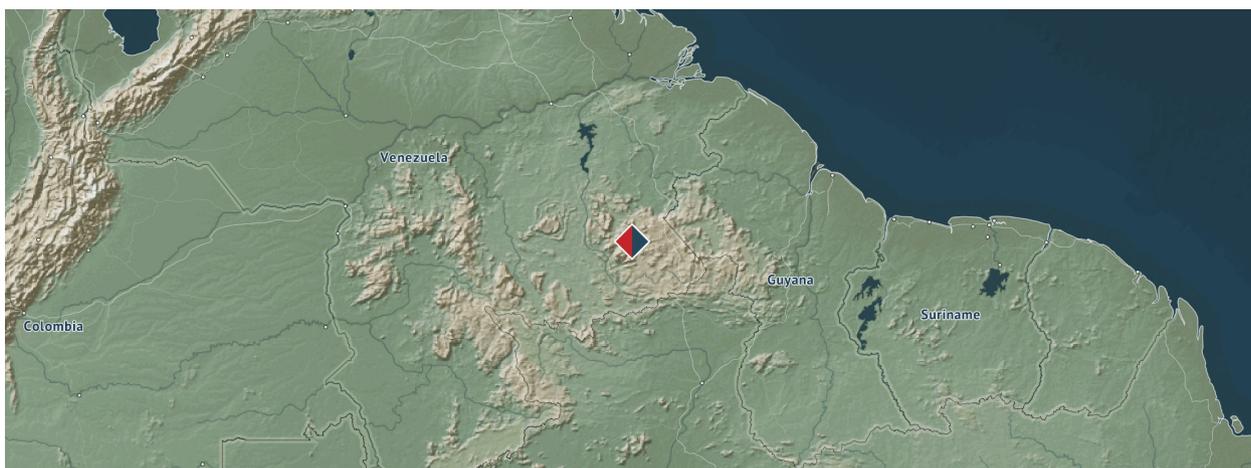




Conflict Factsheet

### Conflict over National Park Management, Venezuela

Type of conflict <b>Main</b>	Intensity <b>1</b>
Conflict Locality <b>South America</b>	Time <b>1944 –ongoing</b>
Countries <b>Venezuela</b>	Resources <b>Biodiversity, Forests, Ecosystem Stability</b>



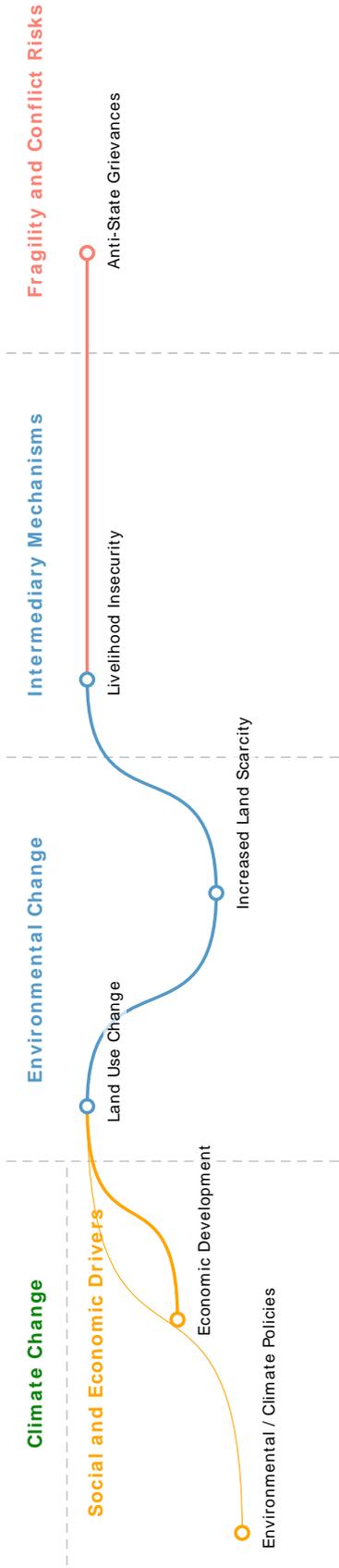
Unintended effects of climate policies

### Conflict Summary

Canaima National Park is located in southeastern Venezuela, near the border with Brazil and Guyana, and inside the ancestral territory of the Pemon Indigenous Peoples. Since the protected area was established, the Pemon have been in conflict with environmental authorities over land use and resource management in the area. Faced with a western vision of land management, the Pemon are fighting for their territorial recognition and self-determination.



### Conceptual Model



### Context Factors



Biodiversity, Forests, Ecosystem Stability



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## Conflict History

### Canaima National Park

Canaima National Park is located in southeastern Venezuela, near the border with Brazil and Guyana and protecting the northwestern portion of the Guyana Shield, an ancient geological formation shared with Brazil, the Guyanas and Colombia. This Park was created in 1962 with an initial area of 10,000 km<sup>2</sup>, which was extended to 30,000 km<sup>2</sup> in 1975 to protect its watershed functions ([Parks Watch, 2004](#)). The Guri Dam, located 300km downstream from the Park's northwestern border, is one of the largest hydroelectric dams in the world and generates the majority of Venezuela's electricity ([World Energy Council, 2016](#)). The best-known landscape components of the Park are the tepuyes, very old mountains in the form of a plateau, receiving their name from the indigenous word tüpü. Its vegetation is markedly divided between a forest-savannah mosaic in the Eastern Sector known as the Gran Savana, and an evergreen forest in the Western Sector. In recognition of its extraordinary landscapes and geological and biological values, in 1994 the Park was registered on the UNESCO list of Natural World Heritage of Sites ([Parks Watch, 2004](#)).

### The Pemon Peoples

In the park, there is tension over various conflicting and heterogeneous demands largely because the protected area was established over the Pemon Peoples' ancestral territory, with an estimated population of 18,000, some of which still maintain their traditional system of scattered nuclear family settlements. Their lifestyle is based largely on traditional activities: agriculture, fishing, hunting and gathering, although there is more and more work in tourism and associated activities such as handcrafts, and increasingly, younger generations occupy public positions ([Rodríguez & Robledo, 2012](#)).

### Conflictual relationship between the Pemon and the environmental managers of the Parc

Despite the strong cultural bonds that the Pemon have with their land, their relationship with the National Park has not been easy. The very name of the Park symbolizes a long history of antagonism between the Pemon and the environmental managers of this. "Canaima" in Pemon means "evil spirit", referring to a person who kills people using witchcraft. The name the Pemon would advocate would have been "Makunaimö National Park", or "Makunaimö Kowamüpö Dapon", which means "the Land of Makunaimö" (the Pemon supreme cultural hero). Although the Park's designation has helped protect this part of the ancestral Pemon territory, they view the Park largely as a threat to their existence. This is a result of a style of environmental management and development planning in the southern part of the country, which has systematically excluded the area's cultural value for the Pemon and their knowledge and notions of authority and territorial property ([Rodríguez & Robledo, 2012](#)).

### Use of fire



As a result conflict is present in many different dimensions of protected area management. On the one hand, there is a long-standing conflict over land use, fundamentally because of the use of fire in conucos (slash and burn) agriculture and burning of the savanna; both indigenous practices considered by environmental managers as a threat to the watershed conservation functions the Park. Despite a variety of strategies developed by the government to change or eliminate the use of fire in agriculture and the savannahs (repression in the 1970s, an environmental education program, new farming techniques, and a fire control program), many Pemon, especially the elders and those living in more isolated communities, have continued using fire extensively. In contrast, younger Pemon have become gradually more critical of using fire and, as a result, inter-generational tensions are increasingly common on this topic.

### Tourism

Tourism has also generated major confrontations between the Pemon and the Government, fundamentally because of pressures by external tourism companies to set up in the area. However, by applying diverse strategies, the Pemon have managed to maintain their right to provide tourism services in the Park, especially in the Gran Savana; yet, to date, conflicts over tourism management still continue (Rodríguez & Robledo, 2012).

### Threatened territorial property

There have also been conflicts over projects of strategic interest for the Venezuelan Government, such as the building a high-voltage power line to export electricity to Brazil (1997-2000), and the installation of a satellite sub-base (2007). Although the commitment to recognizing territorial property rights to the Pemon (stated in the 1999 National Constitution) was key in signing an agreement for both projects, to date no territorial demarcation as such has begun. Therefore, the Pemon remain actively in conflict with the Government for their territorial rights (Rodríguez & Robledo, 2012).

### Rapid cultural change

Added to these diverse conflicts, the Pemon are confronted with a process of rapid cultural change due to various educational and national integration policies implemented systematically since 1940, which is threatening their cultural integrity and desire for self-determination. Despite their resistance and struggle for cultural recognition, the Pemon have increasingly been experiencing a feeling of disorientation about who they want to be in the future and how they would like to live as a people. This situation has put them at great disadvantage and vulnerability in dialogues about development and territorial management with other stakeholders on their land (Rodríguez & Robledo, 2012).



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## Resolution Efforts

### Pemon Life Plan

To cope with this context of conflict and rapid cultural change, the Pemon decided to start constructing their own “Life Plan” as the ideological, spiritual and philosophical foundation to visualize and define a desired future, based on reconstructing their cultural identity. An imperative to move forward in constructing a Pemon Life Plan has been developing capacities and participatory methodologies for community analysis and planning (Rodríguez & Robledo, 2012).

### External actors collaboration

For this purpose, they have been supported by a series of collaborations with external actors who have incorporated the Life Plan agenda within their research and management projects and initiatives, thereby generating opportunities for the articulation of traditional and scientific knowledge. In 2001, the Ministry of Education and Sports, the Indigenous Federation of Bolivar State (FIEB), Econatura and The Nature Conservancy, carried out a project titled “Evaluating Socio-Economic and Environmental Pemon Public Policies” which generated an opportunity for dialogue about how to strengthen the formulation of public policies from the perspective of the Pemon themselves. The Pemon demanded a clearer connection with their life Plan Agenda (Rodríguez & Robledo, 2012).

### Evolution of the Pemon's position

In 2010, a book was published that was written by the indigenous inhabitants themselves, entitled “The History of the Pemon of Kumarakapay”. The internal reflection had impacts on the conflicts described above. It fostered discussions among the Pemon about traditional use of fire, revaluing their ancestral lore underpinning this practice. Also, the Pemon of Kumarakapay set the vision of becoming a tourist community and since then have been training more actively in this activity. They are also trying to find agroecological alternatives to cultivate the savannah; however, despite these achievements, so far no significant change has been seen in the government's approach to environmental management (Rodríguez & Robledo, 2012).



## Intensities & Influences



### INTENSITIES

International / Geopolitical Intensity



Human Suffering



### INFLUENCES

Environmental Influences



Societal Influences



Violent Conflict

No



Salience with nation

National



Mass displacement

None



Cross Border Mass Displacement

No



## Resolution Success

Reduction in geographical scope

There has been no reduction in geographical scope.



Increased capacity to address grievance in the future

There is no increased capacity to address grievances in the future.



Grievance Resolution

Grievances have been partially addressed.



Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity

Decrease in conflict intensity at least partially the result of conflict resolution strategies.





## Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

### Social inclusion & empowerment

2

In 2001, the Ministry of Education and Sports, the Indigenous Federation of Bolivar State (FIEB), Econatura and The Nature Conservancy, carried out a project titled "Evaluating Socio-Economic and Environmental Pemon Public Policies". The project seeks to generate opportunities for dialogue about how to strengthen the formulation of public policies from the perspective of the Pemon people.

### Promoting social change

3

The Pemon people have set out to reconstruct their cultural identity, and clarify their vision for land use and desired future by constructing their own "Pemon Life Plan". As a part of this endeavor, they have been developing their capacities and participatory methodologies for community analysis and planning.

## Resources and Materials

### References with URL

[Rodríguez, I. & Robledo, J. \(2012\). Transforming Socio-Environmental Conflicts by Building Inter-cultural Relations: examples from Venezuela and Argentina, in: Fundación Futuro Latinoamericano \(FFLA\): Good Practices in Transforming Socio-Environmental Conflicts in Latin America. In V. Frank \(Eds\), Good Practices in Transforming Environmental Conflicts \(pp.38-53\). Fundacion Futuro Latinoamericano.](#)

[World Energy Council \(2016\). Venezuela \[accessed 2016-02-16\]](#)

[Parks Watch \(2004\). Park Profile – Venezuela Canaima National Park](#)

Further information

<https://factbook.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/conflict-over-national-park-management-venezuela>