

THE BOLIVIAN COUNCIL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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I. Background

In 1985, Bolivia adopted a new development model after three decades of social and state-centered political administrations. The numerous military regimes or few democratic governments that ruled during these decades largely exploited the country's natural resources and increased Bolivia's external debt. The new development model, by contrast, redefined the government's role, leaving economic production, and financial intermediation to private banks and enterprises as the lead protagonists in a free market economy.

In 1992, after seven years of neo-liberal economic reforms, the Bolivian economy had stabilized, but failed to generate substantial growth. The fall in international commodity prices, the increase in unemployment, and rural emigration, all combined to create a new social crisis. These developments overshadowed progress made in other areas: recognition of indigenous people's land tenure rights; the implementation of the first National Program for Women; a five-year moratorium on forest concessions, which represented a turning point for the ecological movement; and a framework environmental protection law that introduced the concept of sustainable development.¹

The Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, 1992, found a Bolivian government convinced that the state could no longer play the role of passive administrator of macroeconomic variables, and that it had to actively develop public policies that could put in place the social, economic, political and institutional conditions to generate not only economic growth, but also the kind of integrated development that was needed.

In Bolivia there was a national consensus that failure to address the underlying role of poverty in the country's economic, political, social and environmental problems made any development efforts unsustainable. Addressing this underlying problem represents one of the most important challenges for the next century.² With this goal in mind a "Second Generation" of reforms were implemented in 1993 that redefined the role of the state and social actors by devolving political and economic power to local groups and municipalities. Major reforms included the approval of laws such as the Popular Participation and Administrative Decentralization Law, which promotes civil society participation in public administration, the Law on Education Reforms, amendments to the national Constitution that recognized the multi-ethnic and cultural character of Bolivia, and the privatization of forty-nine percent of state-owned companies and assets.

As part of the Rio commitments, Bolivia developed its own concept of sustainable development and created the world's first Ministry for Sustainable Development.³ This

¹ The environment protection law was approved in 1992, through a public participatory process. The law's stated objective is: "to preserve the environment and natural resources while promoting sustainable development aimed at improving the quality of life." The law also created the National Secretary for the Environment (SENMA) and its financial agency the National Fund for the Environment (FONAMA).

² Interview with Ramiro Ortega, National Ex-Secretary of Planning, Ministry for Sustainable Development.

³ Informe-País: Bolivia's strategy to confront the challenges outlined in the Santa Cruz Plan for Action, Ministry for Sustainable Development and Planning, August 1998.

new concept of sustainable development was included in the country's General Plan for Economical Development (known by its Spanish abbreviation, PGDES) in 1994, and became the strategic framework for Bolivia's Agenda 21. This new concept of sustainability was based on four main principles: economic growth, social equity, rational use of the natural resources, and governance.⁴ The first three components were taken from the concept of sustainable development that emerged from the 1992 Rio Summit. Governance was the innovation introduced by Bolivia. This fourth principle recognized the need of social consensus between the state and civil society. This consensus was considered a key element for effective policy formulation, conflict resolution, and the re-engagement of marginalized social sectors traditionally excluded from decision-making. Involving civil society in decision-making would broaden the access of these sectors to development benefits, and consequently, foster equity.⁵

In summary, sustainable development was defined as a process seeking to improve the quality of life of Bolivian citizens through a productive transformation based on the rational use of the human, natural, and financial resources, as well as Bolivia's rich institutional and cultural heritage. And to achieve such development without risking the needs of future generations or nature's carrying capacity.

II. Organization and Function of the Bolivia's Council for Sustainable Development

In 1996, civil society and the state joined together and created the Bolivian Council for Sustainable Development to carry out and follow-up on the Rio Summit's commitments, and to act as forum for deliberation on the Sustainable Development Summit planned for December 1996 in Santa Cruz, Bolivia.⁶ Bolivia was selected as the host-country for this global event because of its leadership, together with other countries, in advancing agreements made at the 1992 Earth Summit.

The Council was defined as an instrument to promote processes of participation, coordination and consensus building, and also to carry out and ensure the continuity of the principles and objectives of the sustainable development model. During instances of public dialogue and debate, the Council was to serve as the institution that forged agreement between the state, civil society, and international aid agencies on sustainable development policies and strategic programs.

The Council was legally recognized with the adoption of Supreme Resolution No. 217046 on May 15, 1997, more than one year after it began to operate. The resolution ratified the Council's purpose and objectives and described it as a forum for participation

⁴ Bolivia's Agenda 21, Ministry for Sustainable Development and the Environment, National Secretary of Planning, 1996.

⁵ Interview with Marianella Curi, Ex-Secretary of Promotions of the Ministry for the Sustainable Development and Environment, and current Director of the League for the Environment Defense (LIDEMA).

⁶ Report on the first Bolivia's Council for Sustainable Development meeting, May 1996. Document No. 1, La Paz, 1996.

and dialogue between representatives of civil society, the public and private sectors. The Council received modest funding from the Capacity 21 Program of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to support periodic meetings and publications. Otherwise, the Council did not receive financial assistance. Any technical assistance from experts or time provided by members was supplied voluntarily.

A. Functions

The Bolivian Council's main functions were the followings:

1. To promote participation and dialogue between diverse social actors, government, and non-governmental organizations in the sustainable development process.
2. To strengthen co-operation between the government and civil society in the area of sustainable development.
3. To ensure implementation of sustainable development objectives and policies over the medium to long-term.
4. To establish guidelines for the creation of sustainable development councils at department or provincial levels.
5. To raise funds from international donors to support the Council's independent function.
6. To undertake actions that change social behavior and perceptions of sustainable development.

B. Organization

The Council was made up of an assembly, an executive committee, and an executive secretary. Members of the assembly included representatives from the central government; parliament; NGOs; academia; and umbrella organizations such as Bolivia's Central Labor Union, the Union of Rural Workers, the Episcopal Confederation, and the Bolivian Association of Private Enterprises; the media; the armed forces; and international aid agencies.

Two representatives of the executive branch and four representatives of civil society formed the executive committee. The mission of the committee was to promote dialogue and create consensus among all members of the council, and to provide information on on-going sustainable development efforts. The president of the Council was the Minister for Sustainable Development.

The executive secretary, an appointed officer, was assigned the responsibility for engaging and coordinating working groups within the Council to analyze particular issues relating to sustainable development initiatives.

C. Activities

During its first year, the Council went through three distinct phases. Upon its inception, the Council worked to develop consensus on the proposed action items presented at the

Summit of the Americas in Santa Cruz on December 1996. The Council participated in the analysis and final review of projects included in the Hemispheric Agenda. This process was repeated in department level councils, even though only three worked regularly: Santa Cruz, Cochabamba, and Oruro. Finally, members of the Council hosted conferences and made presentations on sustainable development to local councils, academic institutions, and civil society organizations.

During the middle of the year the Council focused its attention on monitoring and advancing compliance with sustainable development principles and objectives emerging from the new Ministry for Sustainable Development and the agreements reached at the Santa Cruz Summit.

Towards the end of its first year, the Council sought to establish itself as a regional body or forum for progress toward sustainable development in South America. Bolivia's own progress toward environmentally sustainable development, and its advances in the implementation of the Rio agreements made such an objective possible. One of the most important tasks carried out by Bolivia's Council for Sustainable Development was an assessment of Bolivia's achievements since the 1992 Earth Summit. This assessment summarized the perspectives of the state and civil society in a single document that was submitted at Rio+5 in March 1997.

Funding received from UNDP's Agenda 21 Program was used to publish three important documents. These documents reflected the groundwork and thinking that went into the creation of the Council, the development of the Agenda for Santa Cruz, and the proposals presented at Rio+5. The first two reports compiled information from the Council's first and second meetings, respectively. The second document summarized thinking on the Hemispheric Agenda to be presented at the Summit for Sustainable Development in Santa Cruz. The third document summarized the conclusions of a council workshop that analyzed the second version of the Hemispheric Agenda. Finally, the Council also published the Bolivian report presented at the Rio+5 forum, "From the Agenda to Action."

III. Strategies and Mechanisms employed by the Council

A. Multi-Sectoral Composition and Participation

In the year the Council was most active (its first year of operation) it became a channel for on-going dialogue between the state and civil society. The Council convened different stakeholders and reached consensus on several issues related to environmental sustainability. For example, the Council shaped the Hemispheric Agenda and the post Earth Summit assessment report submitted at Rio+5. This consensus was possible because of the Council's emphasis on participation. In the Council each actor had the right to express an opinion and an equal vote. The Council's successful use of multi-sectoral dialogues has encouraged Bolivia's new government to introduce this methodology to other decision-making arenas. For example, Decree No. 24848 created the Consultative Council for Agro-Economic Policy (COPAGRO), an instrument that

fosters participation and builds consensus between the state and civil society on agronomic policies.

To further broaden participation, the Council's executive committee introduced specific issues for debate before the Council's general assembly. The general assembly called on diverse social actors and the Minister for Sustainable Development (President of the Council) to analyze and evaluate those issues. The Minister's participation in the assembly permitted direct dialogue with civil society.⁷

B. Development of an Integrated Vision

The Council was able to foster an effective, if sporadic, dialogue between the state and civil society that relied on a multi-sectoral and democratic approach. For example, it managed to generate clear agreement from various social sectors that environmental sustainability furthers and supports the country's general development goals. Finally, the Council was an effective consultation mechanism to the Ministry for Sustainable Development and the Environment.

C. Creation of Strategic Alliances

Building strategic alliances among sectors with traditionally conflicting positions regarding common environmental issues was another of the strategies employed by the Council. Organizations such as the Bolivian Association of Private Enterprises, unions, politicians, and international aid agencies were all brought together by the Council to work towards constructive solutions to sustainable development problems. Each organization had the opportunity to contribute its insights and suggestions.

IV. Strengths and Weaknesses

The Bolivia's Council for Sustainable Development should be seen as one piece of the puzzle being assembled to implement sustainable development at a national level. Sustainable development was incorporated into the general social and economic development plan for the nation in 1994, and that continues to serve as the strategic framework for Bolivia's Agenda 21 Plan.⁸ In addition, the Council itself is an outcome of several reforms instituted by the government to encourage civic participation in planning and monitoring of the public sector. But despite all these favorable developments, the council was unable to sustain the permanent dialogue and consensus building process it initiated.

A. Strengths

In considering strengths, the Council was most effective in shaping Bolivia's position in various international for a and giving Bolivia international recognition.⁹ Furthermore, the

⁷ Interview with Ramiro Ortega, National Ex-Secretary of Planning, Ministry for Sustainable Development.

⁸ Bolivia's Agenda 21, Ministry for Sustainable Development and the Environment, National Secretary of Planning, 1996.

⁹ Interview with Ramiro Ortega, National Ex-Secretary of Planning, Ministry for Sustainable Development.

Council has generated national consensus on various sustainable development and environmental issues. The Council's leadership and expertise in this area led to its involvement in the preparation of the agendas for Santa Cruz and Rio+5 events.

The Council was able to do this despite the year-long delay in the formal definition of its legal status, and its lack of an operating budget and a permanent office space, thanks to its member's perseverance and the support it received from the state and civil society.¹⁰ The Council demonstrated that money is not what is most important, and that it is possible to solve problems with the commitment and active participation of all sectors involved.¹¹

B. Weaknesses

The Council faced the greatest difficulties obtaining funds for its long-term operation, defining its codes and regulations, and strengthening its capacity to provide technical assistance and follow-up support to departmental and provincial councils. In addition, little was done to disseminate information about the work of the Council. There was a need to establish a mechanism to inform groups at the provincial and departmental level by, for example, publishing a regular bulletin.¹²

It is important to note that the Council's activities were delayed or put on hold with the election of a new government in 1997. As a result, the Ministry for Sustainable Development and the Environment was replaced by the Ministry for Sustainable Development and Planning. A new addition has been the recent creation of sectoral councils.

Bolivia is in the process of internalizing and adjusting the concept of sustainable development, particularly the Declaration and Action Plan that emerged from the Santa Cruz Summit.¹³ The government recognizes that there has been an advance in the concept of Sustainable Development, but believes that the spaces created to encourage public participation in decision-making have, to date, remained limited. For this reason the new government reformulated and renamed Bolivia's Council into the National Council for Sustainable Development. This new council will have the ability to make proposals, provide consultation, and monitor strategic issues related to national development.¹⁴ It will have operational and financial autonomy to allow more authentic and efficient participation on the part of civil society. Supreme Mandate No. 25145 of August 31, 1998, created the National Council for Sustainable Development, and gave

¹⁰ Interview with Mario Baudoin, member of the Council's Executive Committee and delegate of Bolivia University's Executive Committee (CEUB).

¹¹ Interview with Marianella Curi, Ex-Subsecretary of Promotions, Ministry for the Sustainable Development and the Environment, and current Executive Director of the League for the Defense of the Environment (LIDEMA).

¹² Interview with Valeriano Quispe, Secretary for Conflict Resolution of Bolivia's Central Labor Union (COB), who referred to the limitations to inform the bases of the Council's advances, and suggested as a priority the distribution of a pamphlet to update the Union members of the Council's achievements.

¹³ Interview with Erick Reyes Villa Bacigalupi, Ministry for Sustainable Development and Planning.

¹⁴ Ibid.

the executive committee and its president, the Minister for Sustainable Development and Planning, thirty days to convene the Council's assembly. As of November 1998 this meeting had not taken place. The reason for the delay is that the mechanisms for how the council will operate are still under consideration.

UNDP's Capacity 21 Program has offered to contract consultants to help redefine the reformulated Council's codes and regulations, develop a budget, and study potential funding sources.¹⁵ The consultants will advise the Executive Secretary, who will be selected by the Minister for Sustainable Development from a group of three candidates proposed by the Council's Assembly.

This new Council will have the same basic characteristics, structure and objectives of the former council. From the state's perspective, the new Council's main advantage over its predecessor is its stronger legal foundation, and the expanded representation of the executive branch; giving it greater decision-making power.¹⁶ This Council also has an expanded number of NGOs representatives on the executive committee. The new Council is made up of thirty civil society representatives, eleven government delegates, an executive committee, and an executive secretary. The executive committee will provide support and guidance to the executive secretary, and it will be made up of four government and four civil society representatives. The head of the executive committee is the Minister for Sustainable Development and Planning.

Civil society supports the stronger legal underpinning of the National Council, although it believes that, with the exception of greater governmental representation, few substantial changes have been made.¹⁷ Regardless of the name, Bolivian or National Council for Sustainable Development, diverse sectors agree that the key is to work together, so that the concept of sustainable development moves beyond words to address problems such as Bolivia's economic dependence on natural resources¹⁸ and international aid (about fifteen percent of the GDP or \$700 million/year).¹⁹ Furthermore, government and civil society are in agreement that poverty and inequity are the most immediate challenge to sustainable development, an issue that transcends changes in political administrations.

¹⁵ Interview with Eva Urquidi, Coordinator of Bolivia's Agenda 21.

¹⁶ Interview with Jorge Gonzalez, Program Coordinator for UNDP's Capacity 21 Program, Bolivia.

¹⁷ Interview with Marianella Curi, Executive Director of the League for the Environment Defense (LIDEMA), which congregates 32 NGOs and has an important role in the constitution of the Bolivia's Council for Sustainable Development.

¹⁸ Natural resources (renewable and no renewable) generate seventy percent of the country revenues.

¹⁹ Bojanic Alan, UNDP's advisor on sustainable development.