

SUSTAINABLE LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT IN THE HIGH PLATEAU

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Synthesis

Sustainable Livestock Production, Health and Environment in the High Plateau of Bolivia is aimed to promote evidence-based policies linking livestock production, environmental sustainability and health issues affecting rural poor populations of the Bolivian High Plateau in the department of Tarija.

During the initial six months, the team has focussed on two fundamental areas, which involve the first and fourth objectives of the Project.

1. Identify, quantify and prioritize the main barriers for achieving sustainable production of safe sheep and llama meat in the study area, assess the burden and transmission patterns of associated zoonotic diseases and their economic impacts upon livestock and human health.
4. Strengthen the leadership and capacities of local actors and promote joint spaces for community and policy actors to develop new policies linking healthier livestock production, native pastures sustainability and improved human health of vulnerable populations in the Department of Tarija, and assess potentials for replication in other departments.

Members of the Project, through a participative planning, have worked towards the generation of a joint space between communities (producers, association of farmers), academics and policy actors. Also, the protocol of the research has been designed and refined with the priorities identified by the local actors.

The Research Problem

The project is being carried out in the high plateau area of the Department of Tarija, which is composed of two municipalities, Yunchará and El Puente, two of the poorest in the country, with 93.3% and 81.2% of people living below the poverty line respectively and a high children mortality rate.

The challenges faced by the local population in these two municipalities include limited access to health services and sanitation and high food security vulnerability. The natural conditions of the area result in a high dependency on animal-derived protein to fulfill nutritional needs, and in particular, llama and sheep meat.

However, the dependence on sheep farming is resulting in overgrazing and excessive pressure on native pastures, which may accelerate the destruction of the natural soil cover and compromise livestock production and local livelihoods in the long term.

Llamas represent an important source of income by provision of protein, hide, fibre and transport and a national program has been launched by the Ministry of Rural Development to support the

development of the llama sector and contribute to local economies and sustainable livestock practices. Despite their relevant nutritional value and potential contribution to food security, important knowledge gaps associated with local livestock health and public health still exist and need to be addressed.

The overall aim or general objective of the project is to promote evidence-based and locally-adapted multi-sector policies and regulations for improving the sustainable production of safe food from sheep and llamas, the management of native pastures, and the health of vulnerable populations in the Southern High Plateau of Bolivia. The specific objectives through which this general aim is expected to be achieved are:

1. Identify, quantify and prioritize the main barriers for achieving sustainable production of safe sheep and llama meat in the study area, assess the burden and transmission patterns of associated zoonotic diseases and their economic impacts upon livestock and human health.
2. Assess the suitability of different policy options based on an integrated analysis of interrelationships between the sustainability of native pastures, stocking density, animal productivity, and the prevalence of selected diseases in livestock and humans.
3. Develop pilot multi-sector interventions to assess facilitating and limiting factors, economic trade-offs and feasibility of multi-stakeholder policy implementation alternatives.
4. Strengthen the leadership and capacities of local actors and promote joint spaces for community and policy actors to develop new policies linking healthier livestock production, native pastures sustainability and improved human health of vulnerable populations in the Department of Tarija, and assess potentials for replication in other departments.

Project implementation and management

In the initial phases of the Project, contact was established with a number of stakeholders. Firstly, the socialisation of the Project was done in the institutional field. The team coordinated a number of meetings and interviews with the stakeholders, in order to strengthen alliances and as a first step towards the establishment of an inter-organisational platform of public policy on human public health, livestock and environment.

An inception workshop was conducted in Tarija, with active participation of the main stakeholders, including representatives of the beneficiary communities and the key departmental agencies. The workshop allowed the discussion of the general problem being addressed and it highlighted the need for coordinated action across departments. Key actors were identified and communication channels established. The scope of the action research processes (anthelmintic treatment of llama and sheep and improved husbandry) was discussed and agreed.

It is important to highlight the participation of some senior members of the local government, non-government organisations and media (see Annex 1).

Following the workshop the research methods have been refined and protocols for field studies have been developed and submitted for ethical approval to the Departments of animal health (SENASAG), public health (SEDES) and the professional body of Veterinarians (Colegio de Veterinarios).

In order to socialise and position the Project objectives, members of the team participated in an event organised by the Bolivian Association of Animal Production-ABOPA- (To see presentation Annex 2). Also, they participated in the I Camelid National Summit.

Management and Administration

Project management and administration was carried out under the leadership of Roberto Cabrera as Project Coordinator. Financial management was conducted by PROMETA's dedicated staff.

Project Outputs and Dissemination

Outputs completed

- Engagement of key stakeholders including government departments and beneficiary communities.
- Collaborative mapping of local stakeholders completed and strategy for knowledge management developed (Annex 3)
- Establishment of agreements with policy-makers, academics and important local actors.
- Agreement of the scope of action research processes (anthelmintic treatment and improved husbandry).
- Protocols for field studies.

Outputs underway

- Planning logistics of action research processes.
- The Project team is cooperating with the local head of education of Yunchara towards the formulation of a specific curriculum on Andean livestock for youth and adults. This subject has not been approved yet by the national authority of education, therefore there is a high possibility that this curriculum will be approved.
- Following verbal agreements, inter-institutional cooperation agreements are now being formalized.

Capacity Building

Given that PROMETA has little experience in Ecohealth, the Project team has received some initial training and is building capacities on this approach. The inception workshop, with input from Alain Santandreu and Javier Guitian was effective at developing awareness of the Ecohealth approach among team members and also across local NGOs and representatives of government departments.

Furthermore, and facilitated by Mr. Alain Santandreu, Some activities aimed at designing and implementing a knowledge management system that includes monitoring and evaluation, dissemination of results and systematization of learnings have been held. As a result, members of the project team have engaged with knowledge management and have taken specific responsibilities in relation to its monitoring along the project.

Previous to the inception workshop, the Project coordinator and a team member who has assumed responsibilities in relation to the knowledge management component of the project, took part in a project meeting of the IDRC-funded project on Climate Change, Vulnerability and Health in Bolivia; project led by the *Instituto Boliviano de Biología de Altura* (IBBA).

Impacts

It is difficult to prove that the Project has had an important impact in its first six months of live, however, it is clear that during this time it has been received with high expectations and strong engagement by the all stakeholders. The Project has been positioned at local, regional and national levels and this can certainly contribute to a successful achievement of its objectives.

An important and very relevant consequence of the inception workshop has been the facilitation and promotion of inter-institutional dialogue; it became evident to all participants that there is an urgent need for more coordinated and intersectorial planning of activities and there was a commitment by some individuals to engage in such dialogue. As explained above, the initial phases of the project have also contributed to capacity building in Prometa in the field of ecohealth as well as the adoption of knowledge management practices that can be of benefit to other projects run by Prometa.

Recommendations

We do not have any recommendation at this stage