

Country Programme Evaluation Series

Evaluation of FAO's contribution to the Plurinational State of Bolivia

2018–2021

Executive summary

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Introduction

1. The Office of Evaluation (OED) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has been conducting country programme evaluations since 2005, usually during the last year of the Country Programming Framework (CPF). COVID-19 and its effects on people's mobility and health made it difficult to conduct a complete and rigorous assessment. Therefore, this exercise was designed as a strategic review (instead of a comprehensive assessment) with the aim of contributing to the formulation process of the new FAO CPF in Bolivia.
2. This review covers the work carried out by FAO in the 2018–2021 period within the CPF framework. It therefore includes the four thematic areas and cross-cutting themes prioritized, with an emphasis on gender equality and the inclusion of indigenous peoples. It also takes into account the country's new priorities, as well as FAO's strategic frameworks at the regional and global levels.
3. The main intended user of this information is the FAO country office. However, the context analysis, findings and lessons learned, as well as the recommendations contained in this report, may be useful for other relevant actors such as staff of the FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (RLC) and headquarters, governments at different levels of the State, international cooperation agencies, etc.

Methodology

4. The review assessed the alignment of FAO's work with the country's policies and needs, as well as the most relevant results and the factors, lessons and practices that favoured the achievements. Consideration of gender aspects and the inclusion of indigenous peoples has also been assessed, analysing the potential areas and axes of action to be taken into account in the next programming cycle.
5. It was carried out by a team of external consultants who worked closely with the country office and under OED supervision from July 2021 to March 2022. The team began its work by analysing documents produced by FAO and its counterparts under each CPF priority area. This information allowed for developing theories of change (TOC), as well as identifying the most relevant results reported under each priority area. Subsequently, FAO personnel in Bolivia, their main counterparts and some beneficiary groups were interviewed between August and October 2021. This also included virtual workshops with FAO personnel involved in CPF implementation. The result of the triangulation was discussed in a workshop with country office and RLC personnel in December 2021.
6. The analysis considered the CPF implementation context of 2018–2021. This period was influenced by: i) social and political turbulence; ii) the COVID-19 pandemic; and iii) internal programmatic changes and absence of FAO representative. These affected not only the implementation of the country programme but also the national development plans and objectives during the evaluation period.

Findings

7. The evaluation found that FAO has made several contributions in Bolivia across all priority areas and include the following:
 - i. *Food and nutrition security with sovereignty (priority area 1)*: FAO's work has been aligned with the national goals of diversified sovereignty in production and food under an

agroecological approach. This work has been relevant, as it has focused on groups vulnerable to food insecurity and is considered a benchmark in countries with similar contexts.

- ii. *Sustainable agrifood systems, community and peasant family farming (priority area 2)*: FAO placed great emphasis on building an institutional framework to address the issue of family farming in a more complete way and in line with national priorities.
 - iii. *Comprehensive and sustainable management of forests, water and biodiversity (priority area 3)*: FAO's promotion of a comprehensive approach to the management of natural resources, especially sustainable forest management among vulnerable populations, was very appropriate for the country's context.
 - iv. *Livelihood resilience and integrated risk management (priority area 4)*: FAO's work has been relevant as it aligns with the national environmental sovereignty agenda, as well as the regional and global sustainability and resilience agenda.
8. All-level capacity building, especially collaboration with autonomous municipal governments, indigenous centres and productive associations has been key for the achievements. Given the context and the programmatic changes during the period under evaluation, maintaining working relationships with different actors allowed for continuity in the interventions. At the same time, this resulted in a fragmentation of the programme. Also, it was not always clear whether there were sufficient synergies between the different interventions.
9. In relation to cross-cutting themes, the gender approach has been systematically promoted. Training and awareness-raising activities were very relevant for this goal. The inclusion of indigenous peoples was directly or indirectly taken into consideration in almost all interventions. The main lines of action to facilitate such inclusion have been the preparation and implementation of community life plans and territorial management, as well as the strengthening of capacities and the development of enterprises. However, there is room for further improving the inclusion of vulnerable groups in FAO interventions.

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusion 1. FAO's work within the 2018–2022 CPF setting is relevant. It is closely aligned with government priorities and seeks to contribute to medium- and long-term processes. It does so by linking initiatives and actions to national plans, strategies and programmes aimed at the three fundamental pillars (6, 8 and 9) of the 2016–2020 Economic and Social Development Plan (ESDP). FAO's action is also relevant to the country's needs in facing agrifood sector challenges, as identified in the CPF. In fact, it focuses on increasing productivity, striking a better balance between social and productive development, and protecting natural resources.

Conclusion 2. Overall, FAO's response to the changing environment in Bolivia has been appropriate, largely due to the country office's responsiveness. This resulted in the development of strategies for the largest number of activities to keep going in collaboration with actors and local governments. These strategies also pursue the continuation of key processes despite changes of governments and priorities that occurred during the period under evaluation.

Conclusion 3. FAO has contributed to the further institutionalization of key issues for the development of different sectors in Bolivia. This is due to its good strategic positioning, advocacy and analytical work at the grassroots level. At the same time, this resulted in programme fragmentation where it was sometimes unclear whether the synergies between the different interventions were enough. The transformation of the agrifood sector will require that FAO use new tools to better plan its future work and facilitate the monitoring of results and decision-making.

Conclusion 4. To a large extent, the sustainability of FAO-supported initiatives and outcomes depends on the continuous strengthening of capacities at the municipal, departmental and national levels. This especially holds true because of the changing political environment and the reduced availability of resources. At the same time, the results of the pilot experiences have not been systematized. This aspect could provide inputs for exit strategies that give continuity to the work.

Conclusion 5. The gender approach has been vigorously mainstreamed, highlighting progress in capacity development and women's empowerment at the economic and social levels. The progress in indigenous peoples mainstreaming is witnessed by their large presence in interventions and projects. There are opportunities for improvement in implementing processes such as free and informed prior consultation.

Conclusion 6. Factors that contributed to the results included: i) FAO's ability to work in coordination with national and municipal authorities, as well as organizations of small producers and indigenous peoples; ii) continuous training at different governmental levels and, in particular, training at the community level; iii) working with community and municipal promoters; and iv) the collaboration with and participation of actors such as cooperation agencies, civil society organizations and academia. The latter has been particularly valuable because of its potential to innovate and develop technology based on local research. Moreover, key lessons stood out, such as the need to invest time and effort in advocacy at various levels, adapting work approaches to changing needs, and the importance of focusing on not only technical aspects but also policy issues.

Recommendation 1. FAO aims to advance the transition to a healthier, more sustainable and resilient agrifood system, along with a full recovery from the effects of COVID-19. In order to do so, it should promote greater intersectoral work in the new programming framework. For this, it must capitalize on its recognition at the national level and among development organizations, as well as on its experience in leading and coordinating different thematic areas (e.g. risk management) at not just the technical level but also in terms of policies.

Recommendation 2. FAO should make a larger use of theories of change in designing and implementing its new programming framework. This would facilitate the articulation and monitoring of its contributions to FAO objectives, the government's national development plan and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

Recommendation 3. FAO should strengthen the monitoring and evaluation system to generate evidence about the progress of the processes and expected programme results. This should go beyond the monitoring of progress and actions at the project level. The aim is to capitalize on lessons and good practices for impacting public policies that make actions and initiatives scalable and sustainable.

Recommendation 4. FAO should focus its efforts on consolidating the programmatic approach in the next programming cycle and in the formulation of new projects. To this end, the following is suggested. The work plan risks and assumptions that may affect or limit the expected achievement should be identified and emphasized in a consistent and comprehensive way. This includes potential strategies to prevent or mitigate risks, including internal capacities necessary for implementation and monitoring. All of this should be based on lessons learned from previous planning cycles.

Recommendation 5. FAO should strengthen the technical capacities of executing agencies at different governmental levels to enable them to implement and measure results efficiently. The expected achievement of the new programming cycle will, to a large extent, depend on the capacity of local partners and counterparts to implement complex programmes and projects effectively and in accordance with the expected standards of development cooperation.

Recommendation 6. FAO should apply a gender approach to its projects in a more structured way and systematically implement processes such as free and informed prior consultation.

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