Despite the challenges of this year, our work in Bolivia has managed to carry on. The Fundación Quaker Bolivia Link team in La Paz have had lockdowns, suffered Coronavirus, as well as political and economic turmoil. But, they have managed to keep projects running, albeit with delays. Read more about this inside.

As with all small charities, our income has been affected. Still, with the generous help of our donors, we have managed to complete raising funds for a running water system in the village of Jirapi Alta. The next project is also a water system, this time for the village of Berenguela – see page 4. It seems particularly apt now to be doing something to help people wash their hands regularly in clean water.

Sadly, our partner QBL organisation in the USA has decided that they are no longer able to keep going beyond the end of this year – this gave us all pause for thought, but in conjunction with Friends in Bolivia, we have made a positive commitment to continue our work. On the bright side, there are other wider opportunities emerging for obtaining funding both in the USA and Bolivia.

We are giving our website a refresh and plan to launch it before the end of the year – the address remains the same - qbl.org. Our postal address, though, is changing – see page 4 for details.

Please do help us to keep this work going!
This year, our partners in Bolivia, Fundación QBL, have been working with the villagers of Topohoco on a project to improve their food security. This will benefit 25 families and is nearing its completion. By October, 16 out of 25 new barns had been completed and the remaining nine were well under way.

Each barn is 10 by 4 metres. They will provide shelter for cows, sheep and llamas during the cold season when the temperatures are frequently below zero, and at night can reach as low as -13 C.

Providing shelter helps prevent the animals losing valuable energy in just keeping warm and so improves the production of milk and meat. The milk yield from a cow housed in a dairy barn, or byre, averages 8.2 kg per day compared with 4.6 kg from one kept outside.

In the rainy season, the animals, if kept in the open all the time, run the risk of infection, with negative consequences for their health. Whereas animals kept in shelter remain healthier.

As with all our projects, much of the hard construction work has been done by the villagers themselves while QBL provides materials and vital technical expertise.

This project has played a crucial role in contributing to the well-being and better living conditions of the population of the communities of Taracolla, Exaltación, and Santiago within Topohoco. Their animals not only provide them with meat, milk, and cheese, but, when able to be well cared for, can also provide an additional source of income. Some extra income is a life changer in these mainly subsistence communities.

Despite all the difficulties, this project is well set to be completed successfully.
Covid 19 in Bolivia

All our work has been impacted by the COVID outbreak. According to the official figures for Bolivia, by late October 2020, approximately **140,000** cases had been confirmed and 8,500 people had died. It is generally accepted that these are an under-estimate as many people have died unreported in their homes.

The official figures for people affected by the virus in the Province of Comanche, where most of our current projects are located, are relatively low. Apparently, this is so for a lot of the high altitude Altiplano, except for the crowded cities of La Paz and El Alto. However, life came to a standstill everywhere between March 20 and May 31. During this time, the entire country was under almost total lock-down. This was followed by a partial curfew during which movements were severely restricted. Just as here, our staff have been working from home when they could. Two of the members of the Quaker Board of Fundación QBL in La Paz have had a Covid infection but thankfully have recovered.

Meanwhile, Bolivia was also in the throes of a political crisis, with a caretaker government, which presided over much division and dissent. The postponed elections also added to the state of uncertainty in the country. However, as we write, elections have been held and a new government is about to take office. Throughout the difficult time this year, the Board and staff of Fundación QBL have worked tirelessly both to fulfil their obligations to the people of Topohoco and to other villages, as well as to and bring forward other much needed projects.

Twenty-Five Years of Service in the Altiplano

Back in 1995, after a Bolivia study tour trip, Ken and Pam Barratt decided that a "Quaker response to poverty" to serve the Aymara people in the Altiplano was a compassionate goal. Quaker Bolivia Link was born, and over the ensuing 25 years more than 17,000 families in 130+ villages have received the benefits of clean water, food security, and income generation.
Berenguela Water Project

Berenguela is a village in the high Altiplano, over 160km from the cities of La Paz and El Alto. Here, there is extreme rural poverty. Young people have to migrate to El Alto. This results in an ageing population. The culture of the province is centred on the Aymara language and traditions of the Altiplano, overlaid by Christianity.

The villagers graze livestock, averaging 5 cows, 40 sheep and 10 llamas per family, and also cultivate small plots of quinoa and potatoes. Due to its unique geography and climate, the Altiplano suffers frequent frosts throughout the year as well as times of drought and flood. These are now more variable and less predictable owing to climate change.

Salinity is a major problem all over this municipality: evidenced not only in the local salt industry but also in many wells being too salty to drink. The need is such that this water is still used, but for other purposes.

Clean drinking water is very difficult to access. At present, the poorest carry their water from distant wells which are often polluted. The more fortunate use an old, rudimentary, and often unsafe water system. This inevitably leads to health and hygiene problems.

The aim of the project is to provide clean drinking water directly to 35 families by:

- updating the existing water system,
- ensuring all water sources are clean and protected from animal and soil contamination
- ensuring all water is filtered
- providing an extensive pipe system within easy reach of all
- developing community skills in the administration, operation and maintenance of the water system

The total cost of the project is £18,639. The local Municipality will provide a grant of £4,582, and the villagers will contribute the equivalent of £1,312 in labour, such as digging trenches and mixing concrete.

QBL-UK needs to provide £12,745.

Can you help us please?

Food for thought: in the UK, the average water use per family is 350 litres a day. To cover all the necessary uses of the families in Berenguela, the project will provide 30 litres a day, each. A huge difference between 'our wants' and 'their needs'. You can find Berenguela on Google Maps.

A Quaker response to poverty

Quaker Bolivia Link grew from the concern of individual Friends to improve the living conditions of some of the poorest people in Latin America: the Aymara of the Altiplano. All our work in Bolivia is done through the locally run Quaker charity, Fundación Quaker Bolivia Link.

If you would like to support our work, please donate through our website www.qbl.org, send a cheque to the address on the left or email for bank details. Gift Aid and Standing Order forms are available.