

SPECIAL REPORT

FAO/WFP FOOD SECURITY ASSESSMENT MISSION TO BOLIVIA

29 June 2007

Mission Highlights

- Between November 2006 and March 2007 all departments in the country were affected by a series of adverse climatic events, such as drought, frost, hail-storms and flooding, which damaged crops and reduced yields.
- Rice crop suffered the most serious losses, with a 35 percent fall in output if compared to the previous year, while soybean and potatoes output declined by around 12 percent over 2006.
- Total cereals and root crop production in 2007 has been estimated at 1.6 million and 985 000 tonnes, respectively, both of which were 13 percent below the previous average year.
- In the highlands, dry weather and frosts at the beginning of the year reduced potato and quinoa production. Pastureland for camelid livestock was also adversely affected and is expected to become scarce from July/August onwards, long before the next rainy season in October/November.
- In the lowlands, floods caused losses of soybean, rice and maize crops; the important livestock sector has been severely damaged, with important losses of livestock and pastureland, and the spread of animal health problems.
- Throughout the country, prices of the main basic products rose sharply after February due to expectations of reduced supplies and cases of speculation by intermediaries.
- Rice and potato prices at the end of May were 30 percent to 50 percent higher than a year ago, seriously impacting on the cost of the basic food basket and access to food by the most vulnerable sections of the population, mainly in the urban areas.
- Cereal and potatoes import requirements for the 2007/08 (July/June) commercial year are estimated at 590 000 tonnes of cereals equivalent, 20 percent more than the year before. In particular, rice and potato imports will increase fourfold and threefold, respectively, above 2006/07 levels. These are expected to be covered by commercial imports, partly from unofficial imports from bordering countries.
- In the areas most seriously affected by flood, drought and frost, the most vulnerable families have suffered heavy losses of basic crops and livestock, which are the main source of food and incomes, threatening their food and nutritional security. Most of these people are small indigenous farmers who combine farming with temporary labouring.
- Some 20 000 families in the departments of Santa Cruz, Cochabamba, Tarija and Beni are estimated are facing serious food insecurity and need emergency food assistance. The loss of their main sources of food and incomes due to floods, and the few livelihood alternatives available to them, have reduced their ability to gain access to food, thereby compromising their food and nutrition security and obliging them to resort to survival mechanisms that may result in the depletion of their assets base.
- Considering the high level of vulnerability and poverty in the Andean areas that have been affected by drought and frost, the rural families whose production has suddenly slumped must be constantly monitored and given assistance as required.



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS, ROME



WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME, ROME

1. OVERVIEW

A joint FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Evaluation Mission visited Bolivia from 9 to 28 April 2007 to evaluate cereals and root crop production in 2007, 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 2007/08 (July/June) commercial year. The Mission worked very closely with two evaluation exercises that were being deployed simultaneously: a multisectoral mission by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), to evaluate and appraise the losses in various economic sectors, and a joint FAO/ILO mission for the rapid appraisal of the impact of the unfavourable climatic events on the livelihoods of the local population. An expert from the FAO Emergency Operations Service (TCEO) of the Technical Cooperation Department also worked with the Mission to prepare the preliminary inventory of emergency and rehabilitation projects for the Bolivian agricultural and livestock sector.

At the same time, WFP conducted an Emergency Food Security Assessment (EFSA)¹ which comprehensively assessed the effects of the climatic events on the food security of the population, through household surveys and by recording the anthropometric data on children under five years of age. 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 under the Participatory Integrated Rural Development in Depressed Areas Programme (DRIPAD).

During the first three days at La Paz, the Mission held meetings with various national and international institutions to discuss the socio-economic situation and to acquire the latest information available on macroeconomic indicators, baseline studies on food security at the national and regional levels, prices of the main agricultural products, early warning bulletins and meteorological data on the 2006/07 agricultural season. In order to take part in field visits, about 10 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 that period.

During 12 days of fieldwork, the Mission interviewed regional government officials, rural community leaders, NGO officials and other key informants, as well as farmers and traders. The Mission also 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 climatic events on agricultural production and fisheries, assets and infrastructure and on diseases and access to services.

The Mission was organised into three teams and visited eight of the nine departments in the country (only the department of Pando could not be visited), comprising about 70 municipalities, and conducted about 250 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 9 500 km, with continuous observation of crops through transects and (thanks to the support of the MDRAYMA and the National Civil Defence Service) by overflying 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 foodstuffs and the prevailing prices.

According to the data processed by the Mission, based on the data supplied by the National Statistical Institute (INE), in 2006/07 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 2007 is estimated at 1.6 million tonnes and 980 500 tonnes, respectively, 13 percent below the previous year in each instance. The country suffers from a structural wheat deficit and imports three-quarters of its consumption requirements. Wheat imports in

¹ The EFSA was carried out in the flood-affected areas in the regions of Beni, Santa Cruz, Cochabamba and Tarija.

the 2007/08 commercial year are estimated at normal level of 450 000 tonnes, one-third of which are expected to be covered by informal imports from neighbouring countries. By contrast, rice import requirements have increased fourfold to 76 000 tonnes, while potatoes have increased threefold to 260 000 tonnes. The aggregate cereals and root crop shortfall in 2006/07 is estimated at 590 000 tonnes of cereals equivalent, which is 13 percent above the prior year. It is expected that this will be covered partly through official imports and partly through informal imports from bordering countries.

The climatic events had also heavy repercussions on the highly food insecurity-prone households. In the lowlands affected by floods, the EFSA recorded major losses not only in their subsistence production, but also a reduced capacity to generate alternative income and migration to other areas. The loss of the main sources of food and income and the limited alternatives of livelihoods have reduced the food access capacity of these families, jeopardising their food and nutritional security and forcing them to adopt survival mechanisms, which are depleting the few assets they possess. These families, initially numbering 20 000, need emergency food assistance and their nutritional status and food security must be monitored. At the same time, in the highlands, considering the high level of vulnerability and poverty of the areas that have been affected by drought and frost, the rural families whose production has suddenly slumped must be constantly monitored and given assistance as required.

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