

## Venezuela green electricity

While poverty rates continue to rise in Venezuela, the country regularly experiences nationwide electricity blackouts. However, utilizing renewable energy in Venezuela would alleviate rising poverty rates in the country by creating job opportunities and reducing the presence of negative health impacts due to pollution. It would also ease the energy burden on the Guri dam, likely reducing the number of national electricity blackouts.

Nirida Sanchez, a resident of Machiques de Perij? in the state of Zulia, told Jeanfreddy Guti?rrez, a reporter for Dialogo Chino, that the blackouts have made her "a slave, because at any time when there is a downturn [she] has to run out and turn everything off so that [she doesn't] damage another appliance." Sanchez also told Guti?rrez that the blackouts have damaged both her microwave and her washing machine.

To counteract this heavy reliance on hydroelectric power -- an energy source that, despite being renewable, can still have negative environmental and social consequences -- the government began a push for a transition to other kinds of renewable energy in Venezuela roughly two decades ago. In the early 2000s, the government of former President Hugo Ch?vez established a program called "Sembrando Luz," with the intention of using "micro-networks of hybrid solar-wind systems" to harness the renewable energy potential of Venezuela's northwestern states.

However, the government abandoned the renewable energy projects following the fall in oil prices in 2008 and 2014. As a result, Venezuela renewed its dependence on the Guri dam for electricity and abandoned its hopes for a renewable energy future. That is until a 2016 report by the Scientific Institute Francisco de Miranda emphasized the "technical possibilities and the low cost of photovoltaic energy in the country."

Despite a phase of fits and starts, harnessing electricity via solar panels and storing it in batteries is a practice that is picking up speed in Venezuela. Engineers familiar with the issue emphasize that a need exists for state involvement and investment in the technology, but, despite that financial hiccup, moving the Venezuelan power grid towards a reliance on photovoltaic power would be a definite boon to citizens like Nirida Sanchez.

To begin with, renewable energy sources like solar panels and wind turbines produce little to no global warming emissions. They also lead to little to no air pollution. As the Union of Concerned Scientists clarifies, the air and water pollution that coal and natural gas plants emit has a link to breathing problems, neurological damage, heart attacks, cancer, premature death and a host of other serious problems. These health impacts make it more difficult for impoverished citizens to survive their harsh living conditions.

There are economic benefits to a transition to renewable energy sources as well. The Union of Concerned Scientists states that "on average, more jobs are created for each unit of electricity generated from renewable sources than from fossil fuels." This is because the renewable energy industry, in comparison with the



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fossil fuel industry, is relatively labor-intensive rather than capital-intensive. That means cleaner air, more jobs and less poverty -- all thanks to renewable energy sources like solar panels and wind farms.

For a country like Venezuela, which was suffering from economic and health crises even before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the creation of new jobs is vital to economic recovery. Although some experts suggest that the economic troubles in Venezuela, and the resulting rising poverty rates, are due to hyperinflation, the creation of additional jobs in the renewable energy sector would undoubtedly help ameliorate rising poverty rates in the country.

It will not be easy to transition to renewable energy in Venezuela, but it will help alleviate rising poverty rates in the country by creating job opportunities and reducing the presence of negative health impacts associated with pollution. Although the Venezuelan government at this time is not working to implement any new renewable energy projects, Venezuelan scientists and NGOs like the Committee of People Affected by Power Outages, an NGO that monitors the impacts of the Venezuelan electricity crisis, continue to push for renewable energy in Venezuela.

By fighting for a renewable future, Venezuelan citizens and scientists are nudging their government in a healthier and safer direction. However, it requires funding and international support from countries like the United States or organizations like the United Nations in order to reach full realization.

Renewables are an increasingly important source of energy as countries seek to reduce their CO2 emissions and dependence on imported fossil fuels. Renewables are mainly used to generate electricity, though renewable technologies can also be used for heating in homes and buildings. Renewable biofuels are also an emerging technology solution to decarbonise parts of the transport sector.

Note that modern renewables excludes traditional uses of biomass, such as burning collected wood, agricultural byproducts or dung for cooking or heating. This has serious negative consequences on health and the environment, including contributing to millions of deaths annually from air pollution, and is targeted for phase-out in international development and climate goals and in the IEA's Net Zero scenario.

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