



## **Preserving Indigenous peoples' cultural heritage through resilience building in Bolivia**

### **Overview**

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) Bolivia Country Office is implementing a project to strengthen the resilience of the remote Indigenous Uru Murato community to the impacts of climate change. The project focuses on diversifying their livelihood opportunities and improving their access to water resources, in addition to safeguarding and preserving their culture and traditions. The Uru Murato reside in the highlands, or altiplano, of Bolivia on the shores of Lake Poopó, which used to be the second largest lake in Bolivia and is at an altitude of 3,868 meters. The lake is a part of their cultural identity, and their traditional livelihoods are based on fishing and handicrafts made from aquatic plants. Drought, intensified by climate change and the El Niño phenomenon, and other water management issues have contributed to the drying up of Lake Poopó, which has impacted the Uru Murato's food security and the sustainability of their livelihoods. Climate-induced loss and damage has forced members of the Uru Murato community to migrate, mainly to nearby urban centers, threatening their cultural heritage, including the loss of their language.

### **Programme development and design**

This integrated resilience project evolved following two emergency operations in the area: In the past five years, WFP has intervened with food assistance to support members of the Uru Murato community. As the livelihoods of these families revolved around their interaction with the lake, WFP took a next step to implement a project with community members to improve their food security and livelihood opportunities. Project activities include building systems to harness rainwater to service their homes and schools; supporting animal husbandry and the cultivation of fresh vegetables; and supporting women's entrepreneurship through training workshops and connecting them to markets to sell their products.

The project was developed in an inclusive manner with the Uru Murato through a participatory and equitable consultative process, respecting their ancestral norms and traditions to jointly identify the differentiated and common needs, interests and priorities of men, women and youth of the community. These inputs were then consolidated to inform the project design.

### **Impact and evaluation**

This project is in its implementation stage and is currently ongoing. Thus far, the results achieved indicate beneficial outcomes for the Uru Murato. Over the past five months of operations, the project has installed nearly 30 kilometers of pipelines to provide communities with water, four water storage tanks, 31 photovoltaic pumps, more than 10 facilities for small animal husbandry and vegetable production, and two handicraft centers. This has both improved water resource management among the Uru Murato, therefore safeguarding their



food security and local livelihoods opportunities. In addition, the project has supported women artisans with technical training on small business management practices and has facilitated their participation in local and national markets, with the aim of both generating income and showcasing the richness of their culture through their handicrafts to a wider audience. These activities have contributed to a reduction of migration and cultural preservation.

### **Lessons learned**

The most important takeaway from the implementation of this project so far is that it is essential that the programme design is developed in consultation with community members, and to respect their ancestral knowledge and norms in the process. Language constraints can also pose a challenge; it is therefore critical to have a person who can speak the local language and translate during community consultations to ensure the inclusion of older community members. In addition, to implement such a project successfully, it is important to address gender inequalities. Through the community consultations, it became clear that there was an unequal opportunity gap between men and women's livelihood options, with many women dedicating their time to household chores and herding camelids. Moreover, many adult women are not formally educated, and it is more difficult for them to access better income generation opportunities. It is therefore important to include project activities that directly target and are inclusive of women. In addition, implementation of this project required relationship and trust building with both the Uru Murato and traditional government authorities, which is crucial for project replication.

### **Additional Resources**

Article: [COP27: A dried up lake and an indigenous community on the precipice in Bolivia](#)