

Case 3: Forest Fires in Bolivia

Adapting in Crisis: Forest Fires & Community Resilience in Bolivia

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PROJECT	Title: Green Solutions to the Global Climate, Inequality, and Biodiversity Crisis in the Bolivian Chiquitania Partner: Apoyo Para el Campesino-Indígena del Oriente Boliviano (APCOB) Country: Bolivia Period: 2022-2026
CHANGE	Indigenous-led restoration and fire response in Bolivia’s Chiquitania built resilience, but 2024 record wildfires exposed the scale of the challenge. In Monte Verde, communities restored degraded forests through agroforestry and natural regeneration, with visible vegetation recovery after three years. Trained community brigades, early warning systems, and local fire regulations reduced fire damage for four years. In 2024, severe fires reversed progress and shifted efforts from restoration to protecting lives. The emergency lasted seven weeks; smoke made parts of the territory uninhabitable, displacing families for over a month and closing schools in 11 communities. Yet the crisis highlighted the strength of local preparedness as trained communities mobilised rapidly, evacuating 520 people from 10 communities and delivering food and medical aid to 1,608 families in 28 communities. Their response showed the critical role of community-based resilience amid escalating climate threats.
CONTEXT	In 2024, Bolivia ranked second globally for tropical primary forest loss with fires destroying nearly 12% of the country’s land area. Monte Verde Territory in the Chiquitania region was among the hardest hit. Most fires are deliberately set to expand agroindustry. These fires, intensified by climate-driven drought, heat, and wind, frequently spiral out of control. Despite local restoration and prevention efforts, national policies continued to favour extractive activities, undermining progress. The fires caused not only ecological damage but deepened human vulnerability: families lost homes, livelihoods, and access to clean water; smoke-related health risks increased; and children faced school closures, displacement, and trauma. The crisis underscored the urgent need for stronger governance, cross-sector collaboration, and investment in community-based resilience to protect both lives and ecosystems.
CONTRIBUTION	Community-led restoration and fire preparedness in Monte Verde laid the groundwork for an effective response when record wildfires struck in 2024. Selection of species, production, and monitoring enabled Monte Verde’s Indigenous communities to restore forests via agroforestry and natural regeneration. A participatory monitoring system, combining satellite data with local observations, enabled early fire alerts and supported timely local decision-making. At the same time, community brigades and environmental monitors were trained and equipped to manage fires, coordinate with authorities, distribute aid, and evacuate families. When the crisis hit, this capacity proved to be essential: 520 people were safely evacuated from 10 communities, and 1,608 families across 28 communities received essential food and medical assistance. The response demonstrated the life-saving value of investing in local capacity, while also revealing critical gaps in child protection and education continuity that must be addressed in future emergency preparedness efforts.

IMAGES



Restoration in agroforestry systems and native forest.
Foto: Forests of the World



Community firefighting brigade and community evacuation. Foto: APCOB

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ACTIVITIES

APCOB led the field implementation, while Forests of the World provided technical and methodological guidance and monitored activities. Since 2021, restoration efforts in the Monte Verde Indigenous Territory have involved communities from the planning stage. Training covered restoration techniques, species selection, nursery management, planting, and monitoring; enabling 10 communities to implement their own restoration plans. To support fire prevention and monitoring, training was conducted on information processing and use of remote sensors for fire detection and early warning. Local firefighting brigades were also trained and equipped. During the 2024 fires, coordination with public institutions and firefighters was established, and campaigns to collect and distribute aid were conducted. After the fires, damage assessments were carried out to determine the magnitude of the losses. The intensity of the fires forced extended evacuations, with some communities unable to return for at least four weeks due to toxic air conditions. 11 communities suspended school activities, and humanitarian support was essential for maintaining food and health security during this period.

LESSONS

- **Large-scale prevention:** Externally driven fires call for regional planning and collaboration with key actors (landowners, neighbouring communities, authorities) to address root causes and reduce vulnerability. **Fire-smart restoration:** Ecosystem restoration must integrate climate adaptation and fire prevention measures to ensure long-term resilience and sustainability. **Community resilience:** The fires exceeded local capacity, yet community mobilisation for restoration and firefighting proved essential. Projects have an ethical duty to support during crises to uphold trust and safeguard results. **Gendered impacts:** Women faced greater pressure as they lost crops and medicinal plants, while also taking on additional tasks like tending livestock and crops when men joined firefighting efforts. **Strategy reassessment:** Restoration requires a new approach post-fire, considering adapted strategies and ensuring broad participation. **Systemic vulnerability:** Fires from 2019 to 2024 intensified environmental and socio-economic fragility, undermining food, water, and income security, and reinforcing the need to protect people and ecosystems. **Holistic recovery:** Post-disaster support must address not only ecological loss, but also economic hardship, displacement, and community trauma ensuring recovery is both sustainable and socially just.

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Indigenous communities restored 32,709 hectares through agroforestry and natural regeneration, supported by a structured restoration methodology, community-led monitoring, and trained fire brigades. By May 2024, Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) satellite data confirmed a 16,400-hectare increase in dense vegetation directly linked to these efforts. (Source: [“Reporte de resultados de la gestión 2024”](#), [“Bosques de la Vida”](#)).

The community-led monitoring system enabled early fire alerts and coordination of emergency response, proving vital during the 2024 fires. (Source: [“Atención a incendios forestales en los territorios indígenas de monte verde y lomerío, en la gestión 2024”](#)). The fires that impacted Monte Verde originated externally and escalated from June, affecting nearly 600,000 hectares (Source: [VIIRS and Sentinel data](#); [“Evaluación de daños en el bosque a causa de los incendios”](#)).

In 2024, Bolivia recorded a 200% increase in primary tropical forest loss compared to 2023. Fires accounted for nearly half of tropical forest loss globally, underscoring the urgency of strengthening local resilience efforts (Source: [Global Forest Review, Deforestation Trends 2024](#)).

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Development strategy priorities:		
Changes in the lives of people facing poverty, marginalisation or vulnerability		X
Changes in laws, policies and practices that affect people’s rights		-
Changes in the capacity of organisations and communities to support rights		-
Changes in partnerships and collaborations that support people’s rights		-
Changes in participation of groups facing poverty, marginalisation or vulnerability		X
Changes in local leadership of development and humanitarian work		X