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## Drought is scorching Mexico. Quinones Peña (sociologist): "There are clear human, political, social, urban and economic responsibilities"

It hasn't rained for months in a country already afflicted by the pandemic and facing severe economic and social crisis. Mexico is experiencing one of its most intense droughts in decades. The National Water Commission (CONAGUA) estimates that the drought affects 84% of the national territory and 1,295 municipalities, especially in the north and centre of the country, as well as along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, in Veracruz. It is a long-standing problem, but this year it hit historically low levels (record-lows occurred in 1996 and 2011), *caused by climate change and poor water management*. According to the CONAGUA Climate Report, "on March 31, several Mexican States recorded severe to extreme drought (G2 to G3) in over 70% of their territories: Sinaloa (99.9%), Durango (97.7%), Michoacán (90.2%), Queretaro (85.9%), Colima (82.3%), Sonora (79.3%) and Zacatecas (71.5%).” Furthermore, "from January 1 to April 8 2021, 29 States recorded 3,376 forest fires, covering an area of 98,839 hectares.”



Immagine non disponibile

The northwest, the north, the areas bordering with the United States (Chihuahua and Coahuila), the centre (Guanajuato and Queretaro), as well as western parts of the Country, in Veracruz, are experiencing the worst situations," Juan Pablo Quinones Peña, Sociologist and Regional Studies Professor at the José María Luis Mora Research Institute, told SIR from Mexico City where he is based. "In Veracruz, the sea water has dried up along some of the lower, swampy coastlines, resulting in fish die-offs. The lack of precipitation, due to the so-called La Niña phenomenon, caused by cooler-than-normal subsurface waters in the tropical Pacific in the early months of the year, is aggravated by declining water levels in reservoirs, many of which are located in Mexico and frequently serve as freshwater "reservoirs" for agricultural purposes. **Artificial lakes are drying up.** "Drought is a common phenomenon and has been extensively studied since the 1940s", pointed out Professor Quinones, who has been conducting research into water management in Mexico since 2010. "Compared to the norm, however, drought has increased by 30-40%, albeit unevenly across the country. But we are now seeing a steady water level decline in artificial lakes, which are important not only for irrigation, but also to respond to frequent wildfires. Artificial lakes are declining in water flow by an average of 20%. In Mexico there are 6,000 dams, many of which are very old. Some of the largest dams, in the north of the country, registered a 25% drop in their capacity levels. *This situation is affecting crop production at a difficult time for the economy, not least because of COVID-19.* "Many

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small farmers in the northeastern States had already lost 3% of their production last year, with an additional 6% drop this year." While drought, as previously mentioned, has been a recurring phenomenon for decades, affecting various areas in Mexico, climate change and global warming are undoubtedly playing a key role in exacerbating the phenomenon. *"The temperature increase is evident, four seasons have basically been reduced to two."* Thus, the long dry season is now followed by a succession of tropical storms in the last months of the year, the effects of which are sadly known. **Human responsibilities.** Even leaving aside the large-scale impact of climate change, according to the expert *There are clear human, political, social, urban and economic responsibilities.* "First of all, land degradation is frequently an arena for conflict and is controlled by criminal syndicates. This prevents consistent environmental protection. Secondly, water quality is declining rapidly and is frequently polluted. Growing urbanisation is also contributing to this situation: supplying water to a metropolis with over 20 million inhabitants, such as Mexico City is a major problem. Poor drinking water management is prevalent in the north of the country, while dispersion of this resource is also caused by its use either for invasive monocultures or for certain industrial sectors, such as beer and soft drinks, registering strong growth in Mexico. In short, Quinones concludes, "it can be said that the ongoing drought has multiple causes: climate change, a way of life and economic practices that fail to safeguard environmental resources, political decisions and poor infrastructure management." Nevertheless, there is hope for a trend reversal: "The new water management Act is in the process of parliamentary approval. *Several Land and Water Conservation movements are being formed across the country.*" *The Church is also involved in this process.* In fact, the Mexican chapter of REMAM, the Mesoamerican Ecological Ecclesial Network, was set up a few weeks ago, following the lead of the Pan-American Ecclesial Network ( REPAM). *Mexico's REMAM will be "a clear and courageous voice, drawing on the Gospel", for environmental protection and above all for defending impoverished peoples, suffering from the damage wrought on the common home, emphasised during the presentation of the initiative.* REMAM will coordinate initiatives for documenting threats to environmental protection, share experiences and best practices; it will create databases and fact-finding resources. Such proposals are intended to support environmental leaders engaged in defending livelihoods and land in the face of growing threats such as illegal dumping of toxic waste, large-scale mining and hydroelectric development plans, land grabbing for the planting of monocultures, poor access to drinking water, coastal pollution and socio-environmental conflicts. (\*) *journalist, "La vita del popolo"*

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