

Reflections by Carsten Schwensen, Team Leader of the Bolivia evaluation

Danida seized the opportunities for transformational change

Denmark/Danida has made a difference in Bolivia. Danida seized opportunities in important areas and contributed to keeping momentum for transformational change, that cannot be reversed. The most striking example is indigenous peoples, but others include decentralization and – in recent years – renewable energy. By contrast, Danida's strong focus on gender failed to make a real impact in Bolivia.

Bolivia as a test ground for a Danish top priority

Everybody mentions indigenous peoples when asked about concrete results of Danish support to Bolivia. Again, the timing was important. The rights of indigenous peoples have for decades been a top priority of Denmark internationally, and Bolivia provided an ideal test ground for turning ideals into reality. The need and the wish were genuinely Bolivian, and Denmark came at the right time to contribute to this development. In this area Denmark contributed to a transformation that cannot be reversed and permeates the Bolivian society: The titling of land and inclusion of indigenous languages in schools are obvious examples of this. Another is the fact that indigenous peoples are now guaranteed a say in the management of Bolivia's national parks that make up 15 % of Bolivia's total area.

An early success, which stagnated

Decentralization is another area where Denmark came at the right time. Even before Danish development cooperation with Bolivia started, Bolivia had embarked on the process of decentralization. It is fair to say that decentralization has been a kind of Danida flagship and specialty for years, and Danida supported the process in many different ways. Bolivian informants agree that what has been achieved here, would not have been possible without Danida. In recent years Bolivian determination to move on with the decentralization, though, has weakened.

Renewable energy holds a potential for future cooperation

Danida is recognised as a first mover in promoting renewable energy in Bolivia. Danida saw the window of opportunity when the President Evo Morales personally announced renewable energy as a national priority and acted fast by including renewable energy in phase 3 of the Danish environment programme from 2014. This has created quick and concrete results, but also paved the way for a strong future Danish-Bolivian cooperation of mutual benefit. Vestas, for example, is now involved in one of the three new wind farms in Santa Cruz financed under Danida Business Finance.

Real change remains to be seen on gender equality

Despite the fact that gender has been a key concern in Danish development assistance during the more than 20 years of development cooperation with Bolivia, an effective foundation for real gender equality in the Bolivian society is yet to be established. Bolivia does achieve a high score on international gender equality indexes, but if it wasn't for its 50 % women representation in parliament guaranteed by law, the score would be much lower. Bolivia does have legislation for protection of women against violence and political persecution. But promoting gender equality

has not been a government priority nor has it been dealt with from a strategic perspective in Danida's sector programmes.

This is an example of what happens when a key priority of a development partner like Danida is not genuinely shared by the partner country. A concrete case illustrating this is the support to the mining sector which included both gender, as well as social and environmental concerns. Few of these, however, survived, when Danida support came to an end.

Lessons learned on operating in an unstable context

After the political turmoil in the early 2000s, Bolivia on the surface seems a rather politically stable country after Evo Morales took over as president in 2006 and has been in office for more than a decade. But the reality is different: Policies and politicians in important offices constantly change, and while Bolivia should not be defined as a fragile state, there are lessons to be learned for support to fragile states and situations. Where development programmes are implemented in complex and constantly shifting political and institutional contexts, it is necessary to apply an even more flexible, adaptive and opportunity-driven programmatic approach with short-term planning cycles and decision points.