



Resilience or Resignation:

The Role of Agency and Risk Management in the Face of Climate Change in Poor, Rural Bolivia

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Motivation of the study

- The links between climate events and poverty are complex and difficult to understand
- Complement the quantitative evidence of the impact of droughts and floods on the well-being of Bolivian households
- Document these impacts and risk management strategies from the point of view of exposed populations with high poverty.
- See the impacts on intangible dimensions such as people's capacity for action and decision and expectations about the future

Methodology and design

- 12 communities across Bolivia (6 communities for droughts, and 6 for floods)
- The municipalities were selected based on 3 criteria:
 1. High historical risk to the events and recent exposure
 2. High poverty (monetary and non-monetary)
 3. Accessibility (existence of UGR)
- Combination of focus groups, in-depth interviews with key informants, and in-depth individual interviews

General observations

- The two climatic events have different processes and impacts due to their different nature:
 - Floods: sudden, abrupt impact
 - Droughts: effects occur slowly
- There is a general perception that the climate has changed
- Feeling of loss of control and security
- Evidence on the impact consistent with the quantitative literature

Risk management strategies

- Individual approach to managing risks
- Essential role of traditional and indigenous knowledge in prevention and adaptation – but becoming less relevant
- Need for ‘hard’ investments: investing in better equipment, fertilizer, and seeds
- Local leaders seen as gate keepers in risk management
- Migration is a central response strategy

More than yet another dimension affected by the shock: The role of agency

- Agency is people's capability to make decisions and to transform them into the desired actions and results (World Bank, 2011).
- Agency is an enabler to the leveraging of opportunities and assets
- Indications of decreased agency
 - Pessimism, sense of lack of control, frustration and passivity
- Droughts affect poor people's agency
 - Feeling of helplessness, recurrence of the events
- Limited agency affects risk management
 - Passivity and resignation, short-term thinking, cautious with making investments, lack of hope

“We all want to die, what are we going to do. Like that we talk among ourselves”.

Woman affected by drought, 35 years, Tapacari

“We don’t get organized, We just stare at each other. What are we going to do? Nobody can do anything. It is nature, they say. We just endure it, withstand it”.

Male community leader, 54 years, Apoyo

“The trees will also dry out. Everything will dry out. Everyone is going to die”.

Women affected by drought (FGD), Tapacari

“I cannot think about anything. Like a dumb person I go along, I don’t think about anything, don’t memorize”.

Woman affected by drought, 80 years, Tapacari

“Ten years from now, hum... I don’t know, I don’t know, we don’t think about that”.

Woman affected by droughts, 35 years, Macharetí

“Now, people have become very upset, they have also changed because there is no agricultural production”.

Woman affected by drought, 35 years, Tapacari

“People just take it like that. They are things of nature, and that is that. There is very little desire to work because they are afraid to fail mostly because of the drought”.

Male community leader, 37 years, Charagua

Main takeaways

- Interviews show that droughts and floods are events that significantly affect people's agency.
- Feelings of resignation in some villagers is the changing context that leads to a sense of loss of control over their own lives
- Hopelessness caused by these climate events undermines people's agency and can lead to poverty traps

Implications for policy

- **Information is key** to help understand and adapt to climate change, and increase agency- Demand for information from local leaders and residents about the likelihood of climate events occurring and management strategies
- **Migration** is a core response strategy to climate change, but not for everyone – can also be distressing and affect those left behind
- Complementing “hard investments” with **soft interventions** to enhance impact - policies aimed at improving risk management in very poor communities should understand the role of agency and other internal factors

THANK YOU