



THE POLITICS OF LIVESTOCK SECTOR POLICY AND THE RURAL POOR IN BOLIVIA

It seems that good opportunities for improving rural livelihoods in Bolivia through livestock policy are to be found in the camelid sector. Markets for camelid meat, fiber, and leather are currently small but hold significant potential to benefit poor herders in the Andean highlands. Given that Bolivia suffers from very weak state capacity and has followed a neoliberal economic model since 1985—two factors that limit the state's ability to intervene strategically in the economy—the range of feasible public policies that could be implemented to foster pro-poor development is limited.

The clearest role for the state lies in the realm of animal health and sanitation, in particular, the establishment and maintenance of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD)-free zones, prevention programs to control the incidence of sarcocistiosis, a camelid parasite, and support for municipal governments in improving sanitary conditions in slaughterhouses. The National Service for Agricultural and Livestock Sanitation (SENASAG) is a relatively new government agency, created in 2000 to handle such animal disease issues. To date, however, it has focused most of its resources on establishing an FMD-free zone for cattle production in the eastern lowlands.

If the rural poor are to benefit from growth in the livestock sector, three serious problems must be overcome:

The absence of a professionalized, meritocratic bureaucracy within most public sector organizations and agencies.

The Bolivian state is pervaded by a logic of political patronage that undermines technical capacity and creates great instability. This is a seminal problem that will hinder any attempts to design and implement effective public policies in the livestock, or any other, sector. Further, the large number of agencies that handle various aspects of livestock policy and

general instability in the public sector creates confusion and hinders effective relations with the private sector, including small producers.

The 1994 decentralization reforms inadvertently created obstacles to the participation of small producers in local governments and coordination problems that jeopardize development planning.

First, small producers have been left without clear channels for participating in municipal investment decisions. Second, there is a serious lack of coordination between neighboring municipalities, and between the different levels of government (central, departmental, and municipal). These shortcomings damage prospects for successful pro-poor development of the livestock sector.

Small producers' associations are relatively young, weak, and inexperienced at political lobbying.

The third issue above—the weakness of small producers' associations—is one aspect of a larger problem surrounding the politics of pro-poor development in the livestock sector: whereas large cattle ranchers in the eastern lowlands are well organized and wield great political influence both locally and nationally, there are essentially no domestic organizations that have at present both the interest in and the ability to push for pro-poor livestock policies at either the national or municipal levels. Peasant unions are older and better organized than the small producers' associations, but they are focused on the issue of access to land and are vociferously opposed to neoliberalism and globalization. The traditional political parties have proven incapable of effectively responding to the needs of the poor, indigenous majority.

Finally, the two new indigenous parties do not presently have the capacity to formulate coherent rural policies, nor is



the livestock sector among their priorities, given Bolivia's turbulent political climate and the magnitude and breadth of indigenous grievances. As such, donors and influential organizations within the international community may have to assume the bulk of the responsibility for promoting policies that favor small producers, at least in the near future.

Given these considerations, the following key strategic entry points for the advancement of pro-poor livestock policies and the improvement of opportunities for small producers to benefit from expansion in the livestock sector emerge:

Strengthening small producers' associations

If small producers' associations can be consolidated and obtain legal recognition, and if their leaders can acquire the requisite skills, these associations could become significant actors at the municipal or even the national level, capable of significantly advancing their own interests. The international community could further this goal by helping to provide training and technical assistance for small producers' associations.

Strengthening Municipal Governments

This course of action has two components: institutional reforms at the national level to improve the legal framework that governs decentralization, and training and technical assistance for municipalities to help them elaborate viable development plans. In addition, clear norms need to be established that facilitate and standardize channels of participation for small producers in the municipalities. Pressure from the international community, combined with efforts by domestic actors (such as the Federation of Municipal Associations of Bolivia) could help advance this agenda.

Institutionalization Reforms

The international community must continue to pressure administrations to initiate and respect institutional reforms designed to enhance state capacity and eliminate patronage politics in favor of a stable, merit-based bureaucracy. The international community's efforts to date, at least in so far as they have affected SENASAG and other state agencies involved with the livestock sector, have not achieved an impressive track record. However, there is potential for modest success if these pressures are sustained.

Further, the international community needs to be more attuned to domestic political considerations when devising its pressure strategies.

Redirecting the attention of SENASAG

SENASAG must be persuaded to pay greater attention to the needs of camelid herders in the Andean highlands instead of devoting all of its energies to cattle production in the lowlands, which benefits primarily large, wealthy ranchers. Further, the capacity of this organization to maintain and monitor FMD-free zones must be enhanced. Again, the impetus for shifting SENASAG's attention to the highlands will probably have to come from international actors for now, given the weaknesses of small producers' associations. On the positive side, as long as SENASAG continues its work in the lowlands, influential large cattle ranchers have little to lose if the agency initiates concerted actions in the highlands as well. A partial shift of focus is therefore unlikely to arouse any political opposition.

Various scholars in political science have postulated that institutional change tends to take place during times of crisis. As such, Bolivia's current political turmoil might potentially facilitate strategic interventions related to the dimensions discussed above. This hypothesis is clearly quite tentative given the newness of the Mesa administration and the unstable political climate prevailing in Bolivia in late 2003. Nonetheless, this idea suggests that Bolivia's turbulent political climate should not automatically be viewed as a hindrance to action on the strategic entry points identified in this report.

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