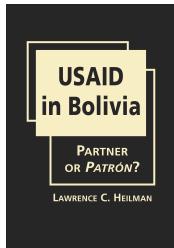


USAID in Bolivia: Partner or Patrón?

Lawrence C. Heilman

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FIRST**FORUM**PRESS

A DIVISION OF LYNNE RIENNER PUBLISHERS, INC.

1800 30th Street, Suite 314 Boulder, CO 80301 USA telephone 303.444.6684 fax 303.444.0824

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The Bolivian Context

The Land

Towering Andean mountains cut Bolivia into a maze of geoclimatic niches. From lowland rainforests that spread east to Brazil to the cold uplands of the Altiplano in the west, a gamut of climates, soils, flora, and fauna exist. The diversity of human culture is correspondingly great. It is this mosaic of land and people that present a riddle of human and physical geography that complicates Bolivia's quest for national integration. (See Figure 1.1.)

Bolivia is divided into three major geographic areas: the Altiplano, the Oriente, and the intervening, high valleys that break into five major compartments with the Yungas in the north and the Cochabamba, Sucre, Potosi and Tarija valleys to the south. The Altiplano, which accounts for 17 percent of the land area, is densely populated in the region bordering Lake Titicaca. The intervening high valleys, accounting for 13 percent of the land, are also heavily populated. The Oriente, the vast tropical hinterland, includes the Amazon Rain Forest, the Beni Plains, the Chapare, the Santa Cruz Plains, the Brazilian Shield, and the Chaco. The Oriente accounts for 70 percent of the national domain, yet it is sparsely populated when compared with the rest of Bolivia.¹ (See Figure 1.2.)

Altiplano

The Altiplano, or high plateau, lies between two immense mountain chains, the Cordillera Oriental and the Cordillera Occidental. The Cordillera Occidental to the west, with mountain peaks reaching twenty thousand feet, generally follows Bolivia's border with Chile and blocks easy passage between the Altiplano and the Pacific Ocean. The Cordillera Oriental, which is a complex mountain system that defines the Altiplano on the east, is rich in mineral deposits. Vast deposits of



Figure 1.1 Map of Bolivia

silver discovered by the Spaniards in the Cordillera Oriental contributed to fueling the European and Asian commercial economies in the late sixteenth century. Tin deposits, also located in the Cordillera Oriental, drove Bolivia's export economy from the middle of the nineteenth century to well into the twentieth century.

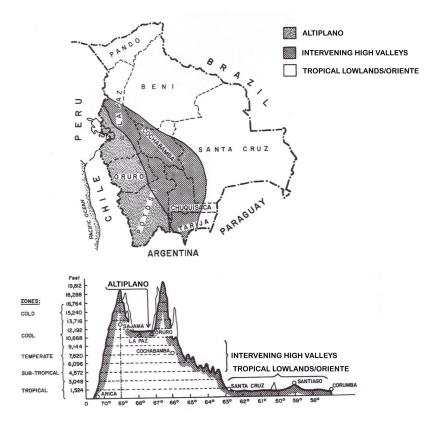


Figure 1.2 Geographic Profile of Bolivia

Source: From "Agricultural Development in Bolivia: A Sector Assessment" (USAID Bolivia, August 1974), p. 43.

With elevations to fourteen thousand feet, the Altiplano stretches north from Lake Titicaca to five hundred miles south beyond the saltpans of Coipasa and Uyuni to Argentina. The Altiplano blends three discernible ecological subsystems: the northern part has warmer temperatures and higher rainfall, the central part is drier and cooler, and the southern part is the coldest and driest of all. Moving from north to south, the Altiplano becomes less populous and farming is less productive. (See Figure 1.3.)

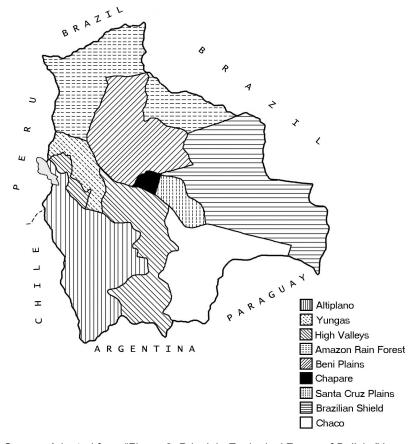


Figure 1.3 Major Ecological Zones in Bolivia

Source: Adapted from "Figure 2: Principle Ecological Zones of Bolivia," in "Agricultural Development in Bolivia: A Sector Assessment" (USAID Bolivia, August 1974) p. 44.

Lake Titicaca is located on the northern Altiplano and is the largest lake in South America. The presence of such an immense body of water, measuring 3,500 square miles, produces higher rainfall and a warmer climate than other parts of the Altiplano. As a consequence, the Titicaca region since the pre-Columbian era has been densely populated, reflecting its agricultural productivity. (See Tables 1.1 and 1.2.)

Zone	Altitude (feet)	Average Temperature	Average Precipitation	Principal Crops	Principal Livestock	Languages
Altiplano	11,500– 14,000	53° north Attiplano, 50° central Attiplano, 47° south Attiplano	26" north Altiplano, 14" central Altiplano, 10" south Altiplano	potatoes, onions, quinoa, barley, tubers, alfalfa, legumes	sheep, llama, alpaca, cattle	Aymara, Quechua, Spanish
High Valleys	5,000– 12,000	67°	32"	horticulture crops, wheat, corn, deciduous fruits	sheep, cattle, poultry, swine	Aymara, Quechua, Spanish
Yungas	1,000– 8,000	73°	41"	coca, coffee, cacao, rice, citrus, bananas	mules, poultry, swine	Quechua, Spanish, Aymara

Table 1.1 Distinguishing Features of Major Ecological Zones

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continues

Zone	Altitude (feet)	Average Temperature	Average Precipitation	Principal Crops	Principal Livestock	Languages
Amazon Rain Forest	400- 1,200	83°	98"	brazil nuts, rubber, yucca	cattle, poultry, swine	Spanish
Beni Plains	600-800	79°	71"	citrus, yucca	cattle	Spanish
Chapare (Yungas de Cochabamba)	700- 5,000	77°	100+"	coca, yucca, corn, citrus, rice, cacao	swine, poultry	Quechua, Spanish

Table 1.1 continued

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Zone	Altitude (feet)	Average Temperature	Average Precipitation	Principal Crops	Principal Livestock	Languages
Santa Cruz Plains	1,300– 2,500	77°	45"	cotton, sugar cane, rice, yucca, corn, soybean	cattle, poultry, swine	Spanish
Brazilian Shield	700– 2,500	75°	37"	corn, yucca	cattle, swine	Spanish
Chaco	1,200– 1,500	82°	30"	corn, sugar cane, yucca	cattle, poultry, swine, goats	Spanish, Guarani, Quechua, Avmara

Table 1.1 continued

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Region	% Total Area	% Rural Area	Land Area (in sq. km)	Pop. % (per sq. mile)	Population Density	Rural Population Density
Altiplano	44	39	182,048	17	13	7
High Valleys	35	39	143,411	13	13	10
Yungas	S	9	45,814	4	Q	IJ
Oriente	16	16	723,560	66	~	-
Bolivia	100	100	1,094,833	100	4.7	3.2

Table 1.2 Distribution and Density of Population by Region, 1972

"Agricultural Development in Bolivia: A Sector Assessment" (USAID Bolivia, August 1974), p. 58.

Note: It is estimated that the total population of Bolivia in 1972 was 5, 195,000, of which 70 percent or 3,646,000 lived in rural areas.

Intervening High Valleys

The larger high valleys of Cochabamba and Tarija and the smaller ones in the Departments of Chuquisaca and Potosi are located between the Altiplano to the west and the tropical lowlands of the Oriente to the east. A wide range of climates is found throughout the high valleys, and soils vary with the topography covering a spectrum from deep and friable and easily crushed to those that are salty, shallow, seriously eroded, and infertile. These valleys are the maize and wheat producing areas of Bolivia. Maize is used for human consumption and the production of the nationally popular alcoholic drink chicha.

The Yungas, from the Aymara word *yunkas* meaning "hot valley,"² is the northernmost portion of the intervening, high valleys. A tropical area, it is more humid with denser vegetation than the other high valleys. It is composed of steep slopes and valleys that are deep and narrow. At the higher elevations, there is adequate precipitation for farming throughout the year. Coffee, bananas, sugar cane, cocoa, papaya, and citrus products including oranges, limes, grapefruit, and tangerines grow there. It is also one of the two major coca-producing areas, the other area being the Chapare. The region's extremely steep topography has always made the movement of agricultural produce to population centers in the highlands a challenge. It is hardly an exaggeration for Bolivians to claim that their roads into the Yungas are the most dangerous in the world. With four thousand vertical foot drops off the side, a two-way graveled road barely wide enough for the generic Altiplano truck was for vears the only way to reach deep into the Yungas. Even today, hiking the pre-Columbian foot trails that tie the Altiplano to the coca and maize producing areas of the Yungas presents a less harrowing experience than traveling by car or truck.

Oriente

The Oriente's immense alluvial plain, which spreads to the borders of Brazil and Paraguay, is a biodiverse paradise replete in flora and fauna species. It has vast unexploited forests and bountiful hydrocarbon resources. The Oriente is divided into six perceptible ecological zones: the Amazon Rain Forest, the Beni Plains, the Chapare, the Santa Cruz Plains, the Brazilian Shield, and the Chaco.

The Amazon Rain Forest, located in the extreme north, is a part of the Amazon River basin system. Temperatures average above eighty degrees Fahrenheit, and an annual rainfall of ninety-eight inches is spread throughout the year. The elevation ranges from four hundred to 1,200 feet above sea level. The sparse population is involved in exotic agricultural activities, including the gathering of Brazil nuts and wild rubber and the hunting of animals and snakes for their skins.

Much of the Beni Plains is an alluvial *pampa* stretching to the northeast frontier. It is a humid region with rainfall coming mainly in the summer months. A topsoil of two to three feet lies on a clay subsoil; these soils tend to be dense and percolation is slow. Sparsely populated, the area's major activity is cattle production. Because this vast expanse is generally level, the area is subject to inundation during the rainy season.

The Chapare, located in the Department of Cochabamba, extends north from the Cordillera Oriental spreading into the Oriente. Its altitude ranges between seven hundred to five thousand feet above sea level with two landforms, low hills and alluvial plains, dominating the landscape. It has a tropical climate with annual rainfall averaging more than one hundred inches per year. The Chapare has a rich variety of microclimates, soils, flora, and fauna that favor the production of bananas, cacao, yucca, corn, rice, and citrus products. This region has also become the major coca-producing area. In the late 1960s, roads were built with loans provided by the USAID Mission that reached into the Chapare to facilitate spontaneous colonization, and in the 1990s, the Mission supported the construction of a network of farm-to-market roads.

The Santa Cruz Plain has long been considered one of the most promising areas in South America for agricultural development. With the completion of the Santa Cruz–Cochabamba–La Paz highway linking marketing centers in the west and the completion of the railroad linking Santa Cruz with Brazil, this tropical area was already playing a crucial role in diversifying Bolivia's economy by the 1970s. A variety of soils in the area allows for a mixture of agricultural activities, including extensive cattle ranching and the raising of sugar cane, cotton, maize, rice, and citrus. More recently, the production of soybeans has played a valuable role in diversifying the Bolivian economy.

To the east of the Santa Cruz Plains and extending to the Brazilian border is the Brazilian Shield. In contrast to the Santa Cruz area, the potential for agricultural production in the Brazilian Shield region is limited. Precipitation of forty-five inches is spread throughout the year, and its soils are uniformly old, highly acidic, and nearly leached of the nutrients critical to agricultural production. Cattle production is the primary economic activity with ranches spread over an extensive pampa covered with savanna shrub. The Chaco, a semiarid expanse stretching south of the Santa Cruz region, continues on to the frontier of Paraguay. An eight-month dry season permits only thorny, drought-resistant plants to grow. Though it is an area with some beef cattle production, there appears limited potential for increased agricultural activity.

The People

The Aymara and the Quechua dominated the Altiplano and the high valleys of Bolivia for over one thousand years before its conquest by the Spain in the sixteenth century. With their subjugation, the status of the Aymara and Quecha aburptly changed. No longer noble participants in a high civilization that reached deep into the pre-Columbian era, the Aymara and the Quechua in a moment of time became subserviant to Spain's imperial interests.

The impulse that inspired the Spanish conquests in the New World was the search for resources to strengthen the financial base from which the Crown could advance its continental interests and expand its vast seaborne empire. With conquest came the Crown's obligation to defend the indegenous population from the depredations of the Spanish conquerors and educate them in the doctrine of the Catholic Church. Here was the rub, for Spain's development interests in the New World were driven by economic and religious imperatives that when translated into concrete actions were frequently in unremitting conflict. The individual Spaniard's interest—that of the soldier, the government official, the settler, the clergyman—tempered the way in which they perceived and described the indigenous population.

In the case of colonial Charcas (Bolivia), most Spaniards refered to the local population as *Indios* (Indians). It was common for Spaniards to call Indians savages or dogs. Indians³ were the Spaniards' beasts of burden in times of peace and cannon fodder in times of war. A majority of Indians during the colonial era owned no land and were classified as *colonos* or agricultural laborers committed to work on *haciendas* frequently owned by absentee overlords, or *patróns*. Prior to the 1952 Revolution, *colonos* were bound to *patróns* and their *haciendas*, and prior to the twentieth century, *colonos* were included in the sales transactions of *haciendas*. In return for their unpaid labor, *colonos* had access to a small plot of land on which they could build their houses and grow the crops necessary for the survival of their families.⁴

The *colonos*' labor obligations to the *patróns* were year round. *Colonos* were duty bound to use their tools and animals for plowing, planting, and harvesting the *patróns*' fields. When the agricultural season was over, *colonos* were expected to contribute their family's labor for road and fence construction and repair, to serve as house help on the *hacienda* or in the *patróns*' town houses, and to work on other properties of the *patróns*. *Colonos* could also be loaned by their *patróns* to other proprietors to work on their estates, which might require leaving their families and providing their own meals for the time necessary to complete this additional work.⁵

If the *colonos* were unable to fulfill these responsibilities or if they broke the *patróns*' rules, they could expect to be fined or punished. The fine could be the loss of money, agricultural produce, or farm animals. They could also be whipped by the *patróns* and even forced to leave the *haciendas*.⁶ In turn, the *patróns* were responsible for providing land to the *colonos* in order for the *colonos* to support their families. The *patróns* were also expected to assist their *colonos* in times of crisis. If *colonos* had trouble with the local government, their *patróns* were obliged to intervene. During feast days, *patróns* would usually provide their *colonos* alcohol and coca.⁷ It was the *patróns*' obligation to build and ensure the operation of a church on the *haciendas*, and they were expected to lend money to their *colonos* for marriage, burial, and health expenses.⁸

Colonos farmed their small plots in much the same way that land had been farmed before the arrival of the Spanish. They grew a variety of potatoes and beans, corn, and quinoa. Quinoa, a cereal grain grown at high altitudes, was valued for its richness in calories and proteins. The Indians' diet was supplemented by the Spanish introduction of cereal grains including wheat and barley, as well as vegetables and fruits that were grown mainly for the *patróns*.

Colonos had access to native meat products including the llama and guinea pig as well as sheep, cattle, pigs, and chickens that were introduced by the Spanish. The llama, which was found throughout the Altiplano and in the high valleys, was valued for its wool as well as being the traditional beast of burden. Except for the introduction of oxen and the wooden plow, agronomic techniques employed on the hacienda had not changed since pre-Columbian times. As late as the midtwentieth century, *colonos* had no access to modern agricultural technology—no chemical fertilizers, pesticides, or mechanical tools were available to them. Crop yields were low, and food was never abundant.

The *colonos*' dwellings were constructed with sun-dried mud bricks or fitted stones, topped by thatched roofs of straw or reeds. The family lived, cooked, and slept in one room. Family members slept under llama or sheep hides on low benches, on dirt, or on the stone floor. Houses were poorly ventilated and electricity was nonexistent. Fuel for cooking and warmth consisted of llama and cattle dung. Usually a corral for livestock would be located adjacent to the *colono's* family dwelling.

Life for Indians who worked in the mines was as oppressive as that for the *colonos*. Conditions in the mines had improved little, if at all, since the sixteenth century when Indians worked the great silver mine, Cerro Rico at Potosi, for their Spanish masters. Mines were invariably located in the harshest of environments, commonly at altitudes of thirteen thousand feet or more. Working conditions were extremely dangerous and fatalities were commonplace. Mechanization was almost nonexistent, with miners using brute strength and small quantities of dynamite to extract the minerals. The Indian miner moved from one level in the mine to another by climbing crude wooden ladders precariously placed at the end of pitch-black shafts. Tunnels were traversed in a hunched or near crawling posture. Flooding was a frequent hazard, and intense heat constrained miners from wearing protective equipment. Safety standards were for all practical purposes nonexistent. Silicosis was endemic.

Typically, the miners and their families lived near the mine in a camp where the mine operators sometimes provided housing. The housing would not have been significantly different from that of the *colonos*—one room, poorly ventilated, without plumbing and electricity. There was never enough housing, and educational opportunities and health facilities rarely existed. Most attempts on the part of miners to organize into unions were met with punitive opposition and sometimes with violent confrontation by the mine owners in collusion with the Bolivian government and the military. The miner's work provided minimum compensation. It was a job that attracted Indians only because there were so few opportunities other than working as a *colono*.

A variety of health problems plagued the Indians and their families regardless of where they worked. In the complete absence of a medical care system, family members turned to local practitioners. Indigenous medicine was a jumble of religious beliefs and magical practices, reflecting local folk traditions and the medieval concept of medicine brought by the Spanish. Due to living at high altitudes, the lack of potable water, and poor hygienic practices, Indian family members frequently suffered from either a respiratory disease, gastroenteritis, or both. Their nutritional status was poor, and their daily calorie intake in the mid-twentieth century fell considerably below the recommended requirement for agricultural or mining labor. Immunization programs were unheard of in the mines, free Indian communities, and on the hacienda. Consequently, smallpox was common. Most Indian children under six experienced protein and calorie malnutrition. All these factors contributed to Bolivia having one of the highest infant mortality rates in Latin America.⁹ The vast majority of the indigenous population who lived in free communities and on haciendas was illiterate, and only a few Indians could speak Spanish. Indian children had little access to public or private educational opportunities.¹⁰

The Constitution of 1826 allowed only Bolivians who were literate to vote or hold public office. All Bolivians, which included the indigenous population, were legally guaranteed such basic rights as reasonable compensation for their work, access to education, freedom to travel throughout Bolivia, ownership of property, and access to judicial process that included appearing in court and filing petitions. In practice, Indians enjoyed none of these rights. White overseers of rural estates and mining enterprises referred to the Quechua and Aymara as *Indios*, while the white class reserved the term *Boliviano* strictly for themselves. From their perspective, Indians were not citizens of Bolivia.¹¹

Prior to the Revolution of 1952, it was common to see Indians kneel and genuflect before their *patróns*. In his memoir, Victor Andrade, the Bolivian ambassador to the United States in the 1940s, confirmed the ingrained nature of the *patróns*' relationship with their Indians:

As a young man, I used to visit the several thousand acres of land that my family had held for many generations. I would sit on a chair in an open space, and the peasants would come up to me, kneel on the ground, kiss my hand, and leave some kind of tribute, like a chicken or some handicraft object. I would pat them on the head and offer friendly words of reassurance to the old and young alike. After everyone had completed this formality, and there might have been over one hundred persons involved, I would order large containers of alcohol, mixed with some sweet liquid, to be opened and served.¹²

The Indians' lack of access to modern society was nearly complete: limited access to market, little access to education and health services, and no access to basic rights. They had neither vote nor voice in government. Their lives were as bleak and as harsh as the Altiplano itself. Only dramatic changes in social attitudes and political practices could break the cycle of poverty and ignorance to which the Indian family was bound.

¹ "Agricultural Development in Bolivia: A Sector Assessment" (USAID Bolivia, August 1974), pp. 44–49.

² Alison L. Spedding, "The Coca Field as a Total Social Fact," in Coca, Cocaine, and the Bolivian Reality, eds. Madeline Barbara Léons and Harry Sanabria (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 48.

³ Hereafter Indian will be used in lieu of indigenous peoples. It is used recognizing its negative connotation in order to communicate the deplorable way that most Spaniards treated the indigenous population.

Dwight B. Heath, Charles J. Erasmus, and Hans C. Buechler, Land Reform and Social Revolution in Bolivia (New York: Praeger, 1969), pp. 176-181. Also see Ronald J. Clark, "Land Reform in Bolivia," in Land Reform in Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, 2nd ed., Spring Review of Land Reform vol. 6 (USAID Washington, June 1970), pp. 5-6, and Herbert S. Klein, Bolivia: The Evolution of a Multi-Ethnic Society, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 227–229.

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Heath, Erasmus, and Buechler, Land Reform, p. 200.

⁸ Clark, "Land Reform and Peasant Marketing," p. 156.

⁹ "Bolivia: Health Sector Assessment" (USAID Bolivia, January 1975), pp.

52-66. ¹⁰ "Education in Bolivia: A Preliminary Sector Assessment," part 1, ¹⁰ *Education in Bolivia: A Preliminary Sector Assessment, Part 1, Alexander The Bolivian National* USAID Bolivia, July 1975, p. 5, and Robert J. Alexander, The Bolivian National Revolution (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press: 1958), p. 84.

Heath, Erasmus, and Buechler, Land Reform, p. 38.

¹² Victor Andrade, My Missions for Revolutionary Bolivia, 1944–1962 (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976), p. 130.