Lithium mining in Argentina: an overview of its main impacts

Pía Marchegiani
Fundación Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (FARN)/FLACSO-Argentina
Oeko-Institut Annual Conference
22nd June 2022
Resources in the lithium triangle: 65% Argentina is 4th world producer (after Australia, Chile, China); 29.5% world production by 2020.

Salinas Grandes: resistance and mobilization against lithium; Kachi Yupi (community protocol on FPIC)+ litigation

Olaroz Cauchari: FPIC with flaws, environmental concerns
Strategies and policies in Argentina

Open participation of transnational capital in lithium’s extraction

• Joint ventures between mining, provincial companies and automobile companies
• Great expectation about producing ion-lithium batteries
• Federal state: provinces own the nat. resources (approve, control projects)
• High potential for environmental conflicts (lack of participation and risks of impact on water sources due to flawed environmental assessments)

Only of the 3 countries in which lithium can be licensed; 40+ projects in different phases; 2 in operation (1997 and 2014); 2 in construction; 23 in advanced exploration
Insufficient evaluation of environmental impacts and ability to prevent irreversible damages

- Endorreic water-shed 3000+ m.o.s.l.;
- Andean wetlands
- Dry climate with water scarcity throughout the year

• Complex information and gaps in the analysis of how this fragile ecosystems work; inadequate assessment of their value in decision making process (lack of environmental strategic and accumulative impact assessments)
Biodiversity rich areas are not protected or respected in mining decision-making. Including their hability to absorb CO2 and release oxygen!!
Reconfiguration of territories; displacement and invisibilization of ways of relating with nature and creation of a new territoriality linked to the global (Goebel, 2013)
Mobilization and protests in the lack of participatory channels and lack of/or deficient FPIC implementation
Some reflections and points for further discussion:

- **Economic:** how to avoid reinforcing the web of interrelated inequalities and asymmetries at the various levels (Global North and South), within the region, and with communities.

- **Economic:** How to devise a responsible supply chains that seek to minimize extreme extraction and encourage a move to less material exchanges (consumerism, work on demand side).

- **Social/cultural:** how to avoid breaking or putting at risk the complex set of social and reciprocal relationships in the territories; how to genuinely grant community participation in the local decision-making processes and benefits.

- **Environmental:** how to minimize impacts at a local level; improve decision making and technical capacities of authorities to authorize and control de projects.
Some reflections and points for further discussion:

• Systemic approach: coordinate efforts to tackle consumerism involving reducing demand for transition minerals (programmed obsolescence re-use, recycling) and devising an energy transition that involves a paradigm shift (less material demand), not just an energy transition for the global north.

• Practical approach: enforce local and national capacities to engage in lithium discussions including the multiple dimensions involved in lithium: technological, environmental, economic, social. Coordinate efforts to leverage the National and provincial States for a strong social and environmental commitment (lithium in a debt crises)
  – FPIC and environmental impacts assessments.
  – What happens with non-European companies and standards?
Thank you!!
Questions/Further comments: pmarchegiani@farn.org.ar