

A photograph of two men standing in a high-altitude mountain landscape. The man on the left is wearing a red sweater and a blue bucket hat. The man on the right is wearing a brown jacket and a green cap. In the background, there are large, rocky mountains with patches of snow and some mist or clouds. The sky is overcast.

# Bolivia

## Climate change, poverty and adaptation

### Executive summary

October 2009

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time for climate justice  
7 Dec 09, Copenhagen

 **Oxfam**  
International

“*We indigenous peoples will continue to talk until we achieve real change. Our voice comes from way back. Our voice is the voice of the snow-capped mountains which are losing their white ponchos.*”

The 10 commandments to save the planet, humanity and life.  
Evo Morales

**B**olivia is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change for six basic reasons:

1. It is one of the poorest countries in Latin America and suffers from one of the worst patterns of inequality. Low-income groups in developing countries are the most exposed to climate change impacts.
2. It is the country in South America with the highest percentage of indigenous people, where much of the poverty and inequality is concentrated.
3. It is one of the most bio-diverse countries in the world, with a wide variety of ecosystems that are vulnerable to different impacts from climate change.
4. More than half of the country is Amazonian, with high levels of the deforestation which adds to the vulnerability to flooding.
5. Located in a climatically volatile region, it is one of the countries in the world most affected by ‘natural’ disasters in recent years.
6. It is home to about twenty per cent of the world’s tropical glaciers, which are retreating more quickly than predicted by many experts.

In July 2009 a team of Oxfam researchers travelled to three areas of Bolivia (Trinidad in Beni, the Cochabamba valleys and Khapi under Mount Illimani, in La Paz) to take a snapshot of how poor families are experiencing the changing climate, and how they are adapting to it. The researchers also interviewed key government and international officials, social movements and NGO representatives. The

main findings and recommendations of this report are:

### Main findings:

- Poor women and men throughout Bolivia are already experiencing the consequences of climate change, but in most cases are ill-equipped to adapt to the present and future impacts.
- The perception of many villagers and local farmers is that the climate is already changing in terms of the unpredictability of the rainfall, more extreme weather events and higher temperatures, with negative impacts for their livelihoods.
- Oxfam International has noted that in recent years the frequency and magnitude of damage from the extreme weather events have increased. Women are often the hardest hit, as they are often the ones left to tend small farms and families, and have fewer alternative livelihoods when crops are lost.
- Bolivia can expect five main impacts as a result of climate change: less food security; glacial retreat affecting water availability; more frequent and more intense ‘natural’ disasters; an increase in mosquito-borne diseases; and more forest fires.
- Of these, Oxfam International is particularly concerned that poor women and men and indigenous peoples will be affected by the effect of unpredictable weather on agricultural production as this could lead to less food availability and/or higher food prices.



*Camellones, Beni. Photo: Mark Chilvers / Oxfam*

- Oxfam International believes that it is deeply unjust that poor communities and families in Bolivia and other South American countries are having to pay a high price for a situation for which they have virtually no historical responsibility.
- In the three areas visited for this report local people, and particularly women, are already experimenting with ways of adapting to the changes in the climate. The 'camellones' project in Trinidad offers a promising example of poor women using ancient technologies to find a way of improving food security, adapting to flooding and reducing deforestation.
- The government of President Evo Morales is beginning to take climate change seriously. However, it is still in the early stages of developing national policy and practical adaptation programmes. A major effort will be required to scale up the institutional, financial, and technical capacity to address the climate challenge.
- Oxfam International's concern is that the opportunities being opened up by the change process in Bolivia to reduce poverty, particularly amongst the indigenous population, will come under severe pressure from climate change impacts.
- The establishment of the Platform of Social Organisations against Climate Change is a positive development to put pressure on national and international governments to combat the impacts of global warming. It is already having a major impact on government policy and awareness-raising.

# Conclusions and recommendations

**B**olivia is currently going through a period of unprecedented opportunity for positive social change, overturning deep-seated patterns of inequality, discrimination and poverty. However, because of its vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, the possibilities of implementing lasting change for poor, indigenous women and men will be severely constrained. This is a high price for a situation for which Bolivia has virtually no historical responsibility.

Local communities have shown how they are responding to the challenges of the changing climate, some drawing on centuries-old traditions of managing risk. These efforts should be supported. However, many communities are ill-equipped. There needs to be a step change in the approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change – in terms of international and national policy, technical and financial support, institutional capacity, as well as awareness and action amongst social movements and the public at large. Recommendations on key areas for action are set out below.

## Recommendations for the international community:

- As the international community takes forward vital negotiations to agree and implement a post-2012 climate regime it is critical that Climate Justice - the historical responsibility of rich countries for climate change and their obligation to transfer finance and technology for adaptation and mitigation in developing countries - is at the heart of the solutions. This involves deep emissions cuts by rich countries, and a major transfer of resources to poor countries.
- Oxfam International is calling for a fair and safe deal in which:
  - Global emissions are cut by 80 per cent from 1990 levels by 2050.
  - Rich countries cut emissions by 40 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020.
  - Rich countries provide at least US\$150 billion per year to help developing countries adapt to climate impacts and develop in a low-carbon way. This includes the immediate provision of at least \$50 billion per year for adaptation, with rich countries' contributions increasing in line with the latest economic and scientific estimates<sup>73</sup>.
  - An adaptation financing mechanism is established, which generates a predictable flow of new funds, additional to existing aid targets of 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI).
- Until such a fund exists, ongoing adaptation and mitigation projects being carried out by countries like Bolivia should be recognized and supported by the donor community.
- Bolivia's vision for a more sustainable development path, epitomised by the concepts of *Vivir Bien* (Living Well) and *Pachamama* (Mother Earth), presents an important challenge to the resource-intensive, exploitative economic models, which have caused the climate crisis. As the international community seeks to shift to a low-carbon economic model, countries should engage seriously with, and learn from, Bolivia's experience and proposals for alternative development approaches.

<sup>73</sup> There are a number of estimates of the additional adaptation costs that climate change is imposing on developing countries. In 2007, Oxfam International estimated adaptation costs in developing countries as being at least \$50bn per year. A recent study from the World Bank put this figure higher, at \$75 - \$100 billion each year from 2010 to 2050. See World Bank, *The Economics of Adaptation to Climate Change*, September 2009.



Group of children, La Paz. Photo: Pedro Laguna / Oxfam

- Recent proposals from the Bolivian government for an international tribunal on climate justice – targeted at polluting countries and companies – highlight the need for effective global governance and accountability mechanisms, which hold polluters to account and protect or compensate vulnerable countries. Social movements in Bolivia believe these types of ideas should be considered in international fora debating climate change.

### Recommendations for the Bolivian government:

- The Bolivian government has made an important and serious start in understanding and responding to climate change effects. However, Bolivia still needs to develop and implement effective policies, institutions and practices to adapt to the reality of severe climate risks.
- An overarching institutional and public policy framework for national policy on climate change adaptation and mitigation needs to be developed through a twin strategy:
  - Firstly, by integrating climate change measures into the new legislative framework which will implement Bolivia's new Constitution and thereby embed climate change policy at the highest level.
  - Secondly, the government should further develop and implement a national adaptation strategy, which is properly mainstreamed across the government's programmes for eradicating poverty, and adopted by and co-ordinated across all the key ministries. Such plans should also identify the most urgent adaptation activities and the cost of these, and secure international financing for their implementation.
- Disaster Risk Reduction needs to be part of long-term planning at all levels of government, across all ministries, and particularly at the departmental and municipal level. Disaster preparedness

has to be stepped up. For example, the civil defence vice ministry, VIDEVICODI, needs more trained specialist staff, adequate equipment and additional financial resources.

- Given the increased climatic risk and severe vulnerability of small agricultural producers, the development of an agricultural insurance scheme should be a priority. It should cover key food security crops such as quinoa, potatoes, soybeans, corn and rice and insure against different climatic extremes like drought, flooding, severe frost. The government should request funding for this from the international community.
- Water storage and management should be made a major priority, particularly in urban areas where increased demand is generating water shortage problems. Given the high rate of water loss through poor infrastructure – which in cities like El Alto leads to loss rates of up to 40 per cent - the government should give as much focus to water conservation measures, as to building new infrastructure like dams for water storage. At the community level, existing rainfall must be captured, stored and used to the maximum capacity. Soil and water conservation measures at the headwaters of river basins are crucial. Reforestation can play a major role in improving water capture.
- Poor women are both particularly vulnerable to climate shocks, and – through their central role in the household economy - play a critical role in protecting families and communities from climate risks. As such, the government must ensure that, with its important emphasis on indigenous emancipation, it does not lose sight of the need for women to be at the center of national and international policies for adaptation and the reduction of poor families' vulnerabilities to disasters.
- The government needs to promote better access to the information from the early warning and climate observation systems that identify anomalous weather situations

like drought, rainfall and flooding, in order for producers to plan or take preventive action.

## Recommendations for Bolivian social movements and civil society

- It is Oxfam International's experience in more than 100 countries around the world that a combination of active citizens and effective states is the best way of securing development and poverty reduction. It is also best way of preparing for climate change. Civil society and social movement initiatives like the Bolivian Platform of Social Organisations against Climate Change should be further supported and strengthened.
- The Bolivian Platform of Social Organisations against Climate Change has made great progress in understanding and addressing climate change issues and in influencing the Bolivian government position. This platform should develop concrete proposals on the content and direction of national adaptation and mitigation policy. While close to government, social movements need to ensure they maintain their autonomy and independence from government in order to place new issues and perspectives on the climate agenda, and hold government accountable.
- Active citizenship is as much about collectively pressuring for change as it is about the choices and actions of individuals. There needs to be a concerted campaign, supported by both government and civil society movements, to broaden awareness beyond the sphere of experts and leaders of social movements to the public at large and to encourage changes in individual behaviour – such as sustainable energy and transport use, water conservation and household recycling.



*Camellones, Beni. Photo: Mark Chilvers / Oxfam*

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