6.1.2 Brazil



Context

Brazil's renewable-energy expansion is concentrated in the North-East, where semi-arid territories have become a major frontier for wind and large-scale solar power. Paraiba illustrates the speed and scale of this change: by January 2025, 104 wind farms and 113 solar plants had been authorised in the state. Projects first appeared on the northern coast and then moved inland, particularly into Western and Eastern Serido and towards the Serra da Borborema. The affected territories are not empty spaces. They include small family farms, agrarian-reform settlements, *quilombola* communities and agroecological landscapes whose food production and collective uses depend on continued access to land. The Serra da Borborema is especially known for agroecology and for strong rural women's organisations. The expansion is supported by federal and state institutions, including ANEEL, environmental licensing bodies and public finance, alongside national and foreign developers, investment funds, land-prospecting firms and corporate media. The study situates this process within Brazil's corporate energy-transition model, in which climate and development narratives legitimise large infrastructures even though the country's electricity mix is already predominantly renewable and its largest sources of greenhouse-gas emissions are land-use change and agriculture.

Conflict description

The conflict concerns not renewable energy in itself, but the territorial model through which it is implemented. Companies and public authorities promote projects with promises of jobs, local income and compatible land uses. In practice, access to land is largely secured through private lease agreements. Because Brazilian law does not specifically regulate land contracts for wind and solar generation, agreements can contain highly unequal terms: durations of 35 to 49 years, automatic renewal at the company's discretion, heavy penalties applying only to landholders and obligations extending to heirs. Communities also report harassment intended to secure signatures. These contracts restrict land use, fence territories and can contribute to land reconcentration and long-term loss of community autonomy. During construction and operation, projects have been associated with deforestation, altered terrain, roads, erosion, increased traffic, displacement of wildlife, visual intrusion, disrupted water flows and changes in land use and cover. Jobs are mostly temporary, while the promised additional income may not compensate for lost farming, grazing and food production. Corporate structures add opacity: projects are frequently organised through separate special-purpose entities, while acquisitions and changes in company ownership make it difficult to identify responsibility. The harms are cumulative and multidimensional. They affect ecosystems and livelihoods, but also cultural continuity and territorial organisation. In Western Serido, unfair leases and land-use changes are already prominent. In Borborema, the proposed Serra da Borborema

Wind Farm Complex, comprising four wind farms, has generated resistance because it threatens an established agroecological model. The conflict therefore pits a centralised, profit-oriented energy system against locally rooted visions of development. Communities argue that the current transition reproduces land grabbing and sacrifice zones under a green label, distributing costs to vulnerable rural populations while benefits and control accrue elsewhere.

Resistance and pathways forward

Resistance combines institutional complaints, public mobilisation and the construction of alternatives. Affected groups have approached the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office, the Federal Public Defender's Office and Paraiba's state-level prosecutorial and defender institutions. In 2023, these bodies issued Recommendation 17/2023 to the environmental authority SUDEMA, centred on Free, Prior and Informed Consultation, and Recommendation 22/2023 to INCRA, covering consultation, contracts and the regulation of projects affecting agrarian-reform and traditional communities. These recommendations are important but non-binding, and their scope does not protect every affected rural group. Grassroots mobilisation is therefore central. The March for Women's Lives and Agroecology, organised by women of the Borborema Hub with AS-PTA since 2010, incorporated renewable-energy encroachment as a core issue from 2022. Around 5,000 women marched in Solanea that year, and the 2025 edition in Esperanca again proclaimed that the projects should take 'not one step further' into the territory. Community theatre, public education and links with the Movement of Those Affected by Renewables help expose misleading promises and strengthen collective refusal. The mobilisation has so far helped prevent the expansion of wind and solar plants into Borborema. The study calls for stronger oversight of company conduct, regulation and review of lease contracts, effective consultation and protection extending beyond formally recognised traditional communities. Where projects have not yet arrived, territorial rights should prevail over installation. Where harms are established, suspension or dismantling should be debated. Most importantly, communities propose a decentralised energy model integrated with agroecology, food sovereignty and local control. Their position is not 'no' to renewable energy, but renewable energy organised through social justice, genuine participation and respect for the territories that sustain rural life.