



How improved governance has benefited a nationwide association of agroecological producers in Bolivia

Producer organisation:
Association of Organizations of Ecological Producers of Bolivia (AOPEB)



Internal Governance Case Study 1: Bolivia



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Acknowledgements

This case study on tactics that improve internal governance within forest and farm producer organisations was commissioned using a template prepared by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) for the Forest and Farm Facility (FFF), a co-management partnership between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), IIED and AgriCord. The FFF is supported by the governments of Sweden, Finland, Germany, Norway, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, and Ikea.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude first and foremost to IIED for providing me with the opportunity to undertake this work and engage with leaders in a crucial sector, organic or ecological producers in Bolivia. Special recognition goes to these leaders who, over the years, have steadfastly established standards that promote organic production, contribute to rural development and foster exports. Heartfelt appreciation is extended to the board of directors of the Association of Organizations of Ecological Producers of Bolivia (Asociación de Organizaciones de Productores Ecológicos de Bolivia or AOPEB) and its executive staff. Their cooperation in providing institutional information, management insights and future projections has been invaluable. This collaboration has directly benefited small producers, productive associations and numerous women and young individuals in rural communities across Bolivia. Lastly, I extend my thanks to those who shared comments or insights and complemented certain concepts and achievements. These valuable perspectives are indispensable and can only be fully understood through interaction with other institutions, leaders and producers who are intimately involved in the day-to-day life of Bolivia's rural and productive areas.

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Salomón Vargas, JR (2024) How improved governance has benefited a nationwide association of agroecological producers in Bolivia. AOPEB, La Paz and IIED, Edinburgh.
<https://www.iied.org/22391g>

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AOPEB	Association of Organizations of Ecological Producers of Bolivia
CORACAS	Peasant agricultural corporations
FFPO	Forest and farm producer organisation
NTFPs	Non-timber forest products
PGS	Participatory guarantee system
TIOC	Original Indigenous peasant territories (<i>territorio originario indígena campesino</i>)

Summary

The Association of Organizations of Ecological Producers of Bolivia (Asociación de Organizaciones de Productores Ecológicos or AOPEB) is made up of organisations of organic producers, including cooperatives, associations and peasant agricultural corporations (CORACAS) and other similar organisations that support agroecological production. Member organisations are those work relates to the productive activities, cultivation, harvesting, transformation and commercialisation of agricultural and non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and whose main characteristic is sustainable, ecological production that respects the environment and Mother Earth. AOPEB's member organisations come from almost all regions of Bolivia, which makes the association a particularly interesting case study within the ecosystem of organic producers of Bolivia.

At present, AOPEB operates under a new board of directors elected by a general assembly in 2021, armed with a clear mandate for restructuring and implementing specific actions to refine the organisation's trajectory. Over the past three years, AOPEB has undertaken a series of initiatives that have enabled it to reverse, process and project actions in support of its affiliate member organisations. These efforts have yielded benefits for grassroots producers across various regions of the country and within the sectors they represent. Efforts have been concentrated on improving AOPEB's standing and creating better opportunities for its members and grassroots partners. This reflects the resilient and effective management demonstrated over the past three years, instilling optimism for a brighter future for producers, associations and the organic sector in general.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of AOPEB's significance within its sector, its operating environment and its status in terms of internal governance, partnerships and technical-administrative structure, it is crucial to reflect on AOPEB's journey since its foundation. While the associative principle has been a cornerstone of its legal status since inception, the passage of time has both complemented successes and addressed weaknesses in organisational management capacity. This includes the evolving relationship with state entities at the national, departmental and municipal levels, as well as structural accomplishments since its establishment.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy to mention the pivotal role of the introduction of Law 3525 of 2006 on the Regulation and Promotion of Organic Agricultural and Non-Timber Forestry Production, marking a significant turning point for AOPEB by providing a framework to enhance its service management and sustainability. The law allows AOPEB to organise and represent thousands of small-scale producers and their associations at the national level, and to coordinate the organic certification process to the benefit of its members. Prior to this, producer associations did not have access to formally recognised national structures (such as AOPEB) to process compliance with specific laws and regulations in relation to organic production and certification. The law applies to all organic producers and AOPEB can certify any small producer that complies with the certification processes.

However, a lack of proper regulation of the law has strained AOPEB's relationships with the government, demanding improvement. Some former AOPEB officials with privileged knowledge of AOPEB's operations have created their own organisations offering parallel organic certification schemes. However, these associations often do not represent organic producers, therefore offering few benefits to small-scale organic producers and undermining AOPEB's position. The new national board of directors has undertaken actions to reestablish its relationship with the national government. The aim is to collaborate with national authorities in regulating Law 3525, to properly regulate the certification process and improve services for organic producers in both national and export markets. This should also ensure direct sector benefits, fostering capacity-building and services for association members as there is a

concern that the lack of proper regulation of the law might deviate from its original intent, potentially causing harm to rather than supporting the sector.

Lastly, it is crucial to acknowledge the effective management of the current board of directors. They have successfully implemented adjustments to overcome challenges left by previous administrations, which had become institutional burdens affecting the association's credibility. Over the past few years, this situation has been reversed through active member participation in decision-making, ensuring equitable representation across different areas or regions of AOPEB, and establishing mechanisms for collecting opinions and feedback from all members.

1 About the Association of Organizations of Ecological Producers of Bolivia (AOPEB)

1.1 AOPEB's origins and vision

The Association of Organizations of Ecological Producers of Bolivia (Asociación de Organizaciones de Productores Ecológicos or AOPEB) was established on 24 September 1991 as a non-profit entity, in the town of Sipe Sipe in the Cochabamba region, department of Cochabamba.¹ Supreme Resolution No 212290, dated 25 March 1993, officially recognises the legal personality of this organisation, which is dedicated to advancing the organic productive sector. AOPEB is comprised of various organic producer organisations, including cooperatives, associations and other similar structures, committed to supporting organic production and advocating for environmentally friendly agricultural practices.

Since its inception, AOPEB has been a proponent of the traditions and customs enshrined in the political constitution of the Bolivian state. The organisation emphasises actions in agroecological production, grounded in respect for ancestral wisdom and knowledge derived from Andean-Amazonian cultures. The focal point of these efforts is the organised participation of peasant and Indigenous producers. The mission of AOPEB revolves around promoting the development of ecological, sustainable, economically viable, socially just, environmentally healthy and culturally acceptable production. The vision is centred on establishing an organisation that harnesses natural resources sustainably, applying ecological and agroforestry production systems to conserve the environment, and creating opportunities for sustainable and resilient production for its members.

1.2 Location and membership

AOPEB is made up of organisations of organic producers, including cooperatives, associations and peasant agricultural corporations (CORACAS) and other similar organisations that support agroecological production. Member organisations are recognised as affiliated members whose work relates to the productive activities, cultivation, harvesting, transformation and commercialisation of agricultural and non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and whose main characteristic is sustainable, ecological production that respects the environment and Mother Earth. AOPEB's member organisations come from almost all regions of Bolivia, which makes the association a particularly interesting case study within the ecosystem of organic producers of Bolivia.

AOPEB operates nationwide, with a primary emphasis on regions where grassroots organisations are concentrated. Its regional offices are classified as territorial extensions administered by AOPEB's national board of directors and general management. Priority is given to productive areas where membership of AOPEB will have a significant impact on the work, production and institutional management of grassroots organisations, benefiting producers, women's associations and young individuals. While AOPEB's national office is situated in the city of La Paz, it is noteworthy that its partner institutions wield a substantial influence in many regions of the country (Figure 1).

The association is actively present in three geographical areas: the Andean zone (Altiplano), Sub-Andean zone (Valleys) and Eastern zone (Eastern Plains) (see also Annex 1). These areas are the ancestral home of Indigenous Peoples whose experiences and practices emphasise sustainable ecological resource use and interaction harmonised with the

¹ In some documents, it is incorrectly stated that AOPEB was founded in Samaipata, Department of Santa Cruz, on the same date.

community's sociocultural structure. AOPEB focuses on key productive areas for specific organic products, leading production and export in regions such as Southern Altiplano, Chiquitania, Baures and others. Activities are sustained by partner organisations such as Anapqui, El Ceibo, Minga, Productos Naturales Protal and Pachamama, encompassing the production of organic quinoa, chocolate, coffee and more.

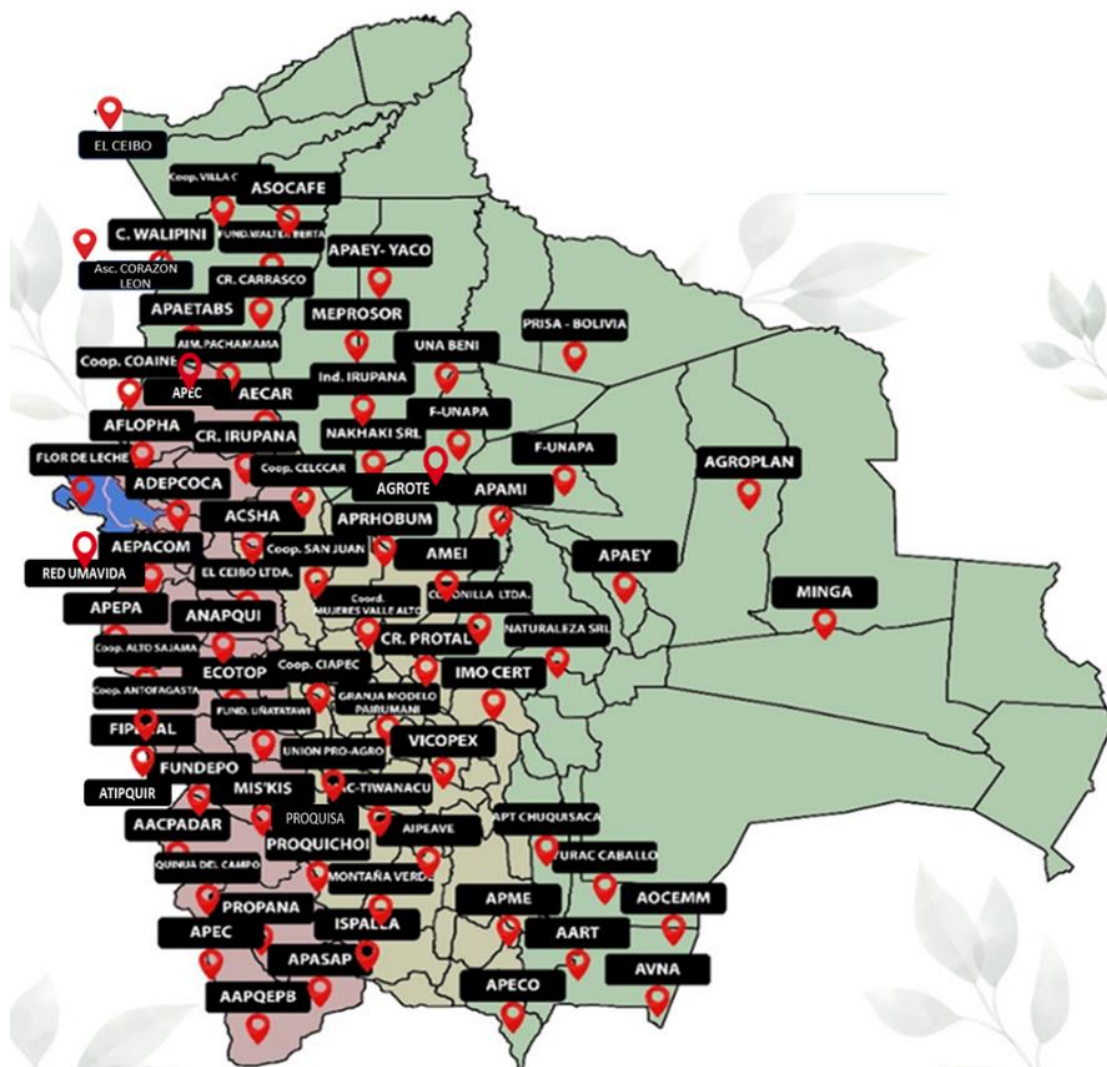


Figure 1. Map showing the locations of AOPEB's member organisations

Source: AOPEB

While the number of producers tends to fluctuate over time, the association's presence in all departments in Bolivia allows for a comprehensive perspective, acknowledging that this figure may vary based on local activities and the impact generated by member organisations. It is important to highlight that the process of member affiliation and management within each of AOPEB's member organisations is subject to variables such as social control, the presence of cooperation, and, notably, the community's own rules that either encourage or restrict participation in fulfilling obligations.

Looking at Figure 1, indicating the locations of AOPEB member organisations, a pattern emerges. Most are situated in the highlands, valleys and Chaco (semi-arid lowland) regions, with smaller but significant numbers strategically positioned in areas such as Chiquitania and Amazonia in Eastern Bolivia. This distribution adequately represents the organised production of key products such as coffee, chocolate and chestnuts, particularly in the Chiquitania and Amazonia regions.

1.3 AOPEB's products and services

Members of affiliated organisations engage in the commercialisation of a diverse range of organic products, including quinoa, coffee, almonds, cocoa and chocolate, among others, both for domestic and export markets. For cocoa production, approximately 12,000 hectares in its wild form are spread across Pando and Beni. While specific data on individual ownership is unavailable, community-based production is prevalent.

To showcase the array of products and services generated by AOPEB and its members in terms of production and land-use patterns, it is essential to highlight the association's success in consolidating policies and regulations for the benefit of organic producers, as outlined in Law 3525 on the Regulation and Promotion of Organic Agricultural and Non-Timber Forestry Production.² AOPEB aligns itself with the national policy of organic production, reinforcing its commitment through programmes and projects related to ecological development and non-timber forestry within the framework of climate-resilient policies. For example, AOPEB promotes the use of agroforestry systems that integrate growing perennial plants such as trees, shrubs, cacti, palms, bamboo trees and vines in areas with annual crops and/or livestock. This approach serves the pivotal purpose of diversifying and optimising production while respecting the principles of sustainability and ecosystem preservation.



Organic products produced by AOPEB members: hibiscus flowers (left) and green tea (right)
© José René Salomón Vargas

One of the association's most significant services to its members has been the certification of organic products within the framework of the Law 3525 on organic production by consolidating its use of a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) to certify its members' organic products.³ Figure 3 shows a timeline of how AOPEB has developed PGS certification for its members.

² Law 3525 defines and regulates the production, wild collection, processing, labelling, marketing and certification of products labelled or sold as organic, ecological or biological. See <https://services.controlunion.com/organic/product/bolivia-organic>

³ A Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) is a second-party certification scheme typically used by smallholders to certify their produce using economic, social or environmental standards. Unlike third-party certification schemes – where products are verified by an independent body – a PGS system enables producers to set their own quality standards and, essentially, certify each other. The benefit of PGS schemes is that they have a lower cost and administrative burden compared to third-party certification schemes, which are major barriers for smallholders. See www.iied.org/how-innovative-shared-labels-are-promoting-diversity-biocultural-heritage-sustainable-production

However, despite the association's efforts, a fully consolidated certification service has yet to be achieved to ensure economic sustainability. AOPEB acknowledges challenges related to production capacity, product quality and volumes, each of which its members are actively addressing. AOPEB is developing a strategic plan to support the production, certification and commercialisation of organic agricultural and NTFPs (see Figure 3). This involves providing technical assistance, establishing productive infrastructure and facilitating product transformation and commercialisation for both national and international markets. Such efforts contribute significantly to the conservation and recovery of the Amazon and Chiquitania forests in Bolivia.

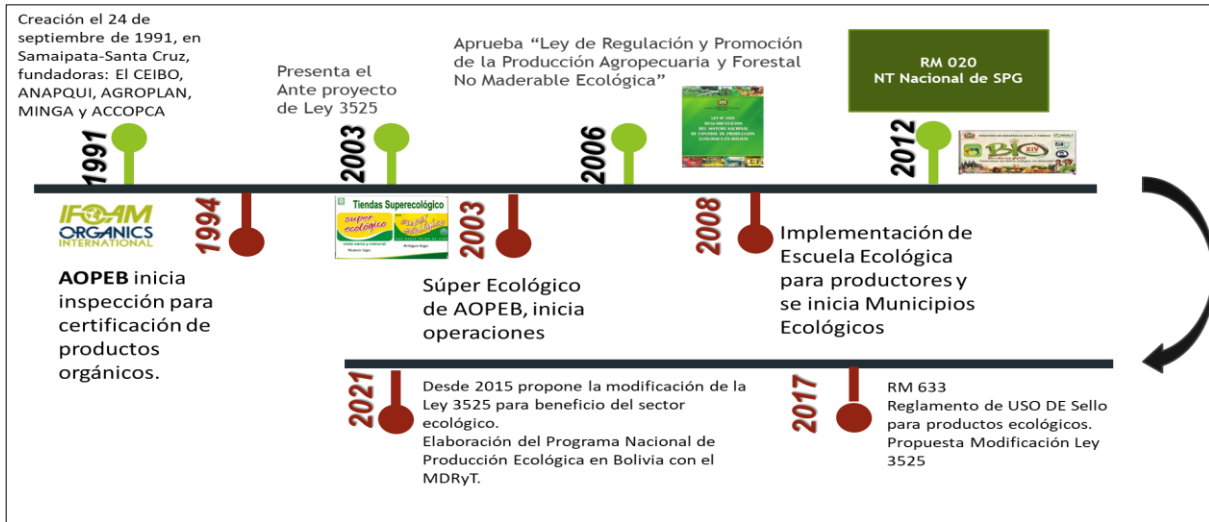


Figure 2. AOPEB's timeline of PGS certification in Bolivia



General manager Ana Guzmán displaying some of AOPEB's PGS-certified organic products © José René Salomón Vargas

1.4 National context: agriculture, forestry and land-use patterns

1.4.1 Agriculture and forestry

In the agricultural sector, traditional crops predominate, particularly in the Altiplano zone, with a focus on domestic consumption. Staple crops such as cereals, maize and potatoes are cultivated, with quinoa and some other grains standing out significantly for export. Other notable agricultural products from the plains include Brazil nuts, coffee, cotton, beans, sesame, chia and sugarcane.

According to a recent analysis of agricultural policies of Bolivia (Alcaraz Rivero 2020), the agricultural sector holds substantial economic and social relevance in the country. It averaged a 10.6% contribution to Bolivia's gross domestic product (GDP) from 2006 to 2019, experiencing the highest growth rate (6.6%) since 2017. Approximately 50% of the active economic population is employed in agricultural activity, representing around 4% of the country's exports. In the sub-Andean Zone, agriculture thrives, focusing on the cultivation of vegetables, coffee, peanuts, fruits and coca (Embassy of Bolivia in Canada). This activity is concentrated in the Chapare region and a small portion of the Yungas region in the department of La Paz.

Forests cover approximately half of Bolivia's territorial area, totalling 53 million hectares (WWF undated). The forestry sector, which includes industrial forestry, employs over 60,000 people (ibid). Bolivian forests are among the most diverse in the world and home to more than 2,194 species of amphibians, birds, mammals, and reptiles (Forests of the World). However, Bolivia (historically having the largest number of certified tropical forests globally) faces challenges today, including forest fragility due to fires and other threats leading to illegal deforestation (World Resources Institute 2022).

As per the Bolivian Institute of Foreign Trade, coffee exports between January and May 2022 reached 1,017 tonnes, amounting to US\$6 million (Instituto Boliviano de Comercio Exterior 2022). These figures represent increases of 32% in volume and 42% in value compared to the same period in 2021. The majority of coffee production (96%) is concentrated in the provinces of Caranavi, Nor and Sud Yungas in the department of La Paz, with Arabica being the primary species. Santa Cruz contributes 3%, and Cochabamba 1% (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores undated). While some private initiatives own coffee plantations, the majority do not exceed 20 hectares. Community production, particularly in La Paz, dominates the sector.

Quinoa production in the Southern Highlands region of Bolivia has been historically export oriented, but has faced challenges in recent years. Producers believe they are at a disadvantage, having subsidised national and international markets. Issues such as monocultures, decreasing incomes and commercialisation through multiple intermediaries now necessitate a shift towards organic certification for higher product value. Quinoa often passes through several hands before reaching the consumer in the USA and European markets, where it commands a significantly higher price compared to Bolivia (Barrientos *et al.* 2017). The cultivated areas for organic quinoa products vary, ranging from 6 to 10 hectares per producing family, with some plots reaching up to 100 hectares.

Based on data from the Observatory for Agro-Environmental Productivity (OAP), Bolivia's average annual quinoa production is around 70,000 tonnes, with 28 different varieties suitable for domestic consumption and export (Agencia Boliviana de Información 2023). Potosí, Oruro and La Paz are the main quinoa-producing departments, accounting for 99% of the crop's productive area for commercial consumption (ibid). Bolivia distinguishes itself as the sole producer of royal quinoa, known for its larger size, thickness, colour and nutritional attributes. The international market recognises and values royal quinoa, resulting in higher prices (ibid). Major export destinations for quinoa from 2017 to 2022 include the United States (48%),

Germany (9%), Canada (8%), the Netherlands (8%) and France (7%) (ibid). The Ministry of Rural Development and Lands supports the National Programme to Support the Production and Marketing of Andean Grains, aiming to enhance production, productivity and food security in Bolivia (ibid). Through this programme, the goal is to develop four adapted varieties of high-productivity quinoa, achieve a 112% increase in quinoa yield by 2025, and improve the positioning and commercialisation of Andean grains in both national and international markets (ibid).

Due to the critical importance of the future of quinoa, I would like to emphasise an interview conducted for this study with Engineer Marín Condori, a professor and researcher at the Gabriel René Moreno Autonomous University (UAGRM). He reported that the newly tropicalised quinoa cultivated in the east of the country exhibits an average yield of 1,500kg per hectare, which is three times more than in the highlands. According to Condori, “That is one of the great gains that the sector has had with this research on tropicalised quinoa. We know that in the highlands there is a yield between 500kg to 600kg per hectare; with this quinoa we are talking about 1,500kg per hectare on average – we are talking about three times more than in the highlands.” He is also a partner in the company Alteí (a marketing company dedicated to providing international agricultural and animal nutrition products), responsible for exports.

Condori also highlighted that even under ideal conditions for irrigation, fertilisation, timely weed management and disease prevention, the crop has a genetic production ceiling of up to five tonnes (5,000kg) per hectare. This represents eight to 10 times more production per hectare compared to the highlands.



Organic products produced by AOPEB members: Café Minga (left) and organic quinoa (right) © José René Salomón Vargas

1.4.2 Land ownership and tenure

Regarding the area cultivated per individual producer in Bolivia, land tenure is generally less than one hectare of production, with some exceeding two hectares. However, due to the communal productive structure, it is challenging to precisely determine the number of hectares managed by each producer, such as in the case of almond production, including Chiquitania almonds, in the north of La Paz, Beni and Pando.

Proprietary and land tenure rights in Bolivia are subject to an ongoing context that remains unresolved. The Political Constitution of the State of 7 February 2009 addresses key aspects. It clarifies the original dominion over the land, stating that the soil and subsoil are the original property and domain of the Bolivian people, with the state responsible for administration and control. It also emphasises that “work is the fundamental source for the acquisition and conservation of land”, stressing the fulfilment of the social or socioeconomic function for maintaining this right (Jurisprudencia Constitucional y de Derechos Humanos).

The state also recognises, protects and guarantees individual and community or collective ownership of land (Huarachi Tola 2017). The state makes constitutional provisions that underscore Bolivia’s commitment to equitable land distribution, environmental sustainability, and the protection of the rights of Indigenous and peasant communities. It:

- Constitutionalises access to land for peasant and Indigenous women
- Explicitly recognises private property and collective property, provided it fulfils a social function or a socioeconomic function
- Acknowledges the complementarity of collective and individual rights, allowing for mixed titling of property in accordance with the dynamics in peasant and Indigenous communities
- Prohibits dual land endowments and speculation
- Constitutionalises the reversion of agrarian property due to latifundia tenure or non-compliance with the socioeconomic function, aiming for equitable land redistribution
- Proposes the equalisation of collective rights to land through the recognition of a new type of property: original indigenous peasant territories (*territorio originario indígena campesino* or TIOCs), formerly known as community lands of origin (*tierras comunitarias de origen*)⁴
- Regulates the land market to prevent accumulation beyond legal limits and division into areas smaller than established for small property
- Prohibits foreigners from acquiring state land under any title, and
- Creates agroecological jurisdiction, with the highest authorities elected by popular vote.

In the highlands, land tenure is predominantly characterised by collective or community ownership. Territories have been successfully consolidated as TIOCs, particularly in the Southern Highlands where quinoa production areas have established community production processes. Despite this communal ownership, there are instances of private plots, notably in regions such as Potosí and Chuquisaca.

In the valleys, community property has undergone subdivision into small private plots, resulting in persistent issues of overlaps and boundaries. The continuous process of parcel division has led to conflicts over boundaries and a lack of clear ownership. Eastern Bolivia mirrors this situation, with ongoing conflicts related to rights, overlaps and a prevailing trend of subjugation, especially in protected areas, natural parks and TIOCs. These conflicts often arise between local community members and migrants (known as *interculturales*).

⁴ Community lands of origin (TCOs) were territories held by Indigenous Peoples through collective titles. Since Supreme Decree 0727 came into force in December 2010, TCOs have been renamed original peasant indigenous territories (TIOCs).

Additionally, the lack of legal security for private property has adversely affected properties established by private producers.

Cocoa production primarily occurs in areas where community ownership prevails. In the case of coffee, there are areas designated as private plots but are also held under common tenure, with producers upholding ancestral obligations and customs, fostering joint work and community responsibilities. Legal authorities, such as the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria), play a crucial role in overseeing and granting the right of ownership. The Authority for Supervision and Social Control of Forests and Lands (Autoridad de Fiscalización y Control Social de Bosques y Tierras) is responsible for managing and enforcing the sustainable use of natural resources.

For conflict resolution, community authorities are recognised as entities capable of resolving internal issues related to the use and tenure of land within the community. Their decisions are made in accordance with the legal structure of agrarian norms governing tenure, ownership, and the exploitation of both forest and non-timber forest products. This approach emphasises a commitment to upholding legal frameworks while respecting community traditions and customary practices.

2 Evolution of AOPEB's internal governance structures, systems and practices

2.1 Organisational structure and internal governance

AOPEB's affiliated members are classified as follows:

- **First-tier organisations:** These are the associations, cooperatives and CORACAS involved in organic production, with legal status, which affiliate individual producers.
- **Second-tier organisations:** These are associations, CORACAS, cooperatives and others formed with legal persons, which affiliate first-tier associations and cooperatives.
- **Other organisations:** This includes eco-social companies, foundations and other legal entities that carry out activities to support organic production, and whose associates can be natural and/or legal persons.

Under the provisions of AOPEB's latest statute approved on 20 May 2022, AOPEB's organisational structure is divided into four areas (see also Figure 2):

- **General assembly:** This is AOPEB's highest strategic level, responsible for macro-level decision-making, setting institutional policy guidelines and philosophy. The general assembly consists of representatives from all of the affiliate member organisations, who convene in ordinary and extraordinary sessions.
- **National board of directors:** Representing AOPEB institutionally, the board formulates and plans institutional policy based on general assembly guidelines. The board supervises and controls executive-level functions managed by the general management. The board consists of a president, secretary-general and treasurer, each with specific roles, exercised in a coordinated and interdependent manner.
- **Directorate of social control:** Operating autonomously, the directorate of social control adheres to guidelines from the ordinary and/or extraordinary general assembly. It oversees the actions of the national board of directors and the general management.
- **General management:** This executive level is managed by the general management team and its directorates. It operationalises strategies, policies and institutional philosophy from the board of directors. They formulate and implement development programmes and projects for AOPEB-affiliated member organisations.

According to the provisions outlined in AOPEB's statute and regulations, elections of member organisations and officials adhere to criteria of universal and democratic suffrage. The nominations of proposed affiliate members are assessed with a commitment to equal opportunities for men, women and youth. Additionally, individuals with a history of criminal and/or economic misconduct are ineligible to become candidates. This reinforces the organisation's dedication to maintaining high ethical standards and ensuring that elected representatives uphold the values and integrity of the association.

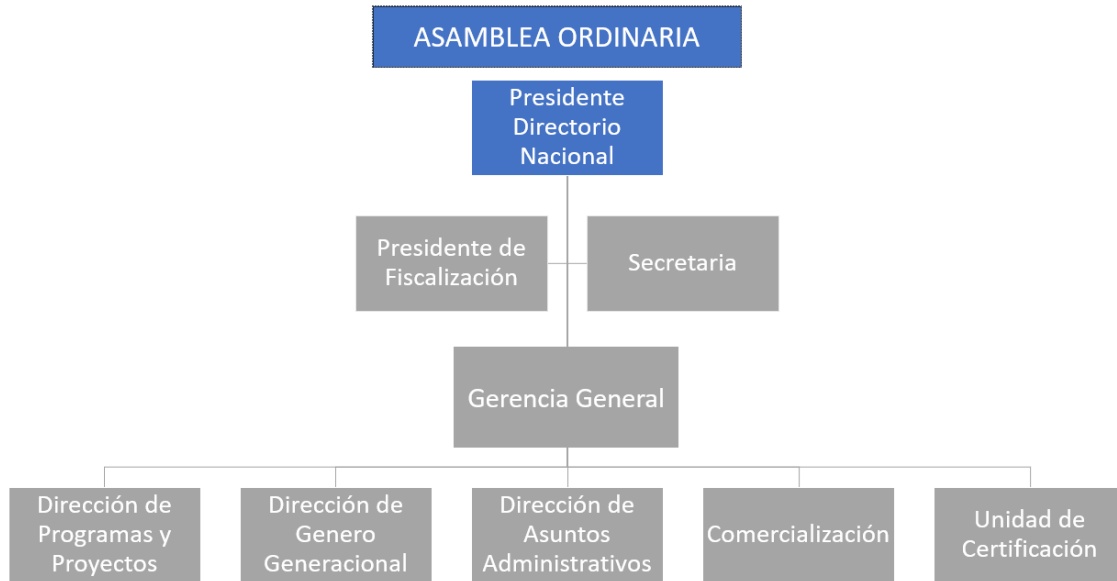


Figure 3. The governance structure of AOPEB

2.1.1 General assembly

Article 17 of the internal regulations of AOPEB defines the general assembly as its highest decision-making body, composed of two delegates representing each affiliated member organisation. The ordinary general assembly is held annually in the first semester and is convened 30 calendar days in advance by the national board of directors. Extraordinary assemblies may be called 15 days in advance to address urgent matters, either at the written request of two-thirds of AOPEB members or at the discretion of the directorate of social control, recognising the necessity and importance of timely deliberations.

2.1.2 National board of directors

As outlined in AOPEB's statutes and regulations, individuals forming the national board of directors must be members of an affiliated organisation of AOPEB. They are democratically elected during an ordinary general assembly, ensuring equal conditions and opportunities.

Article 32 of AOPEB's internal regulations outlines the following procedure for the election of the national board of directors:

- Active affiliate members, through their titular delegate, can propose an affiliate member delegate for election to the national board in the plenary.
- Candidates must meet the eligibility requirements established in AOPEB's statute.
- A minimum of eight proposed candidates will be received at the ordinary general assembly. If the minimum number is not met, the election will be postponed and a new call for delegates will be made within 30 days.
- The candidate with 50% plus one vote is elected as president. If no candidate achieves this in the first ballot, a new ballot is held for the top two candidates.
- The same procedure is followed for other offices (secretary-general and treasurer).
- Only candidates with endorsement and present at the ordinary general assembly during the election can be elected.



Diego Osvaldo Lino Olivares, president of AOPEB © José René Salomón Vargas

2.1.3 Directorate of social control

Operating autonomously, the directorate of social control adheres to guidelines from the ordinary and/or extraordinary general assembly. It oversees the actions of the national board of directors and the general management. To join this control body, members must be from an affiliated organisation and democratically elected in an ordinary or extraordinary general assembly. The directorate comprises of a president and secretary-general, each with a tenure of three years, with the possibility of being re-elected once for a similar period, contingent upon a vote of confidence from two thirds of the affiliated members.

According to Article 32 of AOPEB's internal regulations, the following procedure must be adhered to:

- Active affiliate members, through their titular delegate, may propose in plenary an affiliated member delegate to be elected as a member of the directorate of social control.
- Candidates must meet the eligibility requirements for both the national board of directors and the directorate of social control as established in AOPEB's statute.
- A minimum of eight proposed candidates will be received at the ordinary general assembly. If the minimum number is not met, the election will be postponed and a new call for delegates made within 30 days.
- The board of the directorate of social control will be elected based on the order of votes obtained.
- Additionally, general management, along with the operational directorates (programmes and projects, gender and generational affairs, and administrative affairs), and the certification and commercialisation units will be selected through a public call and based on a shortlist.

2.1.4 General management

Under the general management team, the programmes and projects directorates play a crucial role in formulating proposals and fostering active cooperation between AOPEB's affiliated member organisations. Notably, AOPEB emphasises gender and generational initiatives within its members organisations, showcasing projects that promote inclusive participation and gender sensitivity. These efforts have focused on respecting the rights of women and the elderly.

2.1.5 Membership requirements

For organisations wishing to become affiliated members, eligibility is assessed through an internal process. Within a maximum period of 15 calendar days, at least one member of AOPEB's national board of directors will conduct an on-site visit, and a visit record is duly signed by the representatives of the requesting organisation and the member of the national board of directors to validate the information provided by the requesting organisation.

After the visit, within a maximum period of five calendar days, the assessor from the board of directors prepares a written report for the president of the national board, determining whether or not the applicant organisation complies with AOPEB's requirements for new members. The national board of directors, within the framework of the report submitted, will then proceed with the approval or rejection of the affiliation of the applicant organisation. If approved, the organisation must pay the affiliation fee within five calendar days for their affiliation to be finalised. A resolution of admission is then issued within five calendar days after receiving the affiliation fee.

To be considered an active member of AOPEB, attendance at ordinary or extraordinary assemblies is mandatory, except in situations of duly justified and verified force majeure. Affiliated organisations must fulfil these obligations in accordance with AOPEB's statutes and internal regulations. Organisations that are considered 'passive' affiliates are ones that have not responsibly complied with their obligations within a two-year period.

The statutes and bylaws of AOPEB provide clear definitions of membership and establish rules governing admission. They also outline processes for the continuation or loss of membership, based on criteria specified in their regulations. Procedures for affiliate dissolution, as stated in the statute, consider scenarios such as voluntary withdrawal or resignation and involve a predefined process that requires the settlement of outstanding debts. If a member organisation's exclusion is determined by AOPEB, the directorate of social control investigates and verifies the facts, either *ex officio* or in response to a complaint. The investigation results and justifications are reported to the general assembly, which decides on the affiliation of board members. The assembly's decision is then communicated to the national board of directors, which then updates the affiliate list.

The approval process for new members has been accelerated and encourages new organisations to join. But following the pandemic and social conflicts within the country, many applicants found they were unable to pay the affiliation contribution fee required by AOPEB. For this reason, in 2021–2023, the new board of directors adjusted the level of fees required from new members.

2.3 Innovations, systems adjustments and organisational practice

2.3.1 Improving internal governance

Since 2021 when it was sworn in, the current board of directors has successfully implemented adjustments to overcome challenges left by the previous administration, which had become institutional burdens affecting the association's credibility. Over the past few years, this situation has been reversed through active member participation in decision-making, ensuring equitable representation across different areas or regions of AOPEB, and establishing mechanisms for collecting opinions and feedback from all members.

The board has also aimed to streamline the affiliation process to attract new organisations and to implement changes to enhance the organisation's internal efficiency and relationships with its members and authorities. For example, by express resolution, the assembly identified actions to reduce costs including reducing the number of permanent salaried consultants and stipends paid to members of the outgoing board of directors. They also agreed to develop a database of staff from affiliated organisations for human resources (HR) training, aiming to reduce the association's costs and dependence on more costly external professionals.

AOPEB's new board of directors has also undertaken specific actions to conclude costly and problematic projects it inherited from the previous administration. Presently, the board acknowledges that dealing with this legacy has been challenging, but significant progress has been made in satisfactorily closing most of the projects over the past three years.

Additionally, efforts have been made to enhance continuity within AOPEB's different directorates to ensure greater responsibility for the association's development and to achieve its objectives, indicating an improved institutional and financial situation. It is crucial to note that both the national board of directors and the directorate of social control are elected for a three-year term and may only be ratified or re-elected once again for a similar period. This implies the potential for continuity within the organisational structure. The shortlisting process requires a vote of confidence from over 50% of affiliated members present, provided they have the endorsement for ratification or re-election from their organisation.

As indicated in the interviews conducted for this research, adjustments in the operational structure of the association had also become necessary, prompting actions to terminate the contracts of the high number of permanent consultants hired by previous administrations for projects without considering the costs associated with complying with Bolivia's labour laws (such as payments for social security or pensions). These personnel either had their roles redirected within the association or their employment contracts legally ended in accordance with Bolivia's labour laws. Over the last three years, the association has reduced the number of technicians or professionals it employs from 22 to six, prioritising lowering operating costs by reducing its staff and focusing on essential areas and responsibilities. This decision resulted in a hiatus in the association's planned activities as the board of directors took measures to free itself from economic losses and legal conflicts.

2.3.2 Proposing modifications to Law 3525

In 2003, AOPEB played a pivotal role in promoting the formulation, debate and approval of Law 3525 of 2006 on the Regulation and Promotion of Organic Agricultural and Non-Timber Forestry Production. Various AOPEB representatives actively participated in its formulation with parliament and national authorities. This marked a significant turning point for AOPEB by providing a framework to enhance its service management and sustainability. The law allowed AOPEB to organise and represent thousands of small-scale producers and their associations for the first time. Prior to this, producer associations did not have access to national structures to process compliance with specific laws and regulations.

However, a lack of proper regulation of the law has strained AOPEB's relationships with the government, demanding improvement. Initially, AOPEB was formed to represent thousands of small-scale producer organisations and to coordinate the organic certification process to the benefit of its members. Since this time, some former AOPEB officials with privileged knowledge of AOPEB's operations have created their own organisations offering parallel organic certification schemes. However, these associations often do not represent organic producers, therefore offering few benefits to small-scale organic producers and undermining AOPEB's position. Following a mandate from the ordinary general assembly in February 2021, the new national board of directors has undertaken actions to reestablish its relationship with the national government. The aim is to collaborate with national authorities in regulating Law 3525, to properly regulate the certification process and improve services for organic producers in both national and export markets. This should also ensure direct sector benefits, fostering capacity-building and services for association members as there is a concern that the lack of proper regulation of the law might deviate from its original intent, potentially causing harm to rather than supporting the sector.

2.3.3 Institutional management and Biotienda

Highlighting efforts to enhance AOPEB's institutional management, a significant challenge was undertaken on 21 November 2022, with the establishment of Biotienda (meaning 'biostore'). Supported by various AOPEB Bolivian partners, Biotienda aimed to connect organic production organisations with conscious and responsible consumers to create an income for the association. However, although sustained for a period, the board of directors and general management observed that the sustainability of Biotienda was in jeopardy due to its insufficient economic success, turning operational costs into obligations rather than income. Unfortunately, the commercial unit was unable to generate the necessary resources to support the institutional and economic management of the association. Consequently, a decision was made to temporarily close it, seeking alternative ways to generate an income or, at the very least, to sustain the Biotienda initiative.



Staff outside AOPEB's Biotienda store © José René Salomón Vargas

2.3.4 Promoting inclusive work and commitment to rights

AOPEB exhibits an intriguing structure designed to facilitate effective operations. Notably, the inclusion of young people and women in AOPEB's statute reflects a commitment to upholding their rights and aligning with national legislation that protects these rights.⁵ Moreover, AOPEB's statute explicitly articulates adherence to Bolivia's laws safeguarding women's rights, ensuring a life free of violence, and protection from harassment and political violence. The association also references the General Labour Act for Persons with Disabilities,⁶ affirming the full exercise of rights and duties for persons with disabilities within the organisation, fostering equal conditions, equal opportunities, and preferential treatment under a comprehensive protection system for young people and women.

AOPEB's statutes and regulations are crafted to promote the active participation of young people, women and men in leadership roles. Extensive time and resources have been invested in strengthening the members' roles through training, leadership development and accountability processes, aligning with state policy. AOPEB's current regulatory framework, emphasising good practices and adherence to Bolivian laws, fosters leadership development. AOPEB has implemented training programmes focusing on gender and equality as integral components across all its actions. This approach aids decision-making and encourages grassroots organisations to adopt inclusive practices for men, women, youth and marginalised groups.

2.3.5 Establishing a technical assistance unit

To complement these efforts, AOPEB has established a technical assistance and training unit. This unit aims to provide services in organic production, product transformation and commercialisation. Additionally, it focuses on developing organisational capacities and skills in leadership, communication and customer service, and addresses gender and generational issues, administration and finance.

2.3.6 Supporting better land-use planning and sustainable agriculture

In relation to land-use planning, AOPEB actively participates in defending the laws governing land-use regulations in terms of defending and promoting collective rights to land. Recognising that these norms support the sustainable use of natural resources, the organisation conducts activities to encourage members to actively engage in land-use planning. This is particularly important, as land-use practices can have significant impacts when not aligned with community land or protected area regulations. Consequently, AOPEB promotes the creation of land-use plans in accordance with regulations governing renewable natural resource use.

AOPEB actively works to promote land-use planning processes and rules, organising support and awareness-raising programmes for agroforestry systems. These systems optimise agricultural practices with minimal environmental and cultural impacts, leading to improved soil quality, water conservation, pest and disease regulation, carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, and food and agriculture enhancement.

2.3.7 Securing investment support

An investment support agreement, backed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), has been signed to manage technical and financial capacities. This initiative empowers members to enhance their business plans, fostering productive, financial

⁵ In AOPEB regulations, Article 25 (Election criteria) ensures a) Validity of universal and democratic suffrage and (b) Equal opportunities (men, women and youth) in relations to nominations of proposed affiliate members.

⁶ Bolivian Law No 977 (26 September 2017) makes it obligatory that 4% of public sector personnel hired and 2% of private sector personnel hired are persons with disabilities.

and social self-management. The aim is to strengthen business development, positioning members as key contributors within the municipality and providing access to markets.

2.3.8 Financial accounting and administrative management

AOPEB adheres to a financial accounting system aligned with national standards accepted by the Association of Accountants and Auditors of Bolivia. This system reflects sound accounting management and administrative procedures, ensuring the accurate representation of cash flow and other essential financial tools to sustain AOPEB's operational life.

2.3.9 Human resources management and conflict resolution

The general management possesses the tools and knowledge of procedures for personnel selection processes that attract talent through open and participatory calls and hiring processes. Internally, AOPEB integrates gender and youth considerations in its hiring practices, adhering to current regulations. In the event of internal conflicts, the organisation employs conflict-resolution processes based on its years of experience, managed by the board of directors.

2.3.10 Promoting inclusivity and development

AOPEB has shown a positive evolution in internal practices concerning personal rights, diversity and the incorporation of new members or employees. Statutes and regulations have been amended to protect and encourage diverse participation, covering gender, age, ethnicity and physical ability. Learnings from recent years have prompted a re-evaluation and reinforcement of principles, preventing individual interests from overshadowing the organisation's mission. Projects and initiatives have included:

Strengthening the leadership and economic rights of women organic producers (2021)

- This project addressed issues of masculinity and inclusion.
- The We Produce to Live Well project promoted inclusion and development within the ecological productive complex of Bolivia.
- AOPEB developed a methodology and toolbox to strengthen civil society in political advocacy at the municipal level.

Ecological schools in the municipality of Palos Blancos

- AOPEB implemented this project with a focus on burn-free harvesting. The project empowered producers and improved participants' lives, including gender relations.

Employee welfare

- AOPEB has based its internal labour regulations on national regulations.
- Compliance with labour laws has ensured fair salaries, minimum wages, paid vacations and support for employee rights.
- Community practices are respected, fostering mutual understanding and recognition among members and employees.

National board of directors

- The board holds monthly meetings to evaluate planned activities.
- Extraordinary meetings are held as needed, demonstrating flexibility in resolving issues promptly.

Capacity-building workshops and training

- These workshops aim to strengthen leadership and personnel capacities, and the productive environment.
- There is an emphasis on balancing leadership positions between men and women.

- Workshops also empower young people on leadership issues, involving families associated with AOPEB.
- Ongoing training initiatives benefit a diverse group of young people in marketing, technology access, and different areas of production.
- Trainings incorporate professional ontological coaching.

Comprehensive approaches to development

- AOPEB aims to reduce poverty and vulnerability rates of AOPEB-related families through various assistance mechanisms.
- AOPEB aims to strengthen rural family farming, promote organic farming and encourage vegetable production in urban and peri-urban areas.

Positive work environment

- During a visit to AOPEB offices, a cordial and positive atmosphere was observed. Officials expressed respect and recognition for the work done by the previous administration, indicating a collaborative and supportive organisational culture.

3 Tactics to improve AOPEB's internal governance

3.1 Tactics to enhance members' trust and sense of ownership

Over the last three years, AOPEB has worked to reverse some deficient practices at the operational and administrative levels. The following tactics have collectively contributed to building trust, a sense of belonging and a positive organisational culture within AOPEB. The emphasis on clear communication, tackling issues related to the creation of parallel but unrepresentative organisations offering certification schemes, and the active involvement of units such as the technical assistance and training unit demonstrate a commitment to the wellbeing and development of AOPEB members.

Addressing administrative issues

- The national board of directors and the directorate of social control have worked to rectify deficient practices at the operational and administrative levels.
- Former technical staff, considered permanent employees due to administrative oversights, have had their contracts closed after project completion to avoid unnecessary costs. New staff are now recruited from affiliate member organisations.

Defining clear roles and terms of reference

- The national board of directors and the directorate of social control have defined terms of reference for consultants and staff involved in projects, clarifying roles and functions.
- This has led to improved clarity that has in turn increased trust between AOPEB and its staff. People are able to do their jobs better with more clearly defined roles leading to better results, demonstrating also their commitment.

Preventing the creation of unrepresentative organisations offering certification

- Former officials with privileged knowledge have attempted to create parallel organisations offering certification schemes but that do not necessarily represent organic producers. AOPEB has denounced these actions to sectoral authorities to prevent interference in certification and leadership processes.

Encouraging growth with clarity

- AOPEB acknowledges the potential for growth by strengthening the management, capacity and representativeness of its members (first-tier organisations of organic producers). To facilitate this, AOPEB emphasises the importance of providing groups of producers with clear terms and criteria to avoid confusion and uphold the association's principles within their new organisations.

Role of the technical assistance and training unit

- This new unit has played a crucial role in strengthening the knowledge and technical skills of producers by providing training and other technical assistance. Initiatives such as family garden production, supported by volunteers, have had a significant impact.

Agroforestry systems

- Actions to promote the use of agroforestry in coffee-growing areas have strengthened ecosystems. AOPEB's focus has been on providing greater food and nutritional security, recovering degraded lands, and fostering the increased participation of producers in the association.

Enhancing communication with members

- AOPEB has taken steps to enhance its communication with members to address problems and focus on the association's mission, such as establishing mechanisms for

collecting opinions and feedback. This has fostered a culture of openness and responsiveness, strengthening the sense of ownership and commitment among members.

3.2 Tactics to improve external relations with banks, markets and government

Addressing project closure challenges

- Following project closures, the president and directors have negotiated timings for ending contracts and settlements for staff associated with closed projects.

Formalising relationships with banks

- AOPEB has formalised its bank account management by ensuring that all members of its board of directors have power of attorney. The board of directors assumes responsibility for managing the organisations' economic resources at the national level. Associations that are members have their own obligations.

Securing support for building financial capacity

- AOPEB has secured institutional support from partners such as FAO to enhance its financial capacity and strengthen business development capacities, including certification processes and exports.
- AOPEB serves as the main manager and guarantor of operations in partner initiatives.

Resuming relations with government, external projects and development agencies

- There has been a recognition within AOPEB of the need to resume its relationships with the government, projects and development agencies. AOPEB has resumed working in collaboration with the government to defend natural resources, increase organic production and combat fires.
- Initial perceptions of AOPEB as a non-governmental organisation (NGO) led to many organisations temporarily distancing themselves from AOPEB, but under its new leadership, these relationships are being repaired and partners are now interested in working with AOPEB.
- Due to a divergence in the interpretation of Law 3525, AOPEB has taken steps to work with national authorities to rectify the situation.

3.3 Tactics to improve delivery of AOPEB's vision and purpose

AOPEB has used a number of tactics to manage its external relations, address challenges and align its actions with the association's vision and purpose. The focus on negotiation, formalisation and collaboration highlights AOPEB's commitment to sustainable development and advocacy for organic producers.

Reassessing priorities

- In 2022, AOPEB decided to take a pause to reassess its organisational priorities and accompanying actions in line with its guiding statutes and regulations.

Advocating for reprioritising organic production

- AOPEB has identified where the National Service of Agricultural Health and Food Safety (Servicio Nacional de Sanidad Agropecuaria e Inocuidad Alimentaria – SENASAG) has been neglecting organic production.
- It has been seeking approaches to prioritise organic producers in government policies, acknowledging challenges such as the lack of market access and the impacts of climate change.

Strengthening the capacity of member organisations

- AOPEB has recognised the need to strengthen its members' organisational capacity for sustainable and resilient natural resource management. Emphasis is on developing economic opportunities for AOPEB's affiliates, addressing challenges in public policies to better promote organic production and local producers, and lobbying municipalities and companies.

Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) certification

- AOPEB has identified PGS certification as an opportunity to improve services, generate income, and resolve representation issues in relation to certification processes.
- AOPEB is also taking steps to deal with challenges in the certification process and to resolve relationships with national institutions and authorities.

4 Future plans to improve internal governance

AOPEB's future plans focus on strengthening internal governance, enhancing administrative processes, building alliances and improving services to ensure sustainable growth and success for its affiliate members. The prospects for replication highlight the need for taking a nuanced approach, considering organisational differences, leadership strategies, transparency and effective communication with stakeholders.

4.1 Future plans

AOPEB plans to:

Strengthen democratic processes and leadership training

- Specify training in leadership skills and processes to enhance management capacity.
- Build processes for administrative transparency and strategic management in the medium and long term.
- Work on decentralisation, although this will not be possible if the statute and regulations remain subject to the national directorate and general management. However, the new board has reaffirmed its commitment to respect established processes to ensure democracy is enshrined in the organisation.

Strengthen administrative processes

- Systematise and apply accounting standards for better financial management.
- Establish improved communication processes within the association and with affiliates.
- Mobilise human and economic resources for improved operational management.

Improve alliances and resource access

- Establish new alliances with external partners and development agencies to facilitate restructuring within AOPEB and to expand access to financial and technical resources.

Improve services and certification

- Improve its services for members, focusing on making its PGS Bolivia Ecological certification scheme viable.
- Achieve certification for organic producers within the framework of the National Technical Standard for Ecological Production.

Strengthen technical assistance

- Implement technical assistance processes within its affiliated member organisations, emphasising organic production, commercialisation and product transformation.
- Strengthen leadership and administration/finance skills within AOPEB and its affiliates.

4.2 Prospects for replication

The following lessons will be useful for others considering replicating AOPEB's approach.

Understand organisational differences

- Acknowledge that each affiliate member organisation's situation will be different and consider diversity in members/partners and regional variations.

Form a leadership continuity strategy

- It is important to have a strategy in place to ensure the continuity of leaders and to take a staggered approach to making leadership changes in different strategic areas. This helps to preserve institutional memory and past management experience and avoids having to start anew.

Address transparency and information systematisation

- Tackle issues such as any lack of transparency in financial management. Ensure there is continuous follow up, monitoring and evaluation of any changes implemented in the last two years.

Keep stakeholders informed

- Broadly keeping your affiliate members up to date with information about changes, achievements or challenges (including for example statistics on certification and information about certification processes) by having a regular newsletter or other form of communication will help to avoid surprises and recognise the importance of community traditions and customs.

5 Main conclusions

5.1 Innovations

The following innovations have collectively contributed to a more dynamic and adaptive organisational culture within AOPEB. The combination of proactive leadership, strategic governance, a commitment to quality improvement and comprehensive problem resolution has positioned the association to sustain its success and have a positive impact on its member organisations.

- **Active leadership participation:** The continuous and active participation of AOPEB's president and directors in both operational and strategic management represents a departure from more passive governance models. This approach ensures that leaders are not detached from the day-to-day challenges faced by member organisations. By being directly involved, they can offer timely and effective support. Anticipating potential problems faced by member organisations (for example in relation to certification processes) and communicating with members to avoid or anticipate problems demonstrates a proactive leadership style. This forward-thinking approach allows AOPEB to develop strategies to address issues before they escalate, contributing to the overall resilience and adaptability of the organisation.
- **Enhanced governance through regional representation:** The adoption of this new form of governance by the board of directors is a significant innovation. The new board of directors has improved its relationship with regional affiliate members and producer associations. The complementary skills and experiences of current leaders contribute to more effective regional representation, ensuring that the organisation is well-served in each area. The consideration of sectoral interests in each region is noteworthy. This approach turns challenges into opportunities by aligning the organisation's activities with the specific needs and priorities of different sectors. It also enhances the relevance of AOPEB regionally where there are opportunities to expand AOPEB activities.
- **Quality improvements in technical assistance:** The leadership's willingness to view challenges as opportunities for improvement reflects a positive organisational culture. Instead of being daunted by difficulties, the organisation sees them as chances to enhance its operations and services. The decision to replace overpaid technicians with dedicated young individuals from its affiliated member organisations who have a better understanding of local realities not only helps in cost management but also brings in fresh perspectives and enthusiasm. This shift contributes to a more dynamic and engaged workforce.
- **Comprehensive problem solving:** Internal efforts to comprehensively address operational and administrative problems demonstrate a commitment to organisational health. Rather than tackling issues in isolation, AOPEB is taking a holistic approach to ensure that the root causes are identified and resolved. For example, the

reconstruction of missing information in accounting and administrative processes following the change to the new management indicates a commitment to transparency and accountability. This effort not only rectifies past deficiencies but also establishes a more robust foundation for future financial and administrative practices.

5.2 Lessons learnt

AOPEB's governance lessons reflect a holistic approach to organisational management that aligns with and contributes to global sustainability goals. By emphasising inclusivity, transparency, sustainable resource management and ongoing organisational development, AOPEB serves as a model for other organisations aiming to address the complex challenges of our interconnected world.

Inclusive participation and decision-making

- **Empowering members:** By encouraging active participation, AOPEB empowers its members to have a voice in shaping the organisation's future. This inclusivity ensures that decisions reflect the diverse needs and perspectives of its members. In addition, establishing feedback mechanisms had fostered a culture of greater openness and responsiveness.
- **Regional representation:** AOPEB is nationwide association, with members from across Bolivia. This equitable representation from different regions is crucial, as it acknowledges the unique challenges and opportunities faced by producers in various areas. This contributes to a more comprehensive and context-specific decision-making process.

Transparency in management

- **Building trust:** Transparency in communication builds trust among members. Openly sharing information about operations and finances ensures that members are aware of how the organisation is functioning.
- **Visibility and accountability:** Publishing accounts of activities, achievements and challenges enhances the visibility of AOPEB's work. This transparency holds the organisation accountable to its members and stakeholders, reinforcing credibility.
- **Access to information:** Facilitating access to key information by interacting directly with local producers ensures that all members, regardless of their role or location, have the necessary information to make informed decisions.

Developing shared norms and standards

- **Having a common framework:** Establishing clear norms and standards for how AOPEB and its members operate provides a common framework for organic or ecological production. This shared understanding is crucial for maintaining consistency and quality across the association.
- **Inclusive standard setting:** Involving members in updating standards ensures that the norms remain relevant and adaptable to changing circumstances. This participatory approach reflects the democratic principles of the organisation.
- **Commitment to compliance:** Ongoing efforts to comply with and modify standards based on current realities demonstrate AOPEB's commitment to continuous improvement. This adaptability ensures that the association stays aligned with evolving industry practices.

Sustainable resource management

- **Advocacy for policies:** AOPEB's advocacy for national policies supporting sustainable natural resource management reflects its commitment to addressing broader environmental challenges. This aligns with global initiatives for climate action and biodiversity conservation.

- **Promoting conservation practices:** The association's promotion of practices that conserve soil, water and biodiversity contributes to broader sustainability goals. Sustainable resource management is integral to organic production.
- **Financial responsibility:** Establishing responsible financial management systems ensures the long-term viability of AOPEB. This financial sustainability is essential for maintaining operations and supporting the association's initiatives.

Training and ongoing development

- **Capacity building:** Training programmes for staff in technical and managerial skills contribute to the continuous development of AOPEB's members. This focus on capacity building enhances the overall competence of the association.
- **Knowledge exchanges:** Facilitating the exchange of knowledge and best practice between AOPEB and its affiliated members creates a collaborative environment. This exchange benefits all members, fostering a culture of shared learning and improvement.
- **Technical assistance:** Establishing a system for ongoing technical assistance demonstrates AOPEB's commitment to addressing the evolving needs of its members. This support is crucial for navigating challenges and staying competitive in the organic production sector.

Contributing to global sustainability goals

- **Climate action:** AOPEB's workshops on sustainable agricultural practices directly contribute to climate resilience. Practices that conserve natural resources and promote ecological sustainability align with global climate action goals.
- **Biodiversity conservation:** The emphasis on practices that preserve natural resources and biodiversity aligns with broader global conservation efforts. By promoting sustainable agriculture, AOPEB actively contributes to biodiversity preservation.
- **Food security:** Sustainable agricultural practices not only improve food quality and diversity but also contribute to food security. The efficient production and distribution facilitated by cooperation among organic producers are essential elements of global food security initiatives.
- **Law 3525 and regulations:** AOPEB's efforts to demand adjustments to Law 3525 and its regulations demonstrate proactive engagement with policy frameworks. This aligns with global sustainability goals by advocating for legal and regulatory environments that support sustainable practices.

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Annex 1. Geography of Bolivia

Bolivia is located in the central area of South America, between the meridians 57° 26' and 69° 38' west longitude of the Greenwich meridian and the parallels 9° 38' and 22° 53' south latitude, therefore it covers more than 13° of geographical latitude. Bolivia currently has a total area of 1,098,581 km² and is divided into three distinct regions (see also Figure 4).⁷

Andean zone (Altiplano)

The Andean or Altiplano zone covers 28% of the national territory, with an estimated area of 307,000 km². It is located 3,000–4,000m above sea level, between the Western and Eastern (or Royal) mountain ranges and includes some of the highest peaks in the Americas.

Lake Titicaca is also located in this area, with an area of 8,100km², at an altitude of 3,810m above sea level, which makes it the highest navigable lake in the world. Also found in this region is the Salar de Uyuni, the world's largest salt flat. The climate throughout the region is cold to mild (0°C to 18°C). Departments included in this region are La Paz, Oruro and Potosí.

Sub-Andean zone (Valleys)

An intermediate region between the highlands and the eastern plains, this zone covers 13% of the territory. It includes valleys and *yungas* (the Aymara word for 'warm lands') that are located 1,500–2,500m above sea level. It is characterised by its agricultural activity and its climate that ranges from temperate to warm (15–25°C). This region includes the departments of Cochabamba, Chuquisaca (Sucre) and Tarija.

Eastern zone (Eastern Plains)

This region covers 59% of the territory. It is located north of the Cordillera Oriental (or Cordillera Real) and includes plains and extensive jungles, rich in flora and fauna. It is located 200–400m above sea level and has an average annual temperature of 22–25°C. This region includes the departments of Santa Cruz, Beni and Pando.

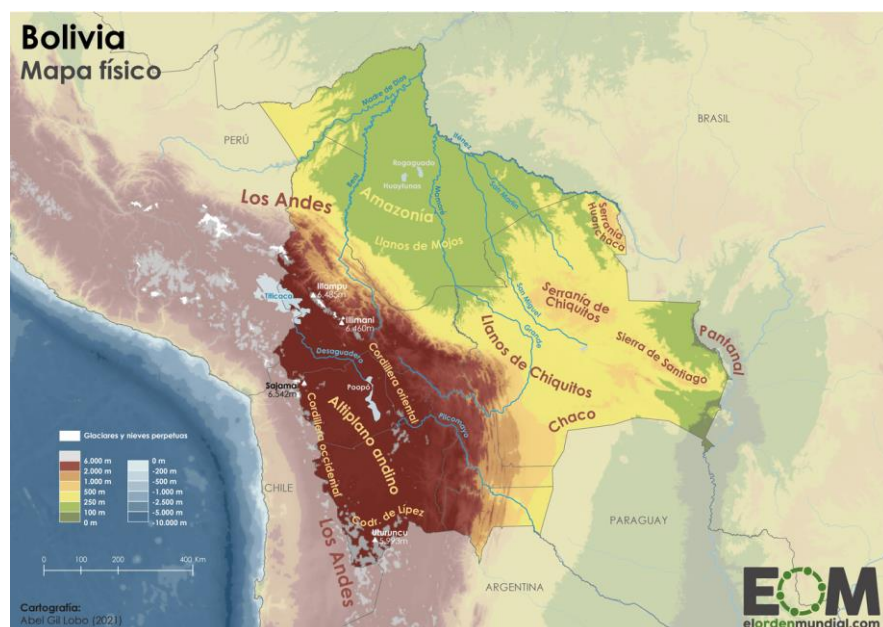


Figure 4. Map of the Eastern zone/plains

Source: www.elordenmundial.com

⁷ For more information about the geography of Bolivia, see <https://bolivianembassy.ca/bolivia/el-pais/geografia-y-medioambiente>