

## **Land Reform in Bolivia: a forestry policy?**

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### **SUMMARY**

In this paper we analyze the Bolivian land reform within the general context of land reforms and then we look at how the Bolivian case could be better understood as a forest reform. First we discuss the ‘standard’ conditions for a successful land reform. Second we highlight that ‘special’ conditions apply to Bolivia. Next, we provide a synthesis of the discussion of the Bolivian government –in light of the points highlighted above– and show how the focus of the national authorities is centred on the standard conditions of land reform and how the issue of forest management is being neglected. We find that if land reform is carried out neglecting the forestry issue it might not solve the structural inequalities that characterize the Bolivian countryside and it is going to contribute to the problem of deforestation.

### **Introduction**

In this paper we analyze the Bolivian land reform within the general context of land reforms and then we look at how the Bolivian case could be better understood as a forest reform. First we discuss the ‘standard’ conditions for a successful land reform. Second we highlight that ‘special’ conditions apply to Bolivia. Next, we provide a synthesis of the discussion of the Bolivian government –in light of the points highlighted above– and show how the focus of the national authorities is centred on the standard conditions of land reform and how the issue of forest management is being neglected. We find that if land reform is carried out neglecting the forestry issue it might not solve the structural inequalities that characterize the Bolivian countryside (since the management systems that are going to be put in place are not sustainable) and it is going to contribute to the problem of deforestation.

### **Land Reform: conditions for success**

Over time the issue of land reform has been surfacing again and again in the policy debate. The various land reforms promoted since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have

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produced results that are very diverse. For example, while the Taiwanese and South Korean experiences with land reform are considered striking successes in terms of inequality reductions and in terms of promotion rural development and contributing to the conditions for national development, other countries –such as Mexico– have experienced ambitious land reforms without being able to rip social, nor economic benefits.

In this section we highlight the ‘standard’ conditions for a successful land reform focusing in particular on the ones identified by the political economy literature (ambitious targets and implementation), on the issue of plot size and of agricultural extension services.

### **Land reform in Bolivia**

Bolivia has already experienced two land reforms: one in the 1950s and one in the 1990s that is still to be completed. The first land reform was an outcome of the 1952 revolution and its aim was redressing the conditions of inequality and extreme poverty that were the very reasons for the uprising (Kay and Urioste, 2007).

The second experience of Bolivia with land reform was enacted in the mid 1990s but its implementation was so timid that only a minor fraction of land has been titled. The current government is giving a new impetus in order to complete it and land reform is a flagship of Morales’ government aiming to provide access to land to landless citizens, small landowners and to indigenous communities, through land titles and security of tenure (Gobierno de Bolivia, 2007a).

The government is paying much attention to the issue of forest reform and all the standard conditions mentioned above are (to a certain extent) addressed.

The Institute of Agrarian Reform (“Instituto de Reforma Agraria”, INRA), in charge of implementing the reform, does not possess details on the type of land being titled, but the majority of land requested by indigenous communities is covered with forest and the communities claimed more than 20 millions hectares of land (Pacheco, 2006: 9).

### **Land use**

The Bolivian Government, supported by donor agencies, has adopted an advanced method of land use planning matching biophysical characteristics of the soil with a participatory approach to public policies. The land use plans (PLUS, “planes de uso del suelo”) recognised the fragility of large parts of Bolivia, the threats posed by desertification and acknowledged the ecological services provided by forest. Land use should follow the vocation of the territory as suggested by the ecosystems’ characteristics, but at the same time it was recognised that the interest and the knowledge of local communities had to be taken into consideration in land planning<sup>2</sup>; as a result the formulation and approval of the PLUS was based on participatory principles and was the result of extensive consultations (Rojas *et al.*, 2003: III, 12). In 2001 a decree based on the PLUS identified around 40 millions of hectares as permanent productive forest (“tierras forestales de producción permanente”): land whose use could only be forest. Out of the 40 millions of hectares, around 30 million could be used for sustainable logging and the extraction of non-timber forest products (UDAPE, 2004; Pacheco, 2006: 18, 51),<sup>3</sup> but only 8 millions hectares – less than 30% of the potential – are currently given in concession and have a management plan; this area decreased in size in 2007.<sup>4</sup> This gives a measure of the current state of affairs when compared to the potential of forestry. Part of the forest exploited is not really following the management system anyway and the rest is either left unexploited, or degraded with illegal logging or affected by land use change.

### **Land reform: a forest reform?**

Notwithstanding the objectives of maintaining forest cover on most of the land currently occupied by forest and the objective of sustainable forest management, the issue of forestry and its potential for poverty reduction is underestimated in the land reform process. In the words of the Bolivian Government “it is known that formal access to land and forest [...] does not produce automatically benefits for local development” (Gobierno de Bolivia, 2007b; see also Larson and Ribot, 2007; Wunder, 2001). However, policies that should facilitate the communities in taking advantage of the new opportunities given by forest land titles and, at the same time, guarantee sustainable land use are not in place.

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<sup>2</sup> Land use planning was implemented within the general orientation favouring participation of the Bolivian governments of the 1990s and was accompanied by initiatives such as the law on popular participation (“ley de participación popular”, Gobierno de Bolivia, 1994) and the national dialogues. In this policy context in order to deliver a good land use plan and a plan with chances to be implemented participation was considered a fundamental factor.

<sup>3</sup> Of the total amount 10.7 millions hectares are protected areas and 2.4 millions have some restrictions related to the provision of ecological services.

<sup>4</sup> Terrazas-Sedlak (Cámara Forestal), 2007, personal communication.

During the current reform efforts in the process of writing the regulation of the new law of land reform approved in 2006, the Forestry Directorate (“Dirección Forestal”), which should be in charge of the promotion of forestry development, has been excluded on the basis that the law involves only the agrarian sector; a claim at odds with evidence that titles are demanded mostly on forests. The law itself is called ‘agrarian reform’, which seems a misnomer and symptomatic of the general undervaluation of the issue of forestry in the process.

### **Forest management**

Here we discuss the state of the forest and the state of the forestry sector. We will argue that the unsatisfactory situation is the reason for continuous proposals and efforts to reform the sector. Unfortunately, so far, little is happening in order to slow down deforestation and for the development of a forestry sector.

At the state organizational level we show how the Forestry Directorate is badly understaffed<sup>5</sup> and under-funded and the Forest Superintendence is not able to fulfill its regulation and control role, let alone take on board new tasks.<sup>6</sup> Still, the government is discussing the promotion of community forestry and creating a state enterprise to facilitate the operations of community enterprises. Promoting land reform, while the forestry sector is in such a bad state runs the risk of contributing to these failures, rather than improving the situation.

Some conditions of the land reform are creating Perverse incentives that promote deforestation. In particular expropriation is most likely if the ‘socio economic function’ of holdings cannot be proven and agricultural operations are the easiest way to demonstrate that the land is ‘used’ and has a socio economic function.

Land reform is also a missed opportunity if the communities that receive land titles are not given the instruments for enjoying those titles and start forest management within the legal framework.

### **Conclusions**

To conclude, the land reform of Bolivia has actually many aspects of a forestry reform, but is not associated with instruments to face challenges and opportunities of titling forests.

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<sup>5</sup> As of April 2007 it was staffed only by 9 people based in the capital, La Paz.

<sup>6</sup> This state of affairs in these important institutions casts doubts on state capability to implement such policies.

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