

Monitoring effects in the Achocalla Region

The Pastoral Social Outreach Project of CARITAS in La Paz, Bolivia

Who is the social-pastoral team, and how does it work?

The municipality of Achocalla is located on the edge of the Bolivian Altiplano at an altitude of about 3,800 metres, opposite the Illimani, La Paz's 'very own mountain'. In six village communities Gerardo Yanarico, an agricultural engineer, and Oscar Osco, a sociologist, of the CARITAS social-pastoral team in La Paz have been advising Aymara farmers on sustainable farming practices for four years. Contour lines with forage crops and mixed cultivation protect the soil on the steep slopes against soil erosion and denudation. This increases yields, and makes crops more resilient to climate change. By diversifying their production, families are able to become more broadly self-sufficient and farmers are able to sell a wider range of produce on regional markets.

The project team also enables the population to analyse local budgets, submit competent applications for funding to support agricultural production, and monitor the implementation of these publicly funded investment projects.

How does the project team go about performing monitoring effects?

Once a year, together with the target groups, the team records the changes, and assesses how close the project has come to achieving its original objectives. As well as farmers who have already been actively involved in the project activities for several years, and people who are interested but have not yet taken part in the project have also been invited to the community centre.

Gerardo Yanarico and Oscar Osco use the ladder to show what the project's objectives are. Each step on the ladder is a step toward achieving the outcomes and impacts envisaged for three years. (O-Ton)

Two working groups are formed. Each group is given a list of simple questions. The questions – which are written on large index cards – relate to the project objectives and indicators. Each group selects one or two individuals to moderate the discussion and document the results. (O-Ton)

Lively group discussions

In the groups, the progress made is fiercely debated: 'How many families take part in the project activities? How much land is being managed with soil amelioration measures? How much larger has the area got since the project began? How much yields have been improved? Were projects to improve agricultural production supported with public funds?' (O-Ton) Each group collects the results of their debate on cards and a flipchart. (O-Ton)

Sharing lunch together

Among the Aymaras, the indigenous population of the Andean uplands, a meeting of this kind always includes sharing a meal. Many of them set off on foot at the crack of dawn. They have brought with them what their families have grown themselves. This includes the usual potatoes, but in a great deal of variety. (O-Ton)

Presenting and debating the results in plenary

The groups then present their results. Gerardo Yanarico introduces the plenary session. (O-Ton) Taking the community of San Pedro de Quilluri as an example, it emerged that in 2012 just 2 people were convinced by the sustainable farming practices, Justo Mamani and Evelia Chambi. They were joined by 3 others in 2013 and another 3 in 2014, so that a total of 8 families are now applying these methods.

In some of the village communities, the irrigated cropland has been increased by 10%, and there are many examples of families who have built terraces to protect the soil. The different progress made in improving yields is one point that is the subject of particularly lively debate in the plenary group. Participants agree that potato cultivation has improved by 20%, and that this comes close to the 30% indicator target.

The debate also becomes heated regarding the modest results achieved so far through the publicly-funded measures. It aims to generate investments in agriculture. So far, only one village community has succeeded in submitting an investment measure to the local government. Representatives of the local authority and other public bodies attending the monitoring meeting promise to help ensure that more public funding is provided in the future. (O-Ton)

A field trip is a must!

For the population, monitoring always includes a field trip. Ultimately, it is only in a farmer's fields that others can see with their own eyes what changes a family has actually initiated, and learn from the family themselves how they went about it. (O-Ton)

Looking ahead

This kind of reflection strengthens farmers, and it helps them analyse the desired changes. People who are unable to read and write are also actively involved. Young people perform an important task, and they are well appreciated.