



Survey of Rural Development Policies and Programs Based on a Territorial Focus in Bolivia¹

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Executive Summary

In an effort to create inputs in order to identify opportunities for collaboration and incidence for the Territorial Dynamics Program – which is being financed by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC)–, the Latin American Center for Rural Development (RIMISP) has undertaken a region-wide survey of public programs and policies that focus on or include rural matters and that are based on or inspired by a territorial approach.

The survey results for Bolivia are presented in two parts. The first is a primary report that describes the objectives and reach of the Bolivia survey and the methodology employed to gather and analyze the data. It also presents policies and programs linked to the territorial focus in six areas that have been identified as priorities for analysis. This part of the survey goes on to describe the main progress that has been made in the implementation of the territorial approach in Bolivia, possible spaces for cooperation with RIMISP, and the sources cited. The second part contains appendices that document and support the observations made in the first and is designed to serve as an input for RIMISP's future work.

Based on the analysis of the data gathered and systematized, we can state –by way of summary- that the situation of Bolivia in regard to the territorial

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approach and opportunities for greater development are linked to the following areas:

a) The political and legal situation is potentially favorable in that there are laws, plans and specific programs that propose a territorial approach, at least on paper. This reflects a process of decentralization and citizen participation that has been present for more than a decade. However, there are certain contradictions, such as a notable tendency towards centralization in the approaches and resources and a political demand for extreme regional autonomy. Both of these factors make it difficult to move forward with territorial initiatives. Also, proposals for "deepening" decentralization tend to fail to come together, which contributes to a confusing set of communities, municipal governments, macro-communities, regions, etc. that have criteria that are often opposed to territorial configuration and demarcation.

b) Despite the declarations of principle made by the central government and decentralized public entities, cooperation agencies, networks, academic and research centers and other civil society instances, there is no coordination among these spheres and significant dispersion of actions persists. In general, institutionalism has not been strengthened and in some cases has even weakened, particularly as a result of the conflict that the country is experiencing.

c) Though reference is made to the private sector and markets, the relationship between them is quite incipient and contradictory positions –which are often very ideological- tend to emerge. These are the same positions that do not allow certain principles of rural territorial development to gel and become operational, such as rural-urban coordination and simultaneity of productive and institutional transformation processes.

d) Theoretically, elements oriented towards economic growth, social inclusion and environmental sustainability emerge from the approaches, objectives and topics that are discussed. However, the specific proposals that circulate are still very much linked to the design of relatively traditional projects and programs or continue to have a level of conceptualization that is not completely grounded.

e) In the end, a fairly conservative approach to the fight against poverty with a "target" that is very much linked to rural communities, indigenous peoples and certain professions under a marked corporatist emphasis continues to dominate. The collective is given priority over initiatives of individuals or interest groups and everything is thought to run top-down

with very little recognition of the strategies that members of rural communities have developed to escape poverty. The process of formulating national and sector-specific plans (which tend to involve very little participation and have a verticalist, discursive bent) and their execution (which is bureaucratic and slow rather than pragmatic and affected by entangled political-party interests) do not demonstrate significant changes, at least in regard to the rural sector.

f) While the composition of the elite class has changed, mechanisms of power have not. Despite the ideology and discourses, there is no evidence that the political agendas include coherent and convincing policy and investment measures focused on rural areas.

g) We have seen significant resources –for a country like Bolivia- that could be systematically channeled towards the promotion of the territorial focus. The greatest risk is a historically weak capacity for execution.

h) We have yet to see the implementation of a solid system for monitoring and evaluating the effects and impacts of policies, programs and projects. In spite of the criticism that has been offered of the lack of “alignment” of international cooperation, priority has been placed on bureaucratic oversight mechanisms that slow investment rather than encouraging it. This is even more evident in new approaches that involve overcoming sector-specific efforts and channeling resources with minimal technocratic or political-partisan mediation.

As these elements have emerged, Bolivia has not offered an ideal context for collaborating with the Territorial Dynamics Program. Its unresolved problems have multiplied and a great deal of tension and confrontations at every level. However, it is difficult to think of a regional program of this nature that would not include Bolivia precisely because of the complex position that it presents and its increasing country risk. In this sense, RIMISP and the Territorial Dynamics Program offer the advantage of promoting a regional approach and initiative designed to contribute to opening borders at a time when there is a tendency –from inside and out- to view Bolivia as an exception with no point of comparison.

It is also clear that opportunities for valuing different types of assets are emerging from the territories. There are self-generated initiatives and relatively innovative efforts supported through external resources that could benefit from the support of Program components.

In view of this and in order to avoid unnecessary weakening and exaggerated expectations that do not reflect the current situation, we have focused on specific areas in which cooperation might be possible as a function of some of the components of the Territorial Dynamics Program.

Applied Research Component

The Program is working with Fundación Tierra and influential researchers in the field from the University of Manchester to develop the first phase of a mapping effort. We suggest that the continuity of these institutions and the team itself be examined during the second phase, when areas for in-depth study are selected. This choice should be made on the basis of academic excellence, but it is also important to consider effective openness and existing capacity to include other academic and research centers in the country in order to solvent and structurally relate with them and contribute to strengthening a critical mass of importance for the country. One also must consider the current legitimacy of the institutions in the country. If this is not taken into account, researchers will run the risk of achieving good results at the research level but failing to generate mechanisms for accumulating and using knowledge where they could be very useful, particularly in a country like Bolivia.

We have developed a list of potential initiatives that could be developed regardless of the institutions chosen for the project. They include: (i) incorporating senior researchers from other spaces; (ii) creating a national panel of institutions and research centers to monitor the research and periodically offer opinions on its direction; and (iii) coordinating periodic events during which the results can be presented and discussed in order to increase levels of involvement and possible response.

Along these lines, the main candidates –besides Fundación Tierra- for this process might be Fundación PIEB, CESU/UMSS, CEBEM, and CIDES-UMSA. An effort would have to be made to identify key members of each of these organizations.

Capacity Building Component

This may be the area in which Bolivia presents the largest number of opportunities due to the importance of contributing to the training of new generations of technical and political operators and the territorial level in that nation.

It has been difficult to establish technical collaboration processes within the central government. There are several reasons for this, including the fact that the management priorities were initially and continue to be focused on policy

management and obtaining visible results in the short-term. Current social conflicts have made this situation even more difficult.

There are, however, some spaces that could be explored, including the PDCR, which has allowed for the identification of possible areas of cooperation such as: (i) the creation of spaces for collaboration on conceptual, methodological and instrumental matters; (ii) exchanges of experiences; (iii) the systematization of results and reflection processes; and (iv) joint execution of certain actions, such as those linked to capacity building and networks.

A second area of cooperation that will be more feasible when the territories for the research are chosen is that of prefectures, commonwealths and the main municipalities in these territories. Before moving forward in this area, it will be necessary to verify the level of contact between these bodies and the central government and any real opportunities to work in the departmental field without having to take on other disputes. But it is clear that part of the public investment and increased specific interest in territorial development (understand in a "broad and creative" manner) is found at these levels, where most of the cooperation is directed. We also find the most interesting experiences at this level, which undoubtedly will need reinforcement by qualified operators. It might be possible to stimulate virtuous circles with the PDRC itself or other important programs that are beginning to be executed (such as the Project for Sustainable Development of Lake Titicaca and the Help in Action Programs) or those that are currently in the design phase, such as the Bioculture Program in which the DTR-IC/RIMISP Project is already involved.

Due to the type of conceptual and methodological framework that is being used for the Program, it would be feasible to focus attention based on existing institutionalism in the territories where the research will be performed. Rather than forcing agendas, this would involve contributing to an environment of gradual training that places a priority on networking and the inclusion of actors such as the OECAs and private companies that have a long-term presence in the territory.

Finally, an important space that no one is covering in a serious manner and that is increasingly demanding attention involves promoting coordination between women's political participation in the local context and their social inclusion and economic development. Given that the Territorial Dynamics Program looks to promote a substantive gender approach, we suggest that the capacity building component explore this as one of the opportunities for involving more capable women who are committed to their own territories in territorial gender agendas.

Graduate Level Training Component

When asked about opportunities for cooperation with universities and academic centers, respondents mentioned the following: i) training researchers who can work and reflect on incipient processes of territorial development (applied research designed to support operational aspects); ii) coordination of the university and the State in the sense of reflecting on the construction of territorial public policy; and iii) academic training through graduate programs that increase capacities from the position of decision-makers.

The Program already has made some decisions regarding this component, such as strengthening the capacity of a group of Central American and Andean universities. In the case of Bolivia, we suggest that project partners identify certain individuals (teachers, key investigators) who are supported by solvent institutionalism and experience and who are capable of establishing inter-institutional bridges that contribute to broadening the national critical mass and demonstrating effectiveness and efficiency in their institutional performance. In view of the type of collaborative work that it has developed in the past, Fundación PIEB/UPIEB might be a good candidate, perhaps in alliance with CESU/UMSS. It also might be beneficial to explore the possibility of incorporating CIDES and other UMSA departments or a public university that needs strengthening at various levels.

Communications Component (as a transversal component)

Bolivia does not currently present favorable conditions for clearly and directly aiming for political incidence. However, one could engage in low intensity efforts to cultivate certain spaces that are favorable for a broader discussion and perhaps hold some sort of event that stimulates dialogue between local potential counterparts and their peers from the rest of the region. One of these spaces is the Rural Development Group (G-DRU), though it has been weakened a bit in recent years. In addition to bringing together public and private institutions, social organizations and international cooperation agencies, G-DRU has incorporated an agenda focused on rural territorial development.

Another possibility is the group of cooperation agencies that are participating in the decentralization subgroup in the Table of Cooperation with the Government, particularly those that are already working with or have worked with the Vice Ministry of Decentralization during the present administration, such as the World Bank, COSUDE, DANIDA, SNV, AECID and GTZ.