

Defending women's rights in Honduras



Raising Her Voice in Honduras has made notable gains despite working in an extremely challenging context. Political instability has limited partners' opportunities to work at national level. The strategy is therefore to build a strong grassroots network of women activists to hold the authorities to account and to ensure that the government doesn't reverse hard-won progress on women's rights. The project has also launched a high-profile, national campaign against the shockingly high rates of murder of women.



Background

Political unrest relating to the coup d'état of June 2009 has had a negative effect on women's rights in Honduras and threatens to undermine much of the progress made in recent years. There have been several cases of women being raped by policemen and the military during political protests; the rate of femicide (the murder of women) has increased dramatically; women's representation in national parliament has decreased from 24 to 19 per cent; and the number of women mayors in local government has decreased from nine to six per cent. Although the number of women in government is relatively high, most of these women are from the conservative Catholic elite and do not support women's rights.

Objectives

The overall aims of Raising Her Voice in Honduras are:

- **To increase women's leadership and participation**
At a local level, the project aims to increase the leadership and participation of rural and marginalised urban women in decision-making, and to promote women's rights and gender equality in policies, institutions and budgets. Raising Her Voice is bringing together women from different grassroots organisations to work in networks, and enabling them to hold local level governance structures and government agencies to account.
- **To reduce violence against women**
At national level, the project has launched a major campaign to reduce femicide and other forms of violence against women, and to end the high level of impunity for such crimes. The campaign aims to raise awareness of the issue among ordinary men and women, civil society organisations and local authorities in marginalised rural communities; to enable local women to participate in and strengthen advocacy work at regional and national level; and to enhance the women's movement through joint advocacy and mutual support between diverse organisations and networks. The rate of femicide is shocking high: Raising Her Voice partners report there has been one case per day since January 2011.

Achievements

Improved leadership skills

The project has worked directly with more than 2,200 women from marginalised urban and rural communities, increasing their leadership skills through training in advocacy, public speaking and budget monitoring. As a result, several women are actively participating in community level governance structures, such as local transparency commissions and water committees. In one case, training led to a woman leader participating in the United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women in March 2010, where she raised her voice before global civil society representatives and the media to denounce violations of women's human rights during the coup d'état.



Women influencing local laws and budgeting

In the target communities, around 1,800 rural women have raised their demands in their local assembly, a noteworthy achievement at a time when women's participation in formal governance structures is in decline. In one municipality, women's groups have successfully lobbied for a local law to prevent domestic violence. In four other municipalities, women have secured public investment to enhance women's organisations.

Successful coalition for a national campaign against femicide

A national coalition – La Tribuna de Mujeres contra los Femicidios – has brought together eight organisations and networks to develop a national campaign against femicide. The campaign is raising awareness of gender-based violence and demanding that public authorities make a strong commitment to reducing impunity. Already, the number of women reporting incidences of violence is increasing at municipal level, as women become more confident that they will be taken seriously.

Femicide recognised as a human rights issue

In the lead up to the Honduras Universal Periodic Review (a UN review of a country's human rights record) in November 2010, the coalition lobbied UN representatives, and succeeded in having femicide recognised as a human rights issue for which the government should be held accountable. A campaign representative was part of the strategic group of civil society organisations which contributed to the review. This gave her a voice in an international arena,

speaking out against the impunity which the vast majority of the 1,588 cases of femicide reported from 2005 to 2010 met with.

Widespread media support

The coalition has been invited to participate in at least ten television and radio programmes, and to take part in a wider Central American campaign on femicide. Radio and television adverts have been produced, and the project expects to create alliances with community media in order to raise awareness among rural people. Media monitoring has shown positive coverage of the campaign in more than 23 media outlets across Latin America. A Facebook page – Campaña Contra los Femicidios en Honduras - continues to raise awareness and support.

Involvement of women from rural areas

Women's groups from rural areas came to the capital, Tegucigalpa, for the campaign launch and are also actively involved in organising and participating in local campaign activities. This is an important achievement, as advocacy work in Honduras is usually led by national women's organisations, with activities concentrated in the capital city.

“Now we know how to influence the people who make the decisions”

Alba Robledo, Raising Her Voice activist

Lessons

The campaign has been strengthened by working in coalition. The coalition partners are taking responsibility for implementing campaign actions in different geographic areas where they have influence, increasing the campaign's reach and potential impact. Three of the coalition partners are grassroots organisations; this is helping to ensure that the campaign is informed by the experience of poor and marginalised women. Working in coalition has enabled the different project partners to learn from each other and increase their capacity. Some of the partners have worked with community organisations for over ten years, but not necessarily on women's rights issues. Gender is now becoming a central issue in their work.

Raising Her Voice is a five-year programme which promotes the rights and capacity of poor women to engage effectively in governance at all levels. This is to be achieved through enabling their voices to be heard and increasing their influence, and by making institutions more accountable to women.

Working through local partners in 17 countries, Raising Her Voice has significant funding from DFID and is co-ordinated by Oxfam GB.

