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BBC Weather



Living in a Coastal Desert - The Chungungo Project



The small desert village of Chungungo on the coast of northern Chile lies in one of the driest areas of the world - the Atacama desert. Due to the physical geography of Chile, the Andes stop moisture-rich air masses reaching the Pacific coast.

The coast of Chile is enveloped in a shroud of persistent cloud cover for much of the year, known locally as 'camanchaca'. The prevailing winds carry this inland creating a continual fog as it rises over the mountains, but the cloud lacks enough moisture to produce rain.

Chungungo receives less than 5cm of rain a year, despite the persistent cloud cover. Without an adequate local water supply, the fishing community was dependent on water brought in by truck from distant wells at great expense. The supply was often contaminated, as the trucks were also used for transporting other liquids, as well as unreliable.

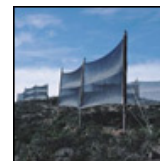
It was noticed that the camanchaca condensed on the leaves of eucalyptus trees growing near an abandoned iron mine. Could this observation be transformed into a large scale fog harvesting project?

In the mid 1980s, researchers in Chile contacted a Canadian government agency with regards to the possibility of harvesting their camanchaca.

The Chungungo project

The first nets were erected in 1987 near the iron mine where the phenomenon had first been observed. There are now 75 collectors, each the size of a billboard taking more than 10,000 litres a day of water to the village.

The success of the Chungungo project has led to similar projects in Peru, South Africa, the Dominican Republic, Israel, Cape Verde, the Canary Islands and Nepal.



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What are the benefits

Increased availability - The fog collectors in Chungungo in northern Chile provide more than 40 litres of water per person per day - compared to 14 litres before the project began giving enough water for domestic consumption and also for a few hectares of vegetable gardens.

Run by the community - The collectors are managed by a local committee, which provides the community with control over their water supply.

A safe and reliable supply - the water is clean and uncontaminated and the villagers are not reliant on trucks that can break down.

The amount of water taken out of the fog is so tiny, and it is used where it is collected, so it does not damage the delicate ecosystem of the area.

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