

A guide to Bolivia



Population:	Almost 11 million (UK: over 64 million)
Currency:	Bolivian Boliviano
Languages:	Spanish, Quechua, Aymara and Guarani, and other native languages
Religion:	76.8% Catholic, 8.1% Evangelical and Pentecostal, 7.9% Protestant, 7.3% other/none
Average age:	23 years (UK: 40 years)
Poverty:	45% live on less than \$2/day
Agriculture:	Soybeans, quinoa, Brazil nuts, sugarcane, coffee, corn, rice, potatoes, chia, coca
Exports:	Natural gas, mineral ores, gold, soybeans, soy products, tin.

Sources: World Bank Indicators; CIA World Fact Book.

A BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY

From the mighty ice-covered peaks of the Andes to the vibrant rainforests and huge savannas of the Amazon basin, Bolivia is a country of stunning natural beauty. There are vast, dazzling salt flats, ancient ruins, the world's highest capital city, La Paz, and some of the most diverse plant and animal life in South America.

HISTORY

Bolivia's earliest known civilisation dates back to around 2000 BC. The ruins of this people's grand city, Tiwanaku, can still be seen today near the shores of Lake Titicaca. Thousands of years later, in the 15th century, Bolivia became part of the Inca Empire. The Spanish invaded in 1525 and Bolivia lived under their rule for almost 300 years. During this time, the indigenous* population were enslaved. Bolivia finally gained independence from Spain in 1825.

Bolivia has survived periods of significant instability since gaining independence. It lost much of its land, including the coast, in wars with neighbouring countries. The 1900s were filled with revolution and turmoil and there were many changes in government. A democracy was finally established in 1985.

* **Indigenous** = people that have lived many centuries in an area and have their own culture and language.

CURRENT SITUATION

In 2005, Evo Morales was elected - Bolivia's first president from an indigenous community. Over the last ten years, poverty levels have fallen and indigenous people's rights are better recognised and protected.



However, Bolivia remains the poorest country in South America and many people still battle discrimination and inequality in their daily lives. Almost half of the population live below the poverty line. This rises to as high as 60 per cent in rural areas, where people depend on farming to make a living.



The Altiplano



The Altiplano is a vast plain high in the Andes, 3800m above sea level. The soil in this region is poor quality and extremely dry. The climate is changing and so are the rains – they are very unpredictable; sometimes there can be too much rain, but usually there is simply not enough.

These conditions make it difficult to grow food. Families are unable to grow enough varied food for a good diet. As a result, many people, particularly children, are malnourished. Often family members are forced to leave the area to find work in the cities because failed rains and sudden hailstorms have destroyed entire harvests.

CAFOD PARTNERS

On the Altiplano, CAFOD has three ‘partners’, local organisations that know the area and its needs. They offer training in traditional and modern farming methods, such as making organic fertilisers and terracing the land to stop soil being washed away. They also provide tools and training in how to build greenhouses and wormeries — containers in which worms convert waste into rich compost at no cost.

The impact of these techniques is huge. Families who had received continual support from CAFOD partners are now able to grow enough food to feed themselves as well as additional food to sell to earn an income. Those who have learned new skills go on to support others by sharing their knowledge around the community.



The foods we were buying before were not grown well. Now we grow everything ourselves, so it’s much better for our health.”

Rebeca, 16

REBECA

Rebeca is 16 years old. She lives on a farm on the Altiplano.

Rebeca and her family worked with our partner to build a greenhouse that protects vegetables from the harsh environment. Rebeca helped to make the bricks and to put the plastic sheeting on the roof and says she felt very happy the day they finished building the greenhouse.

NEW TECHNIQUES

The family also learned new farming techniques and now grow beetroot, celery, tomato, lettuce and cucumber in their greenhouse.

Rebeca remembers the day her family picked their first lettuce: “We cooked it with potato and from then on we’ve always eaten lettuce. I really like lettuce. It’s very important to eat vegetables because they’re nutritious and they help us to strengthen our brains and to study. Since we’ve had the greenhouse, I’ve noticed my health is better.”



“WE GIVE YOU THANKS”



I ask all believers to return to this beautiful and meaningful custom. That moment of blessing, however brief, reminds us of our dependence on God for life; it strengthens our feeling of gratitude for the gifts of creation; it acknowledges those who by their labours provide us with these goods; and it reaffirms our solidarity with those in greatest need.”

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 227



Rebeca is Aymaran. In their traditional faith, the Aymara have a close relationship with *Pachamama* (Mother Earth). One of their rituals is, before any meal, each person drops a tiny bit of their food or drink on the ground as an offering to *Pachamama*. Each person wishes their companions an enjoyable meal and, at the end of the meal, gives thanks for the food.

LEARNING FROM THE AYMARA

Parents and school cleaners may not be impressed if you start dropping food on the floor before a meal! But there are other ways to show thankfulness for the food we are receiving. The traditional way for Christians to do this is by saying a prayer—or ‘Grace’—before meals.

TASK



What four reasons does Pope Francis give for praying Grace before meals?

Write your own Grace, incorporating all four aspects that Pope Francis mentioned.
Vote to choose one version that your youth group or class could use before mealtimes.
You could even set your Grace to a familiar tune.

CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY: FEED THE HUNGRY

Let us rediscover these corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead.”

Pope Francis, at the start of the Year of Mercy



In September 2016, Pope Francis proposed a new work of mercy – care for our common home

Traditionally, the Catholic Church has taught that there are seven corporal works of mercy, or ways to help others with their corporal (physical) needs. They are based on Matthew 25 and Tobit 1. The first one is ‘feed the hungry’. But, how? Scripture, the people most affected and Catholic Social Teaching can all help to answer that question.

Explore

Read Matthew 25:34-40.

Who was given food, according to the King?

Why do Christians feel called to do corporal works of mercy, like feeding the hungry?

Watch our video about Rebeca: cafod.org.uk/secondary.

What are the main causes of hunger and malnourishment on the Altiplano?

How do CAFOD’s partners help to ‘feed the hungry’ on the Altiplano?

Imagine

You are one of Rebeca’s parents, knowing she is not getting enough healthy food. If you can have either a free weekly food package or a way to grow your own nourishing food, which do you choose, and why?

Task

Create a display, an assembly, a series of photos, or a blog for your school or parish website suggesting ways that you and others can help to feed the hungry by taking action, sharing, speaking out and changes of lifestyle.

Share

Write us an email so that we can share what you’ve done and inspire others: schools@cafod.org.uk

Plenary

In five words, say what is distinctive about the way that CAFOD partners feed the hungry.

Extension task

On CAFOD’s website, what evidence can you find of other corporal works of mercy, including the newest: ‘care for our common home’?



The Aymara people are indigenous to the Andes and the Altiplano, across Bolivia, Peru and Chile. Their flag is very bright with seven colours in diagonal squares. Traditional Bolivian fabrics are also bright and colourful. Can you use the bright colours of Bolivia in your fundraising to help feed the hungry?

Visit CAFOD’s website for ideas on how to Brighten Up to help families like Rebeca’s around the world.

Curriculum links

RE Curriculum Directory: 4.6 Love of Neighbour; **Geography** KS3 Asia—how human processes influence climate, KS4 Extreme weather; **English** KS3 Write non-narrative texts; **D&T** KS3 Understand user needs, reformulate problems.

Puzzle

‘Unlock’ the puzzle, using what you’ve discussed and the extra clues on the two ‘keys’

CAFOD’s partners help to feed the hungry around the world but, unless it’s an emergency, they rarely give out food.



Catholic Social Teaching (CST):

Teaching by popes and other Catholic leaders on social issues.

HUMAN DIGNITY

A key principle of CST: all people have dignity and are worthy of respect because they are made in God’s image.

SUBSIDIARITY

A key principle of CST: decisions should be made by the people most affected.

Write your answer below