

Success stories from the Danish engagement in Bolivia

Danida's most concrete contribution: Land titles for indigenous peoples

Support to indigenous peoples has been a priority for Danida since the opening of the Embassy in Bolivia in 1995, and Danida is recognized as a key player in contributing to the transformation of the Plurinational State of Bolivia through its intervention for the inclusion of indigenous peoples and recognition of their rights in public life. It is clear that the support given by the international community, in particular by Denmark, contributed in a significant manner to the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples.

Perhaps the most concrete and outstanding result of Danish assistance to Bolivia according to the evaluation was ensuring land rights and titling to thousands of indigenous people between 1998 and 2010. These indigenous community territories cover a total area of no less than 24 million hectares – that is a quarter of Bolivia's total area.

Out of these 24 million hectares, 12 million hectares were directly attributable to Danish assistance – that is 2.6 times the total size of Denmark.

A total of 135 Indigenous Community Territories (TCOs in Spanish) were surveyed and titled, directly benefitting more than 300,000 indigenous people. This agrarian reform process resulted in fulfilment of a historical demand in Bolivia, it reconfigured the national map and cannot be reversed. Moreover, the right to land and territory was enshrined in the current constitution of 2009, and a public policy of land redistribution recognising indigenous communities was also elaborated and implemented.

Successful double-track approach

Danida's support to promoting indigenous peoples' rights was also a positive example of the 'double-track' strategy used by Danida in many areas, keeping the dialogue open with both government and civil society. This 'double-track' strategy, understood as the inclusion of both state institutions and representative organisations of the indigenous people in the programme implementation, was key to the achievement of results.

The evaluation notes that Danida's support to the enhancement of the capacity of indigenous organisations also laid the foundation for the design and development of a model for bilingual education in Bolivia.

Danida also provided significant support to strengthening the technical and operative capacities of the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA), and this became a crucial supporting factor for the agrarian revolution that made redistribution of land possible.

On top of the direct support to indigenous peoples, the Danish contribution to enhancement of indigenous peoples' rights and livelihoods also came about through support of these rights within other sector programmes.

“Danida left before we could walk alone”

Various governmental and civil society actors recognize Danida for its long-term projection based on sectoral support and for its flexibility to adjust the strategy between the first and second phases of the support to indigenous peoples, based on a good assessment of context and opportunities, formulating and pursuing a clear theory of change.

Danida is, however, criticised for only supporting indigenous peoples as a crosscutting element after the termination of the second phase of the sector programme in 2010. As one informant explained:

"With the support of Danida we learned to take our first steps, but they left before we could walk alone".

Don't forget indigenous peoples, Danida

Although, Danish development cooperation with Bolivia is now being phased out, indigenous people should remain a Danish priority, the evaluation recommends: At global level, Denmark's support for indigenous peoples' groups should remain at the top of the development agenda with a particular view to addressing the role and challenges faced by these groups in relation to sustainable forestry management.

ID cards to two million 'undocumented Bolivians'

An area where the evaluation describes Danish assistance as 'a clear champion' is in relation to Citizen Registration and the provision of ID cards. Denmark is currently the only donor providing direct support to the national documentation service (SEGIP), which has reached impressive, measurable results.

Through the Danish support SEGIP was strengthened with databases and fingerprint identification devices, when the mandate to issue ID cards was transferred from the National Police to SEGIP.

A special and innovative feature was the use of mobile brigades, which has now reached every corner of the country and nearly two million undocumented Bolivians have received their ID cards since 2009.

Cheaper and faster

In this process, the average cost of getting an ID card has fallen from anywhere over 120 BS (about USD 12) to the current price of 17 BS (about USD 1.75). This money is directly deposited into a bank account (to avoid and prevent corruption), and the average time to obtain an ID card has been reduced from weeks or months to just two hours if the necessary documentation is presented (basically a birth certificate).

Dual approach and shrinking space for CSOs

Bolivia has seen dramatic political and social changes during the period of Danish support, but the Danish assistance has demonstrated a relatively high degree of flexibility and ability to adapt to what the evaluation describes as “changing contextual circumstances” and “windows of opportunities”.

One of the methods used by Danida is the ‘dual approach’ – that is engaging with both governmental and nongovernmental institutions within supported sectors. That, the evaluation concludes, has been an effective means by which to overcome difficulties in the implementation process and to promote and support multi-stakeholder dialogue and cooperation.

The involvement of local and nongovernmental organisations has created a diversified platform of partners, which has been particularly useful both in situations where governmental institutions have been ineffective and where it has been more relevant to work with NGOs (e.g. on social accountability issues).

The dual approach success story

The most concrete result of applying the dual approach is found in Danida’s support to education. Here, Denmark played a key role in advocating for the development of literacy and educational materials in 19 different languages, as well as for supporting Indigenous Peoples’ Educational Councils to become key actors in the education sector.

Shrinking space for Civil Society

Adopting the dual approach has become more difficult in recent years, as the Bolivian government has imposed more limits and restrictions to civil society organisations, but here, the evaluation says, the Danish insistence on channeling part of the support through NGOs, via a range of different modalities and set-ups, has been an important response to the shrinking of CSO space.

Danida’s support to agriculture reduced extreme poverty

Denmark has been providing assistance to the agriculture sector in Bolivia for more than 45 years and has been, by far, the largest bilateral donor supporting the development of the agricultural sector, focusing on small-scale farmers.

The impact of this support has – according to the evaluation – improved the lives of large numbers of Bolivians:

According to official statistics, the rate of extreme poverty in rural areas was reduced from 62 % in 2002 to around 40 % by 2013 and has remained at that level since. While estimates of increase in income vary, it is clear that the Danish assistance contributed to increasing the income of thousands of small farmers, particularly in the highland regions. The most reliable data comes from a study commissioned by Danida in 2010, which found that the Danish programme support contributed to an average increase in income of 21%.

The evaluation details what made the Danish support to agriculture successful and concludes that overall, Danida is seen as one of the most important contributors to the agricultural sector specifically focused on benefiting small producers in Bolivia, including indigenous people in the highlands. Danida has made a significant contribution to developing the capacity of the national, departmental and municipal government in the agriculture sector and developing national institutions to support small-scale farmers in the country.

Danish-supported kickstart to renewable energy

Renewable energy (RE) is a top priority of the Bolivian government and given the strong Danish technical competencies within this area it was included in phase 3 of the Danish environment programme from 2014 on the request of Bolivia. And since then things have moved fast.

The evaluation describes how Denmark has been a first mover in demonstrating the feasibility of different types of RE projects and the particularly strong partnership between Denmark and Bolivia that has developed in this area. It also concludes that the more recent Danish focus on supporting energy sector development in Bolivia (2014-2018) has within a very short time become a catalyst for boosting the RE agenda in the country.

Solar power to remote areas

In 2015 Danida provided funding for a pre-feasibility study of eight concrete renewable energy projects within solar, wind and biomass. The study was done by the national power company ENDE, and several of these projects have since been implemented or are in the process of implementation with funding from various sources.

One of them is a solar 5 MW power plant which is now in operation in Cobija – the largest city in the northeastern region of Pando. Cobija is located in an isolated area bordering Peru and Brazil, and it is not practically possible to connect the city to the national Bolivian power grid. Until recently, the citizens of Cobija therefore had to rely on diesel-powered generators to provide their energy needs. Denmark funded a feasibility study for the Cobija solar power plant and has provided DKK 40 million in investment support, around half of the total cost. It is expected that the Cobija plant will inspire similar solar power plants throughout Bolivia.

Wind is coming big scale

In 2016 Denmark approved a grant to co-finance three wind farms in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, a total investment of DKK 1.3 billion. The Danish support will come through Danida Business Finance as a soft loan worth DKK 750 million and Danida direct support of DKK 366 million. A contract for this project with Vestas was signed in December 2017.

Future potential

With the traditional Danish-Bolivian partnership coming to an end, the evaluation notes that renewable energy provides an interesting potential for continued Danish-Bolivian commercial cooperation: research, technology development, technical assistance, etc.