

# CHALLENGES FOR THE CONSERVATION OF PANTEPUI

In the context of economic, social, political, environmental and climatic crises that deeply impact life in Venezuela, and the rest of the countries of the Guiana Shield region (Colombia, Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana and Brazil), it is worth asking ourselves: is it possible the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the Guiana Shield? Who is interested in the conservation of Pantepui?

A retrospective analysis of the conservation efforts of the high mountains of the Guiana Shield, between 1200 to 3000 meters of elevation (Pantepui), concludes that the actions of governments, institutions and communities that manage natural resources have been insufficient (Bevilacqua, Señaris and Huber, 2019). This is due in part to the social imaginary that considers the remote, isolated and difficult-to-access condition of the tepuyan peaks archipelago a guarantee for its conservation; and, on the other hand, to the emergence of progressive policies and populist regional governments that promote the intensive use of natural resources, with the premise of redistributing income for social well-being.

The Guiana Shield is one of the oldest geological formations in the world whose rocky outcrops in mountain ranges, immersed in the Amazon region and the Orinoquia, cover 13% of the South American continent, house 25% of the world's tropical forests and contribute 15 % of the planet's fresh waters. Pantepui conservation efforts began in 1960 with the creation of the Talferberg Nature Reserve in Suriname and the Canaima National Park in Venezuela. Since then, the objectives of creating and managing the protected areas of the Guiana Shield (around 35) reflect the evolution in the global conceptual frameworks of conservation: landscapes, sites with high biodiversity and endemism, for sustainable development and climate mitigation. However, despite the interdependence between the social, economic and environmental agendas, recognized at the highest level by the United Nations Organization in the Sustainable Development Goals, the set of nations still fails to translate this awareness and commitment into action and change. Specially in Latin America, where the paradigm of human development still associated with economic growth, and the thesis of increases sustained in the extraction of minerals, hydrocarbons, and various extensive crops as a mechanism

to finance social programs, reverse inequalities, promote inclusion and social mobility, recover infrastructure, and build a new critical consciousness to capitalism.

In this context, protected areas emerge as highly vulnerable geographic spaces, and their limits become more flexible and more permeable in the face of the ideological discourse that the social goal justifies the means and economic growth based on the appropriation of nature. New socioeconomic asymmetries affect local populations and other actors linked to protected areas, mediated by the absence of individual capacities to convert rights into real freedoms and achieve what people value and aspire to. The absence of freedom to maintain lifestyle and culture, linked to the territory and access to natural resources, is a permanent source of conflict in environmental management and constitutes a vital force that perpetuates the perverse cycle of poverty-environmental crisis-poverty in the region; driven by the growing impact of climate change.

The conservation of Pantepui, and the protected areas that contain it, requires courage, coherence, perseverance, resilience and, above all, long-term continuity of actions based on universal values of peace, freedom, human rights and inclusion. The key challenge is to increase awareness of the importance of the heritage of Pantepui, and boost cross-border collaboration to develop community, academic, and technical-professional capacities in transdisciplinary, interculturality, defense of nature, and peace building; from action research and long-term support of the academy and the international community of donors.

MARIAPIA BEVILACQUA

Presidente de la Asociación Venezolana para la Conservación de Áreas Naturales (ACOANA). Venezuela

## Reference

Bevilacqua M, Señaris C, Huber O (2019) Conservation of Pantepui: between complex emergency and climate change. En Rull V, Vegas-Vilarrúbia T, Huber O, Señaris C (2019) *Biodiversity of Pantepui. The pristine "Lost World" of the Neotropical Guiana Highlands*. Elsevier-Academic Press. Londres, RU. pp. 389-402.