

PROJECT CONCERN INTERNATIONAL
USDA-Funded Food for Progress Program, Bolivia, 2003-2009
MIS Llamas Project: Improving lives in the high plains of Bolivia

Bolivia is the poorest, most food insecure country in South America. Eight in ten rural families live in poverty. The altiplano, the vast, high-plains region stretching across the Western half of Bolivia, is home to many rural indigenous families where development is hindered by a number of factors, including inadequate access to capital, markets and commercialization services for agricultural products and businesses; poor technology transfer; disorganized, and ineffective agri-business value chains; and inadequate productive infrastructure and sanitation for the processing of value-added food products.

Between 2003 and 2009, with support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food for Progress program, PCI conducted three phases of the “MIS Llamas Project” with 139 communities that depended almost exclusively on llama herds for their livelihoods, but productivity and incomes were very low. Working with the community, PCI identified and addressed the problems in the llama chain of production, introducing measures that improved llama survival; improved the production and the quality of llama products; and increased access to markets for llama products. Prior to the project, llama producers depended on outside, third parties to purchase their livestock and/or its derivatives (meat, hide, fiber). PCI helped local llama producers gain greater control over their wealth source by improving rural capacities all along the chain of production and marketing.



During the three phases of the project, the commodities directly distributed to participants in through the Food-for-Work (1,612 MT) and Food-for-Training (1,732 MT) included lentils, bulgur, peas, wheat flour, non-fat dehydrated milk and vegetable oil. These commodities were chosen based on project beneficiary demand.

The majority of the funding for the three phases of the project came from the monetization of wheat. An average of 16,700 MT of wheat was monetized during each phase of the project. The monetization assisted in addressing Bolivia’s national shortage, which was approximately 200,000 MT in 2009. The total amount monetized in the most recent monetization represented 7% of the national shortage. The monetization and importation of wheat also generated employment in the milling and bagging industries creating much needed jobs for the local population.

Below is a summary of some of the key impacts the MIS Llamas project:

Increased llama survival: Food for Work and Food for Training programs were used to construct llama corrals, increase fodder and improve the health and maintenance of the llamas. As a result, by 2009, llama producers saw a 22% increase in llama survival with indicators showing likely improvement of improvement of 50-80% by the end of the next season.

Improved quality of and incomes from llama by-products: PCI conducted training workshops, where llama producers learned how to improve the quality, quantity and marketing of llama by-products, including llama meat, hide and fiber (wool) products, which could significantly increase the revenue earned per animal. Those who were trained were also taught how to train others and formed “by-product committees” to continue the educational and product development process and to identify new marketing opportunities. For example, the by-products committees developed sales contracts to provide llama jerky to the School Breakfast Program in nine municipalities in the Department of Oruro, which improved nutritional value of school meals and benefited more than 6,000 children in rural areas.

At the end of the project, there was a 100% increase in production of by-products, with some communities experiencing increases as high as 458%. On average, the price per item increased by 60% and marketing was greatly expanded, both of which contributed to significantly higher producer incomes (84% on average, 300% for members of by-products committees).



Empowered women producers: The MIS Llamas activities empowered and built self-esteem of beneficiary partners. This was particularly evident among women, who improved their skills in production and commercialization and learned how to negotiate and take greater authority for decision making at the family and community level. Women comprised 37% of the participants in the MIS Llamas project. Most were active members of the participating llama-producer families and in the by-product production committees of llama fiber (wool), meat and hide. Support provided to 10 fiber production committees in 6 municipalities in Oruro focused improving the quality, designs and market position of llama fiber and fiber-related products. From 2007 to 2009, training was provided to the members of these committees in machine knitting, embroidering, loom knitting, hand knitting and business development. Women were overwhelmingly represented on the fiber committees, accounting for 99% of the 142 members and all 10 of the fiber production committees are headed by women. In the community of Sajama one of the members commented: “As women, we can now do things and can help support our family”, while another added “...this is also an inheritance we can leave our children”.

Increased market access for llamas and llama by-products: Given the remote location of producers and by-product committees, as well as their relative inexperience in the

marketplace, they needed time to learn how to gain access to markets, to compete, and to practice what they had learned. PCI assisted the producers in obtaining legal certification of the quality of their by-products through participation in the “Integrated Association for Camelid Producers (AIPC).” This was also an avenue for producers to market their products at trade fairs and promotional events and they created their own “MIS Llama” store in Oruro. The producer association contributed to doubling the number of commercial contracts signed with buyers and provided a means for growth and expansion.

Improved livelihoods of llama producers and their families: The MIS Llama project operated in 139 communities and helped 38,592 Bolivians directly improve their livelihoods. According to the final external evaluation, “As a consequence of this project, income of participants (llama producers and by-product committee members) more than doubled. Assessed separately, llama producers experienced an 84% increase in income. In addition to actual income, producers witnessed a 27% increase in herd size which can be largely attributable to improved survival. By-product committee members increased their incomes by almost 300% based on what they were making at the start of the project. Interviews indicated that this income is additive to other family income and that by-product activities are not replacing other income generating activities of members. The increased income is being used to expand operations, improve homes and increase food consumption. However, the most referenced use of funds is to extend educational opportunities for their children...the MIS Llamas model is an excellent model for rural development and improving livelihoods. It is a concept that is potentially replicable in other parts of the Andes and other herd-oriented societies around the world. While the results are impressive, the full impact is yet to be seen as continued llama survival and improved quality and expansion of llama by-product markets is likely to have a cumulative effect for years to come.”

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