

SPECIAL REPORT

FAO/WFP FOOD SECURITY ASSESSMENT MISSION TO BOLIVIA

28 May 2008

Mission Highlights

- On 12 February 2008, the Government of Bolivia declared a state of national emergency due to the meteorological phenomenon of “La Niña”. Between December 2007 and March 2008, all departments in the country were affected by a series of adverse climatic events, such as flooding, drought, frost and hail-storms, which damaged crops and reduced yields.
- After a late start in October and November, with consequent delay in planting operations, accumulated rainfall from December to March was more abundant than in previous year that has been characterized by the meteorological phenomenon of “El Niño”.
- Rice crop suffered the most serious losses, with a 5 percent fall in output if compared to the low production previous year, also severely affected by adverse weather conditions, and 25 percent below last five years average. Important losses are reported also for soybean, sorghum (summer crop) and tubers.
- Winter wheat and sorghum crops, harvested at the end of 2007, have benefited from the abundant residual humidity caused by the intense rainfall of the phenomenon of “El Niño”, with increase in yields and production. It is estimated also that the production of maize and quinoa crops may slightly increase if compared to previous year due to an increase in planted area and the positive effect of abundant rains in some areas that partly balanced the losses occurred in others.
- Total cereals and root crop production in 2008 has been estimated at about 1.7 million and 996 000 tonnes, respectively, very similar to previous year’s production in the case of cereals, but some 5 percent less in the case of tubers.
- Throughout the country, prices of the main basic products rose sharply after August 2007, with a strong negative impact on the price of food basket and the access to food of most vulnerable population, especially in urban areas.
- Cereal and potatoes import requirements for the 2008/09 (July/June) commercial year are estimated at 600 000 tonnes of cereals equivalent, essentially the same level of the year before. The main deficit is expected in the cases of wheat and potatoes, followed by rice and maize. These quantities are expected to be covered by commercial imports, partly from unofficial imports from bordering countries.
- It is estimated that some 28 000 families will face serious food insecurity with need of emergency assistance and 17 000 of them are expected to need food assistance until October 2008 as a consequence of the disruption of their livelihood mechanisms.

1. OVERVIEW

A joint FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Evaluation Mission visited Bolivia from 4 to 18 April 2008 to evaluate cereals and root crop production in 2008, which had been severely affected by a series of adverse climatic events such as drought, frost and floods, and to estimate the import requirements for the 2008/09 (July/June) commercial year.



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The Mission worked very closely with the exercise of evaluation and appraisal of losses in various economic sectors carried out by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). In addition, two experts from the FAO Emergency Operations Service (TCEO) of the Technical Cooperation Department worked with the Mission to prepare a preliminary inventory of emergency and rehabilitation projects for the Bolivian agricultural and livestock sector. Previously, WFP conducted an Emergency Food Security Assessment (EFSA) with a detailed household survey in the main affected areas of the departments of Beni, Santa Cruz, Chuquisaca and Cochabamba. The information obtained by the EFSA was used as input for this report. The Mission also benefited from the active participation of officials from the Ministry of Rural and Agricultural Development and the Environment (MDRAyMA) and from the Prefectures of the visited departments.

Before starting the fieldwork, the Mission reviewed the latest information available on the socio-economic situation, international trade and agricultural policies and gathered data meteorological on the 2007/08 agricultural season, estimates of planted area, crop production forecast and prices of main agricultural products. In addition, about 30 MDRAyMA officials were trained in rapid appraisal methodologies and particularly in the use of the checklist of key variables, to be used during the semi-structured interviews with agricultural producers, and in the transect method to record the state of the crops and livestock during the fieldwork.

During 8 days of fieldwork and organised into six teams, the Mission interviewed regional government officials, rural community leaders, NGO officials and other key informants, as well as farmers and traders. The Mission inspected standing crops and those recently harvested. It also gathered information on different aspects of household food security and household livelihoods. It examined issues relating to the local prices of the main foodstuffs, production and income-generation possibilities, and the effects of the adverse climatic events on agriculture and livestock production, assets and infrastructure and on diseases and access to services.

The Mission visited eight of the nine departments in the country (only the department of Pando could not be visited), comprising about 119 municipalities, and conducted about 235 interviews with different informants. In the departments, the Mission received strong support from the local governments which guaranteed logistical support and supplied additional technical personnel, enabling it to cover a broader area of analysis. The Mission covered approximately 14 000 km, with continuous observation of crops through transects and by flying over certain areas of the Beni departments which were still flooded and inaccessible by road. It also visited several agricultural and livestock markets to see the availability of food and the prevailing prices.

According to the data processed by the Mission, based on the data supplied by the National Statistical Institute (INE), in 2007/08 the area under cereals and root crops was just over a million hectares, very similar to the previous season. Production of cereals (including the secondary winter harvest of the year before) and of root crops in 2008 is estimated at 1.68 million tonnes and 996 000 tonnes, respectively. These values are even lower of the low levels of production achieved the year before, with a reduction of 1.75 percent for cereals and 5.30 per cent for roots. The winter wheat crop, planted in April 2007 and harvested in August/September of the same year, has benefited from the abundant residual humidity caused by the intense rainfall of the phenomenon of "El Niño", with increase in yields and production. It is estimated also that the production of maize and quinoa crops may slightly increase if compared to previous year. This is the consequence of an increase in planted area and the positive effect of abundant rains in some areas that partly balanced the losses occurred in others. Paddy has been the food crop that has been more affected, with a sensible reduction in harvested area (-9.1 per cent if compared to 2007 and -25 percent in compared to last five year average) and yields (-4.8 percent if compared to 2007).

The Mission estimates that wheat imports in the 2008/09 commercial year will be at normal level of approximately 450 000 tonnes, one-third of which are expected to be covered by informal imports from neighbouring countries. In addition, rice and potatoes import requirements are forecast at high 74 000 and 230 000 tonnes, levels very similar to previous yera. The aggregate cereals and root crop deficit in 2008/09 is estimated at 600 000 tonnes of cereals equivalent, essentially the same of the prior year. It is expected that this will be covered partly through official imports and partly through informal imports from bordering countries.

As a consequence of the adverse climatic events, the Mission estimates that approximately 28 000 families will probably face a situation of food insecurity with need of emergency assistance. Some 17 000 of them are expected to need food assistance until October 2008 as a consequence of the disruption of their livelihood mechanisms.

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