

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICTS IN THE LITHIUM EXPLORATION PROCESS BY THE FALCHANI PROJECT: A VIEW FROM LOCAL ACTORS

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SUMMARY

Mining is an important economic activity for the country, but at the same time it generates socio-environmental impacts by reconfiguring the local landscape, labor and community relations. The purpose of the research was to analyze the social responsibility, conflict management in the lithium exploration process by the Falchani project in Corani - Carabaya, it was framed under the quantitative, non-experimental and descriptive approach. The observation unit was made up of local actors and authorities. We worked with a sample of 59 heads of household. The information was collected through a four-section questionnaire. The information processing was carried out in the SPSS software. The results show that the company has deficient channels and forms of communication to publicize social responsibility plans, generating uncertainty, mistrust and currents of negative opinion. It also faces serious latent socio-environmental challenges such as pollution, loss of biodiversity and risks to public health that could intensify social conflicts and affect governance.

Keywords: Social responsibility, socio-environmental conflict, lithium exploitation, Falchani project,

INTRODUCTION

Lithium has been dubbed the "new white gold" due to its fundamental role in the manufacture of batteries for electric vehicles, which has increased its global demand (León *et al.*, 2020; Maisel *et al.*, 2023; Romero *et al.*, 2023). This scenario has driven lithium prospecting and exploitation projects in several countries, including Peru, whose participation has increased since its inclusion in the world ranking in 2019 with 130,000 tons, to reach one million tons in 2024 (U.S. Geological Survey, 2024). However, mining expansion brings with it questions about its impact on different dimensions (De la Puente *et al.*, 2023; Ramos, 2023).

The Falchani mining project, located in the province of Carabaya, Puno, represents a strategic opportunity for Peru due to its important lithium deposit, which has reserves of up to 9.5 million tons of Lithium Carbonate Equivalent (LCE). This resource, essential for the transition to electromobility and the battery industry, could position Peru as one of the world's leading producers of lithium by 2027. In fact, production is expected to reach 100 thousand tons per year by 2032, and the country will have a battery-grade lithium refinery, increasing its participation in the global value chain (León *et al.*, 2020; Maisel *et al.*, 2023; Quinde, 2023).

In this context, the study analyzes corporate social responsibility, management of socio-environmental conflicts and community dynamics in the lithium exploration process by the Falchani project in the Corani – Carabaya district from the perspective of local actors.

Mining and Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is presented as an essential mechanism for mining companies to establish effective relationships with the communities where they operate, being a key factor in fostering sustainable links, especially in critical resource projects such as lithium in Corani. CSR seeks to balance economic interests with social and environmental well-being, as emphasized by the UN (2015), noting that its adoption is crucial to promote solid alliances that reduce social tensions and promote governance. According to the European Commission (2018), the implementation of CSR should focus on creating long-term value through transparent dialogue, building trust and legitimacy in the affected population. In addition, the World Bank (2020) highlights the importance of managing social and environmental risks for the success of mining projects, suggesting that the participatory approach not only provides social license, but also generates benefits for the parties involved. Finally, the ILO (2019) points out that CSR policies must include respect for labor rights and the creation of local employment, contributing to the development of skills and a sustainable environment in communities, which in turn strengthens the relationships of mining companies and ensures the sustainability of their operations.

According to Sarmiento (2011), CSR is understood as the ability of a company to respond to the effects of its actions on stakeholders, which implies recognizing the expectations and concerns of communities. In the mining sector, where activities can have a significant impact on the environment and on the community dynamics of the inhabitants, companies must prioritize sustainable development and maximize profitability. According to the definition of the Brundtland Commission (1987), this is done to ensure social license and sustainability in relationships. In this regard, Freeman (2011) points out that companies can improve their image by increasing the trust and credibility of stakeholders, as suggested by Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), collaboration between the private sector, the State and civil society is revealed as a prevailing need to achieve a tangible and lasting impact on these communities. ensuring that future generations can benefit from sustainable resources and environments (Gómez, 2014).

In the mining sector, CSR is a crucial component in ensuring the sustainability of operations and relationships with local communities. Ospina *et al.*, (2021) emphasize the importance of establishing compensation schemes for communities to participate in the planning and execution of mining activities, monitoring the economic benefits and associated environmental risks. The CSR approach is relevant to the Falchani project, where extractive activities could threaten biodiversity and water resources (ERI, 2023). They must also include concrete measures to reduce impacts, ensuring that communities will not only receive economic compensation, but also receive additional benefits.

The success and legitimacy of mining companies depend on communities' perceptions of CSR initiatives. Valdivia (2020) highlights how the negative perception of CSR can generate mistrust due to a lack of communication and visible local development actions. In this context, the CSR of the Falchani project should be understood not only as a corporate strategy, but also as a means to improve community relations and ensure long-term sustainability. The success of mining operations depends on social acceptance and commitment to the well-being of affected communities. CSR initiatives must also be adapted to the socio-cultural characteristics of each community. Mansilla Guinez and Jeldes (2021) argue that philanthropic actions are not enough on their own; it is necessary to create development projects that address the real needs of local populations, such as job creation, improved health and education services, as well as environmental protection.

In terms of environmental management, Rey-Coquais (2021) emphasizes that mining companies must adopt comprehensive approaches that consider environmental impacts in a broader context, not just at the local level. In the case of Falchani, natural resource governance must include addressing community concerns about contamination of water sources and risks to biodiversity. On the other hand, Rojas de la Puente *et al.*, (2019), propose specific indicators to measure the impact of CSR projects on mining, especially in relation to sustainable development. Manríquez and Urquijo (2019) highlight the political dimension in the implementation of CSR, stressing that the ability of companies to establish transparent relationships with local authorities and communities is key to preventing long-term tensions and conflicts in projects such as Falchani.

The analysis of the social responsibility of the Falchani mining company, in charge of lithium exploration in the Corani district, is within the current legal framework that guarantees the active participation of the communities and the protection of their socio-environmental rights. The Law on Prior Consultation (No. 29785) ensures the inclusion of indigenous communities in decision-making, complemented by the Regulation on Citizen Participation in Mining and Energy Activities (Supreme Decree No. 042-2003-EM), which promotes a transparent and continuous dialogue, are important for analysis. In addition, the mining canon and royalties provided for in Law No. 28090 are essential to ensure the equitable distribution of the economic benefits of mining.

Mining and Environmental Conflict Management

The Falchani project, focused on lithium exploration, can generate socio-environmental conflicts by confronting mining economic interests with the environmental and social concerns of local communities. These types of extractive projects are likely to trigger tensions and disputes (Oberschall, 1978). The Falchani Project is no exception, as the lithium exploration process has generated expectations and tensions related to the use of the territory and the possible environmental impacts of the activity.

One of the key elements in the emergence of conflicts is the lack of equity in the distribution of economic benefits. Mining projects in Peru, such as Falchani, are often presented as great development opportunities, but the benefits tend to be concentrated in the hands of a few, while local communities face the environmental and social consequences (Tanaka *et al.*, 2007). In the case of Corani, lithium exploration represents an overvalued economic expectation and promise that contrasts with the job instability of South American camelid herders, whose main source of income is the sale of the fiber that faces price fluctuations in the market (Solís, 2023). This situation could lead to latent discontent among the inhabitants of the communities in the area of direct influence, who have economic expectations, but also fears of ecosystem degradation. Conflict management in projects such as the Falchani Project requires special attention to community dynamics and corporate social responsibility. Mendoza (2022) points out that communities often demand active participation in decisions about resource exploitation, but the lack of effective consultation mechanisms generates unrest and social mobilizations. Although the Macusani Yellowcake company has established dialogue processes with local communities, doubts remain about whether the authorities can guarantee respect for community interests. The participation of social organizations and regional authorities has amplified the debate, which could escalate into conflict if environmental expectations and concerns are not adequately managed. In Puno, the environmental degradation caused by mining, both formal and informal, has intensified concerns about the impact of lithium exploration on land and water resources, as warned by social and academic leaders, who fear irreversible damage (Cruz, 2024). Faced with this situation, it is likely that mobilizations and environmentally oriented movements will emerge to stop or modify mining practices, as has happened in other regions of the country.

The tension between promises of economic development and environmental risks has local and regional implications. Tanaka *et al.*, (2007) identify that socio-environmental conflicts are on two levels: divergent interests around the conception of local development, and protest actions that can escalate to greater crises. In the case of the Falchani project, local communities' demands for jobs and development must be balanced with concerns about the long-term effects of mining in the region. If the national government and regional authorities fail to effectively mediate between these interests, tensions are likely to lead to protests and social outbursts that affect the stability of the region and the progress of the project.

The Falchani project illustrates the challenges faced by mining in the region, where natural resource extraction often collides with the rights of local communities and environmental conservation. The experience of other mining regions in Peru has shown that, when community interests are not taken into account, conflicts can persist for years, affecting the viability of projects and social cohesion (Cruz, 2024). In this context, the state's ability to mediate will be key to preventing current tensions from escalating and achieving governance.

METHODOLOGY

The research was carried out in the peasant communities of Isivilla, Corani – Aconsaya, Aymaña – Chimboya, Chacaconiza and Q'elcaya in the district of Corani located at 4039 m.a.s.l., 13°52'07" South Latitude and 70°36'16" West Longitude (INEI, 2023). The scope of study is characterized by the development of extensive subsistence agricultural activity and artisanal mining activities in the exploitation of polymetallic minerals. The research is quantitative, non-experimental and micro-level. The units of analysis are corporate social responsibility, management of socio-environmental conflicts, community dynamics and the risk of archaeological resources in the lithium exploration process by the Falchani project. Meanwhile, the observation unit is made up of families residing in the district's peasant communities and the sample was 59 heads of household. The techniques for collecting information were surveys, documentary review, and non-participant observation. The data processing and analysis was carried out through the statistical software of the SPSS and analyzed through the report of the frequency and contingency tables.

The peasant communities in the study area present the following information:

Table 1

Information on the peasant communities in the area of study.

number	Community	Meters.	Resolution	Date	Electronic Item	Titled Extension (ha)	Date of registration
1	Isivilla Corani	4 388 –	R.S. 94 R.J. 003-77-AE-	22/12/1956	11008233	7 804,00	01/02/1994
2	Aconsaya Aymaña	3 969 -	ORAMS-VIII R.J. 005-77-AE-	27/01/1977	11007630	7 875,20	03/02/1997
3	Chimboya	4 220	ORAMS-VIII R.D. 0334-87-RA-XXI-	02/02/1977	11008256	15 601,00	13/11/1998
4	Chacaconiza	4 425	P/ DRAYAR R.D. 0231-88-UAD-	23/06/1987	11007579	8 247,52	11/06/1997
5	Q'elcaya	4 585	XXI-P	30/05/1988	11007571	31 358,26	03/02/1997

Note: Based on information from INEI (2023), INEI (2017) and CEPES (2016).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Mining exploration and exploitation in Peru, especially in the highlands region of Puno, is gradually replacing the agricultural activity that historically predominated. This change has reconfigured economic, social and environmental relations in the region. In the current context,

the Falchani lithium exploration project, located in the Corani district, is under development. By the company Macusani Yellowcake, a subsidiary of the Canadian American Lithium. The project, discovered in 2018, has an investment of 880 million dollars and is expected to start operations between the last quarter of 2026 and the beginning of 2027. This development has generated interaction between mining activity and the interests of the local community, which is concerned about the environmental implications, given that Falchani is an area used for the grazing of South American camelids.

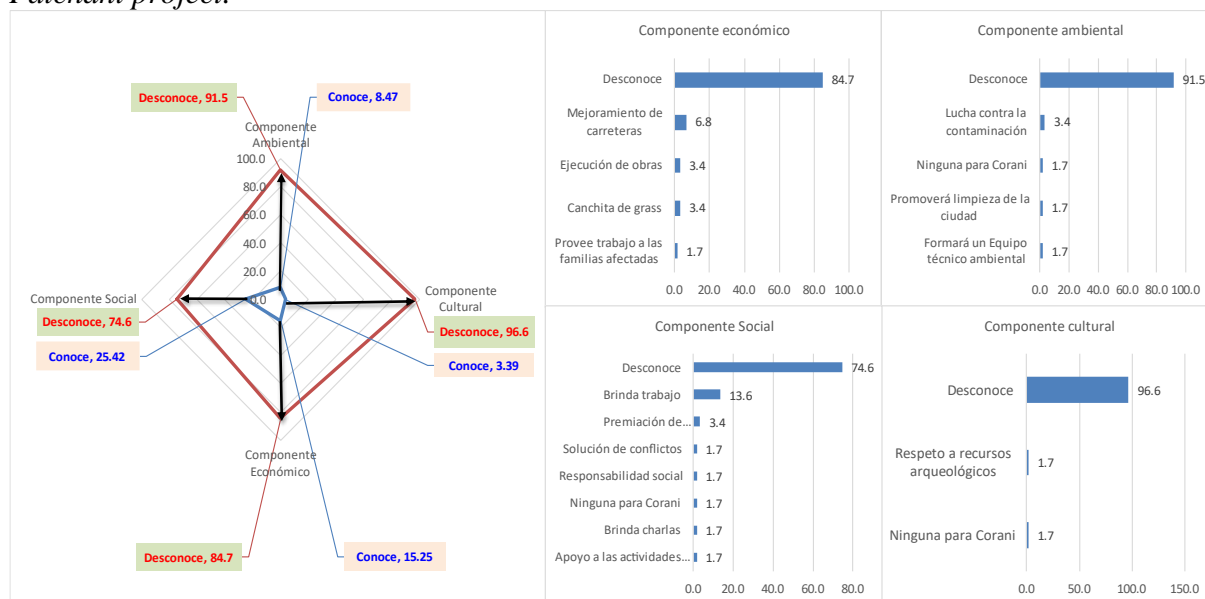
The observation unit is made up of a relatively adult population between 26 and 45 years old (40.7%) and 46 to 64 years old (32.2%), the majority of heads of household in the communities (94.9%), are mainly men (52.5%) and have subsistence agriculture as their main economic activity (76.3%). This population is vulnerable to climatic variations and low economic diversification.

Corporate Social Responsibility and Lithium Exploration Process

For the reference population, CSR is of vital importance to promote sustainable business practices in the social, economic, environmental and cultural spheres. In the context of lithium exploration, an adequate CSR policy must ensure compliance with the regulatory framework and promote the strengthening of the company's image and legitimacy. The company, by properly managing social and environmental impacts, could have opportunities to improve its operational efficiency, reduce costs and mitigate risks, while promoting sustainable and beneficial solutions for the region, fostering innovation and local development.

Figure 1

Information from the perspective of local actors on Social Responsibility activities of the Falchani project.



Note: Applied Survey Database. In original language Spanish

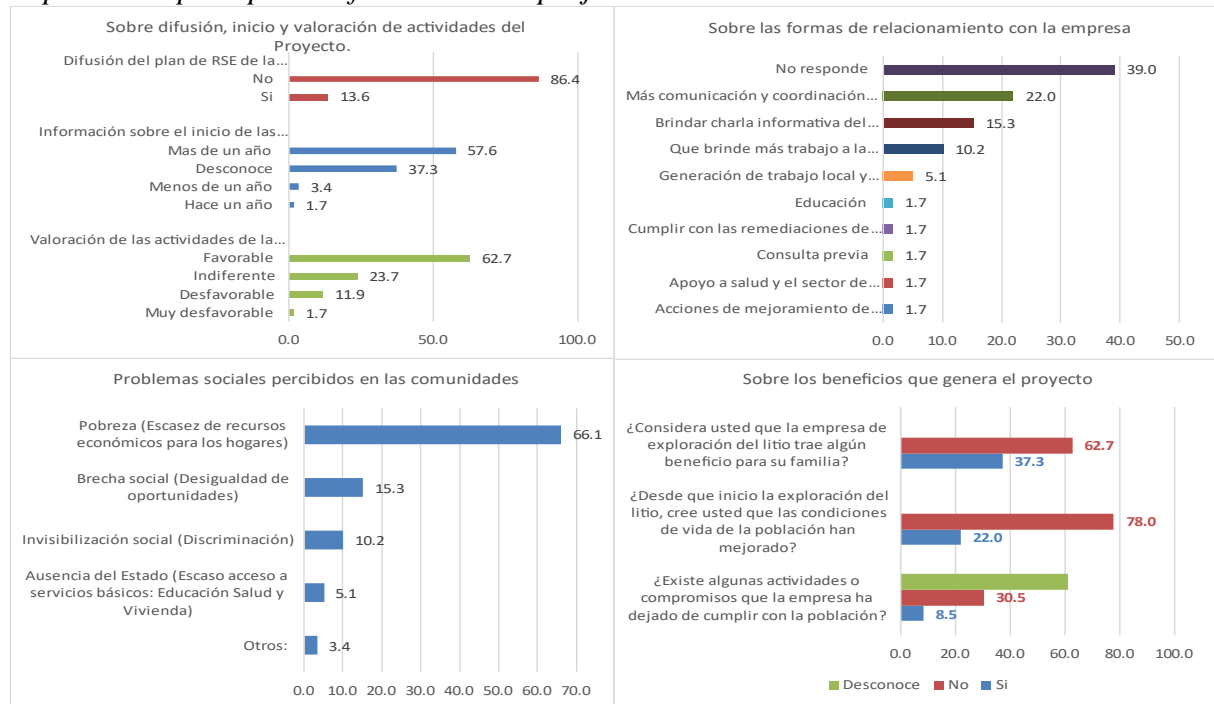
The high level of ignorance of the population regarding the CSR activities implemented by the company in the lithium exploration area reflects the lack of effective communication and transparency in the process. The figures are revealing: 74.6% of the population lacks information about the social component, 84.7% is unaware of economic initiatives, 96.6% is uninformed about the cultural aspect, and 91.5% lacks knowledge about environmental activities. The results show a disconnect between the company and the local community, which can generate mistrust and frustration. The fact that the population is not aware of the cultural (96.6%) and environmental (91.5%) components is worrying, given that these aspects are key to sustainable development and the preservation of natural resources and local heritage.

Perceptions

The population's perception of the CSR actions of the Falchani project is characterized by distrust and skepticism, fueled by the lack of legal and moral compliance and the lack of transparency of its actions. Many residents perceive that the company is hiding information, which has created a factor in triggering protests by non-governmental organizations, environmental groups, and community organizations. This mistrust is aggravated by misinformation about actions aimed at preserving the environment and promoting local culture, which causes tensions and conflicts.

Figure 2

Population's perceptions of the Falchani project

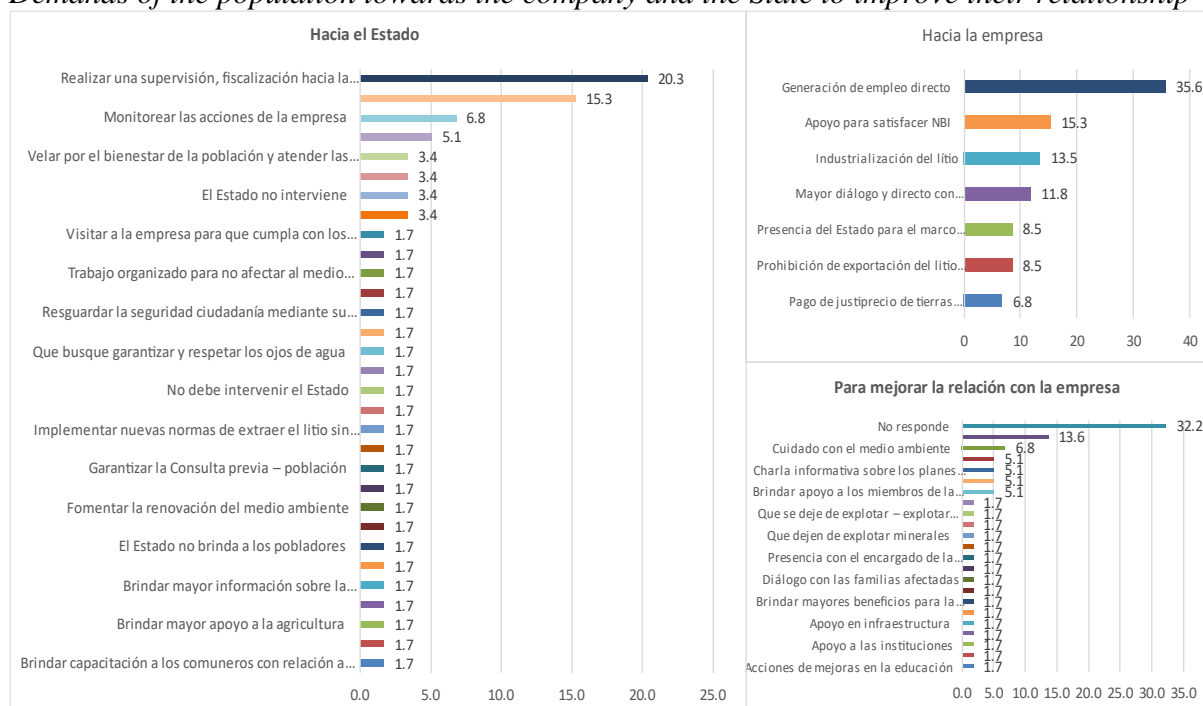


Note: Applied Survey Database. In original language Spanish

The population in the area of intervention perceives that the company is not carrying out transparent information or dissemination campaigns on its CSR Plan, which makes it difficult to strengthen the trust necessary to reduce the likelihood of conflicts, protests and oppositions. This situation hinders the promotion of sustainability and legitimacy of long-term mining projects in the region. Stakeholders demand adequate channels and strategies for open and transparent communication, which include a well-structured and timely community engagement process. To this end, it is essential to listen actively, horizontally, sincerely and in a timely manner, which shows full predisposition and ability to attend to the intentions of local actors. In addition, it is necessary to make the population aware from the planning phase to the improvements in the project, generating trust through the constant recognition of the concerns, fears and perceptions of the stakeholders.

Figure 3

Demands of the population towards the company and the State to improve their relationship



Note: Applied Survey Database. In original language Spanish

The population presents a series of clear perceptions and demands in relation to the lithium exploitation project. They demand the payment of a fair price for the affected surface lands, as well as the prohibition of the export of lithium in stone, pointing out the need to industrialize the resource to generate direct employment and satisfy basic needs. In addition, they consider the presence of the State crucial to establish an effective regulatory framework that guarantees the well-being of the community and prevents pollution of the environment. The inhabitants demand greater direct dialogue with the representatives of the company and the authorities, stressing the importance of informative talks on the project plans, as well as the supervision and inspection of the company's actions regarding environmental agreements. The perception of the absence of the State and the lack of attention to their social needs – such as access to education, health and housing – is complemented by the demand to provide economic support to potential residents affected by lithium exploitation, highlighting the social gap and the invisibility they suffer in the current context. Together, the demands reflect a clamor for a fairer and more responsible relationship between business, State and community, seeking to guarantee sustainable development that respects their rights and their environment.

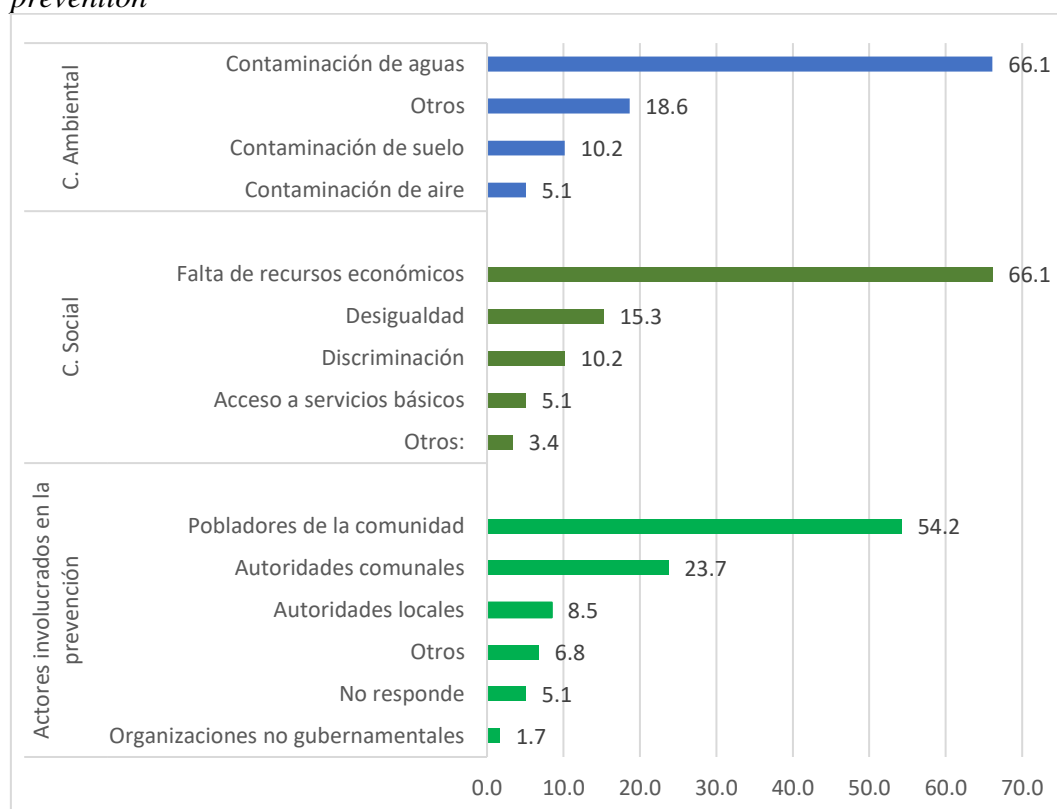
Mining and conflicts

The perception of environmental pollution is very high, highlighting the concern about the transition to the lithium exploitation phase and reflecting a clear awareness of its negative impacts on public health, access to and control of resources such as water and land, and the possibility of relocation. There are also fears that this could lead to divisions within the community, affecting community identity, social cohesion and local culture. At the same time, the existence of asymmetrical power relations between local communities, the State, and companies is highlighted, which places the population at a disadvantage in decision-making (Svampa, 2019). This situation generates perceptions of risk and mistrust towards external actors, reinforcing the idea that communities do not feel protected or listened to by the responsible institutions. However, the need to intensify citizen participation as a way to strengthen governance is highlighted.

In summary, the analysis highlights that the conflict is not only rooted in potential environmental impacts, but also in a lack of trust in institutions and the exclusion of local communities from decision-making processes. The long-term solution requires greater citizen participation and inclusive and transparent environmental management. This implies that conflict resolution does not only depend on technical or environmental solutions, but also on the effective integration of communities in decision-making processes. Ignoring these concerns could trigger significant conflicts in the future, underscoring the need for a more inclusive and locally demand-sensitive approach to mining project management.

Figure 6

Prevalence of socio-environmental conflicts in the field of intervention and actors for prevention



Note: Applied Survey Database. In original language Spanish

Within the prevalence of environmental conflicts in the area of intervention, the problem of water pollution stands out (66.1%), positioning itself as the main perceived environmental concern, mainly due to the effects associated with mining. The population fears that mining activity could intensify pollution risks, which would generate community protests if these risks are not properly managed (OCMAL, 2019). In second place is the problem of soil contamination (10.2%), related to the degradation of agricultural land. The third concern refers to air pollution (5.1%), which suggests that this type of pollution is not perceived as the main problem compared to water and soil. However, both soil and air pollution could escalate depending on the magnitude of the project and prolonged exposure to toxic materials (Martínez, 2011), a perspective of how local community members perceive them to face environmental conflicts.

However, although water appears to be a central concern, it is important to underline that multiple pollution (water, soil and air) is interrelated. A lack of action by authorities and mining companies to address these issues can lead to escalating social tensions, especially in contexts

where communities feel excluded from the economic benefits of the project. The key to preventing these problems from leading to social conflicts lies in effective environmental management, which minimizes the impacts of mining and focuses on the prevention, mitigation and compensation of damages.

In the component of social problems, the scarcity of economic resources (66.1%) is the most prevalent problem, which suggests that it is a key factor in social conflict. This is in line with the general trend in communities affected by mining projects, where the promise of jobs and economic development often goes unrealized. If this problem is not addressed, it could lead to greater conflicts. In second place, social inequality (15.3%) is perceived as a significant problem, followed by discrimination (10.2%), which reflects tensions related to unequal treatment between different social groups. These two problems show that the feeling of injustice is present and could worsen if the benefits of the project are not distributed equitably among the inhabitants. A lack of equitable employment and social opportunities may intensify conflicts in the future. Likewise, limited access to basic services (5.1%), although low in percentage, could be affected by a possible population increase due to the arrival of external workers, which would increase the pressure on available services and exacerbate the perception of exclusion in local communities (Bebbington, 2008).

It is important to consider that the scarcity of economic resources is a prevalent factor, a structural problem that goes beyond mining intervention. The disconnect between the expectations generated and the perceived benefits reveals that poverty and lack of resources are at the heart of social conflict, suggesting a dependence of these communities on the promises of economic development and employment. The future of these conflicts will depend largely on how authorities and mining companies manage both expectations and benefits, and whether they are able to create an inclusive model of development that addresses these concerns equitably.

Regarding the actors involved in conflict prevention, the perception of the observation unit is that the inhabitants of the community (54.2%) are the main actors who should participate in conflict prevention. This suggests high local participation and awareness of the social and environmental impacts of the project. In second place are the communal authorities (23.7%), whose influence on decision-making is evidence of a strong community organization. Local authorities are also considered (8.5%), although their role seems more limited compared to communal authorities, which could be due to low representation or legitimacy (Arellano, 2011). This may be indicative of a shortfall in local government commitment, which could pose challenges in conflict management in the future. Other actors (6.8%) and NGOs (1.7%) appear with a lower proportion, probably due to their limited presence or participation in prevention efforts, which suggests a reduced space for the intervention of external actors.

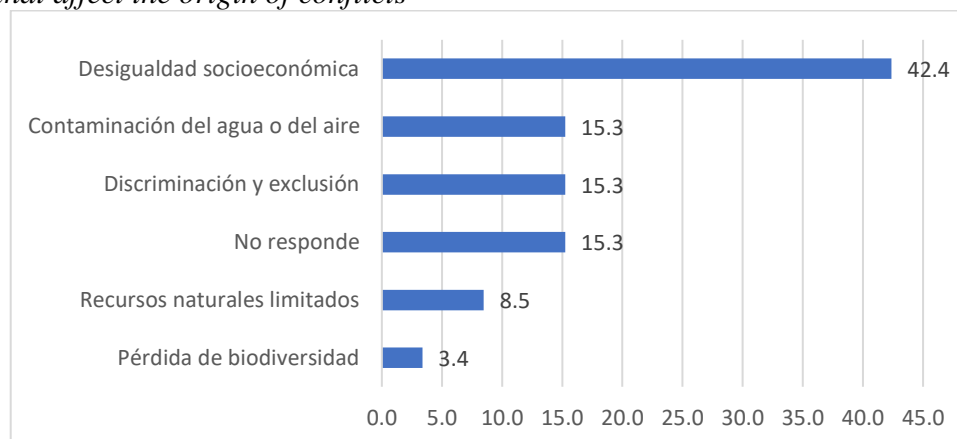
The lithium exploration process in the Corani district has generated exaggerated expectations in the population and has the potential to increase social conflict if economic and environmental needs are not adequately addressed. Future trends point to greater social mobilization and the need to implement more effective environmental management measures, with greater participation and improved distribution of economic benefits.

It can be noted that, among the actors involved in conflict prevention, the inhabitants of the community are identified as the most important, according to the observation unit. This data recognizes their leading role in the defense of their interests and in the mitigation of possible social tensions, which reflects a high level of participation and collective awareness. It also highlights their sense of autonomy to defend their rights over the territory and against the social impacts that the lithium exploitation process could generate. Community organization is key not only for the defense of these interests, but also for guaranteeing participatory governance in the management of resources and in the development of the extractive project (Gudynas, 2012).

Consequently, it is evident that villagers and communal authorities are perceived as the main actors in conflict prevention, reflecting a strong sense of local participation and strong community organization. In the lithium exploration process in Corani, the importance of properly managing the expectations of the population and implementing effective environmental management that minimizes social and environmental impacts, ensuring an equitable distribution of economic benefits, stands out.

Figure 7

Factors that affect the origin of conflicts



Note: Applied Survey Database. In original language Spanish

Regarding the factors that affect the origin of conflicts, the population perceives that socioeconomic inequality (42.4%) is the most prominent. This suggests a significant gap between different socioeconomic groups and the perception that certain sectors benefit more than others in the community engagement process, which could exacerbate tensions. Likewise, water and air pollution (15.3%) is another factor that the company must consider when addressing environmental management to avoid conflicts. On the other hand, the population also perceives acts of discrimination or exclusion (15.3%), which generates feelings of marginalization in decision-making and a lack of inclusion in consultation processes. Another factor identified is limited natural resources (8.5%), reflecting concerns about their sustainability and availability (Bebbington, 2013). There is also concern about the possible loss of biodiversity (3.4%). Finally, a part of the population did not respond (15.3%), which could reflect apathy, distrust of the survey or lack of information about the problems in question.

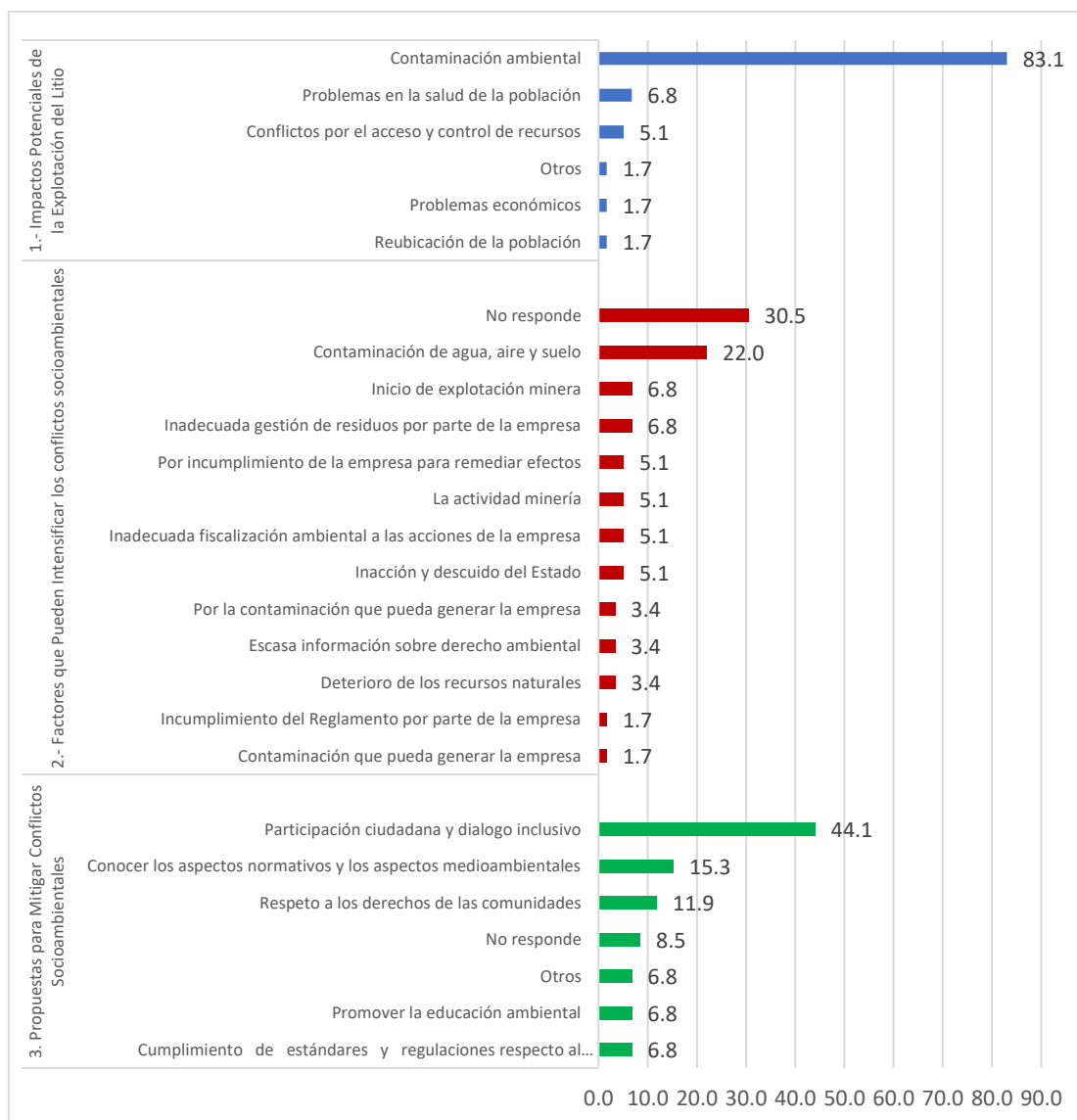
These results allow us to infer that socioeconomic inequality is the main driver of conflicts in the lithium exploration area, so the company must be careful not to widen these gaps and implement strategies that promote an equitable distribution of benefits, in addition to encouraging the inclusion of communities in decision-making processes. This perception points to a significant gap between different groups within the community, suggesting that certain sectors of the population feel excluded or disadvantaged in relation to the benefits that mining activity brings, in this case, lithium exploration.

The analysis also suggests that the company has a key role to play in preventing these conflicts. To avoid exacerbating socioeconomic gaps, it must implement strategies that ensure that the economic and social benefits derived from lithium mining are equitably distributed. Given that the area is currently a predominantly agricultural socioeconomic space, the productive activity around alpaca fiber should be replaced by another that is more profitable and sustainable. This not only implies generating employment and economic development for the community, but also including the most marginalized populations in the decision-making process, promoting an inclusive model of development (Acosta, 2013). If the company does not address these concerns, there is a high risk of conflict, as the community could perceive the mining operation as a force of exclusion rather than an opportunity for progress.

This analysis suggests that ignoring these factors would only exacerbate tensions. Therefore, working from a perspective based on participatory management and transparency could be a key axis to avoid social conflicts.

Figure 8

Potential impacts of lithium exploitation: intensifying factors and proposals to mitigate socio-environmental conflicts



Note: Applied Survey Database. In original language Spanish

The population perceives that the lithium exploitation process will generate environmental pollution (83.1%) in the local ecosystem, which is one of their main concerns. If these risks are not mitigated, they are very likely to become a determining factor for community opposition or the emergence of subsequent conflicts. Secondly, health problems (6.8%) that could be derived from environmental risks are identified. In addition, conflicts over access to and control of resources (5.1%) are mentioned, particularly in relation to the struggle for control, appropriation and use of water and land (Muradian, 2001). Finally, although the risk of population relocation (1.7%) is a minor concern, it could also become a factor of conflict.

In terms of factors that can intensify socio-environmental conflicts, the population perceives water, air and soil pollution (22%) as the most dangerous factor, highlighting a primary concern

about environmental effects and their potential to aggravate future conflicts. Likewise, it is perceived that inadequate waste management (6.8%) and the start of mining exploitation (6.8%) could increase conflict in the intervention area. It is also noted that the inaction and carelessness of the State (5.1%), as well as inadequate environmental oversight (5.1%), are perceived as factors that intensify the conflict, indicating a lack of confidence in the capacity of institutions to regulate effectively. Finally, a significant proportion of the population does not respond (30.5%), which could be due to misinformation or uncertainty about the possible sources of new conflicts.

Regarding conflict mitigation strategies, the population expresses a significant preference for the creation of spaces, mechanisms and forms of citizen participation and inclusive dialogue (44.1%). This perception of local actors reflects the need to be heard and involved in decision-making. If these measures are not implemented, they are very likely to become a factor in conflict.

The second strategy identified is knowledge of regulatory and environmental aspects (15.3%), which underscores the need for training on these issues to empower local communities and allow adequate social control over the company's actions. Likewise, respect for the rights of communities (11.9%) stands out as a mitigation strategy, which implies not violating their collective identity. Other strategies include compliance with environmental standards (6.8%), promoting environmental education (6.8%), and other measures (6.8%). The latter three reinforce the idea that communities value a biocentric vision to achieve sustainable development. Finally, a part of the population does not respond (8.5%), which suggests a possible lack of information.

From the perception of the local population, the latent conflicts over the exploration and exploitation of lithium in Corani are framed by asymmetrical power relations, perceptions of risk and demands for environmental justice. Communities are deeply concerned about the environmental impacts, especially on water, that could result from extractive activity. Likewise, they distrust the capacity and role of both the State and the company to adequately manage these risks (Martínez, 2002). The population fears that socio-environmental conflicts will not be managed effectively, which would harm the local ecosystem. Therefore, it is necessary to intensify citizen participation in order to strengthen governance.

Indeed, lithium exploitation in the Corani district presents a combination of opportunities and risks for the company, the state and the local population. While there are clear proposals to mitigate conflicts, factors such as environmental pollution and state ineffectiveness can trigger an escalation of tensions due to limited or no community participation and the lack of effective state control mechanisms.

CONCLUSIONS

- The population in the area of intervention of the Falchani project considers that the company's channels and forms of communication are ineffective in publicizing its plans and activities related to corporate social responsibility. This deficiency in communication causes a series of negative effects on public perception. The lack of clear and accessible information generates uncertainty in citizens, who are unaware of the objectives and benefits of the company's initiatives. The perception of the lack of transparency generates a feeling of distrust towards the company, since local stakeholders perceive that there is something that is hidden or that it is not being handled properly. As a result, currents of negative opinion arise that affect the company's image, undermining its reputation and making it difficult to build a sustainable relationship of trust.
- The lithium exploitation project in Corani, although it is in the exploration phase, according to the local population already poses serious socio-environmental challenges, linked to air,

water and soil pollution, which would generate public health risks, such as respiratory diseases. Land disturbances and biodiversity loss could negatively affect both local ecosystems and the traditional ways of life of communities, which face the loss of agricultural land and the absence and sustainability of equitable benefits. In addition, lack of communication, mistrust of authorities, and the absence of adequate consent can intensify social conflicts in the short to medium term, especially around access to and control of resources. In addition, active community participation is crucial to mitigate these effects and prevent future conflicts, but the lack of adequate regulation and control mechanisms could exacerbate tensions between communities and external actors.

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