaced with energy-efficient ones. Francis Izquierdo, a single mother in Caracas, confirmed that her energy bill is about half what it was before the bulbs were replaced in her barrio.¹⁸ The switch to energy-efficient bulbs should help reduce the country’s carbon output. In fact, in 2007 the president banned the opening of new coal mines in the Zulia state and an expansion of the Guasare and Paso Diablo mines was rejected. Other mining projects threatening to negatively affect indigenous communities or local ecosystems have been shelved by the Ministry of Popular Power for the Environment.¹⁹
- 806 photovoltaic systems, generating energy in schools, clinics, cafeterias and security

"Venezuela is one of the countries that least contaminates the environment, but nevertheless we want to set an example and be in the vanguard,"
President Hugo Chávez

stations in isolated, frontier and indigenous areas have been installed.

c. Tree Mission

The “Tree Mission” was launched in June 2006 and aims at reversing deforestation by protecting river basins and promoting the sustainable use of forests. The following results have been achieved so far:²⁰

- Over 18,322 hectares of land have been reforested between 2006 and 2008.
- 33 million forest and fruit plants have been cultivated.
- The rate of forest fires has been reduced by 34 % by 2007.

d. Transport

- Expanding Electric Railway Systems:

Venezuela has initiated one of the most ambitious railroad projects in Latin America, which upon its completion in 2030 will connect 24 Venezuelan departments by rail, by means of 13,555 kilometres of railroads.

Individual routes are planned to be inaugurated earlier, such as, for example, the line Puerto Cabello - La Encrucijada, which will be open by 2012. It is projected that this transport system will carry an average of 11 million passengers per year, as from 2030 onwards. Important however is the fact that it will run on electric energy, which in the case of Venezuela

will be generated to a large extent from hydroelectric power, and will therefore not produce any greenhouse gas emissions.²¹

- Natural Gas Powered Cars: According to a resolution passed by the National Assembly in 2008, all cars produced and sold in Venezuela need to be equipped with dual natural gas and petrol powered internal combustion engines, as from April of the current year. This measure is yet another step to “promote the rational use of liquid fuels on the domestic market” and to reduce pollution.²²



Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the UK and Ireland

Some More Innovative Projects

- **“Petrocasas”**: New programmes, carried out hand-in-hand with the community, creating eco-friendly housing that use building materials derived from waste generated from oil production. The aim is to build 60,000 “petrocasas” (petrol houses) by 2010, the first of which were already inaugurated last year.²³
- **Ecological Mobile Phones**: Movilnet, the mobile phone division of Venezuela’s national telephone and communications company, CANTV, released the country’s *first mobile phone made from recycled plastic bottles* and equipped with a solar energy charger. This new model will help reduce energy consumption and prevent environmental damage caused by discarded phones. Furthermore, Jaqueline Faria, the President of Movilnet, pointed out that “This mobile phone was manufactured using 20% less energy than any other”.²⁴

PDVSA and the Environment

Venezuela’s national oil company, PDVSA, has actively participated in Venezuela’s “Green Revolution”. PDVSA has implemented an environmentally-friendly plan over the past few years which includes recovering green areas, decontaminating rivers, lakes and land, and reducing emissions. In fact, during a Saturday meeting with local journalists in 2007, President Chávez announced: “*You should all know that the petrol produced in Venezuela is now ‘green’ petrole, we don’t use lead anymore.*”²⁵

Conclusion

This fact-sheet has clearly shown that an oil country *can* go green. Despite the fact that Venezuela is a major producer of oil, it has repeatedly called for the use of renewable energies, inside and outside Venezuela, and has set an example in this regard. But Venezuela has gone much further than that, as it has taken lead roles in water management, the reduction of energy

consumption, the fight against climate change, the signing and implementing of international environmental agreements, and so forth. The Chávez government has clearly shown its commitment to the environment and President Chávez himself made his position clear in a recent interview by saying: “*Venezuela is the country that least contaminates the environment, but nevertheless we want to set an example and be in the vanguard.*”²⁶

¹ “Environmental and Social Justice in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela”, July 22, 2008,

<http://www.embavenez-us.org/factsheet/environmentalsocialjustice2.pdf>, retrieved July 30, 2009.

² <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/2244>

³ Ley Organica del Ambiente, http://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_dbquery&Itemid=182&task=ExecuteQuery&qid=7&leyes_id=20491

⁴ Ley Organica de Educacion, http://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/index2.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=1855&Itemid=124

⁵ http://www.minamb.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=64&Itemid=74

⁶ “Environmental and Social Justice in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela”, July 22, 2008,

<http://www.embavenez-us.org/factsheet/environmentalsocialjustice2.pdf>,

⁷ Venezuelan Embassy Washington DC,

<http://www.embavenez-us.org/factsheet/waterinthebrv.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.embavenez-us.org/factsheet/fswatermanagement.pdf>

⁹ http://www.minci.gob.ve/reportajes/2/12876/venezuela-celebra_eldia.html

¹⁰ Ley de Aguas, http://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_dbquery&Itemid=182&task=ExecuteQuery&qid=7&leyes_id=20287

¹¹ <http://www.embavenez-us.org/factsheet/waterinthebrv.pdf>

¹² <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/1210>

¹³ <http://www.embavenez-us.org/factsheet/fswatermanagement.pdf>

¹⁴ “Environmental and Social Justice in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela”, July 22, 2008,



Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the UK and Ireland

<http://www.embavenez->

[us.org/factsheet/environmentsocialjustice2.pdf](http://www.embavenez-us.org/factsheet/environmentsocialjustice2.pdf),

¹⁵ <http://www.aporrea.org/tecno/n139469.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.politicalaffairs.net/article/view/4497/1/223/>

¹⁷ <http://www.aporrea.org/tecno/n139469.html>

¹⁸ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp->

[dyn/content/article/2007/02/04/AR2007020400601.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/04/AR2007020400601.html)

¹⁹ <http://www.rethinkvenezuela.com/downloads/Venezuela>

[%20and%20the%20Environment.htm](http://www.rethinkvenezuela.com/downloads/Venezuela%20and%20the%20Environment.htm)

²⁰ “Environmental and Social Justice in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela”, July 22, 2008,

<http://www.embavenez->

[us.org/factsheet/environmentsocialjustice2.pdf](http://www.embavenez-us.org/factsheet/environmentsocialjustice2.pdf),

²¹ Alo Presidente,

<http://alopresidente.gob.ve/reportajes/sistema-socialista-ferroviario-la-distancias-se-acortan-cada-vez-mas.html>

²² <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/4372>

²³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPOCVMNNSbQ>

²⁴ <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/4679>

²⁵ <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/2244>

²⁶ <http://www.rethinkvenezuela.com/downloads/Venezuela>

[%20and%20the%20Environment.htm](http://www.rethinkvenezuela.com/downloads/Venezuela%20and%20the%20Environment.htm)