

Working in partnership for change in Bolivia



Raising Her Voice has made significant gains in Bolivia, capitalising on a positive political environment which respects human rights. The 'Women's Platform' established by the project successfully involved women in drafting Bolivia's new constitution, and is now recognised as an important and influential voice in politics. By combining national-level advocacy with public and media campaigning, the project has contributed to better policies and increased resources for women, and an increase in women's participation in elections from ten to 30 per cent.

Background

Bolivia has one of the worst levels of poverty and inequality in Latin America. Sixty per cent of the population lives in poverty, and 38 per cent in extreme poverty. Although there has been significant progress in recent times in recognising the rights of indigenous people and women, these groups are still the poorest in Bolivia, and discrimination against them prevails.

During the last decade, Bolivia has experienced a period of crisis and change – but also of opportunity, with the re-emergence of grassroots movements for social justice. Working in this favourable political context, Raising Her Voice has been able to make significant gains within a relatively short space of time –

involving women in the process of drafting Bolivia's new constitution, in new decentralisation processes, and enabling women in poverty to become effective political activists and leaders.

Objectives

Oxfam has been working with partner IFFI – the Institute of Women's Integral Training – to achieve progress towards genuine gender equality. Success will be demonstrated by political change on gender issues, as well as change in the institutional practices, values and beliefs that compound discrimination and exclusion. Targeting urban areas, the specific objectives are to:

- Strengthen women's organisations and create departmental, national and regional networks of women's groups, in order to reinforce a gender perspective in politics, and reposition the women's movement as an important player in creating social change.
- Enable women in poverty to take part in public decision-making processes and influence decision-makers.
- Campaign to raise awareness among women's organisations, politicians and the general public of gender inequality, violence and discrimination, and of the need for equal representation of women and men in all aspects of public, social and economic life.



Achievements

An influential women's movement

One of the major successes of Raising Her Voice in Bolivia has been to contribute to establishing a 'Women's Platform' – a national network of grassroots and regional women's organisations – which is recognised by the Bolivian government as a valid and influential participant in policy discussions.

Empowering women through training, and creating safe spaces to come together has helped to increase women's personal self-esteem and skills, and create trust and collective power in the women's movement. Leadership shown by the Women's Platform led to ten members being invited to stand in national, provincial and municipal elections.

More women in government

The 'Listas para las Listas' campaign to increase women's participation in government has been successful nationwide. Women's participation in elections increased from ten to 30 per cent, and women now make up 50 per cent of the Bolivian Cabinet.

Increased budget allocation for women

Media campaigns, advocacy and a huge amount of grassroots activity to raise public awareness have led to significant increases in gender budgets, benefiting women in poverty. Policies now include cash transfers to families with children at primary school, to new mothers without medical insurance, and to low-income residents aged over 60.

Strong influence on gender policy

Advocacy by the Women's Platform in the province of Cochabamba resulted in a strong gender focus in the new provincial constitution, which has 35 'gender-sensitive' articles. Learning from this was shared to promote replication at national level. The national constitution now includes articles enshrining social and gender equity; non-discrimination; individual and collective human rights; non-violence; education without discrimination; equal participation in government positions; and women's economic, employment and land rights.

Increased public awareness

Partners and grassroots women's organisations have made a concerted effort to raise public awareness of inequality and discrimination, and gain support for the women's movement. For maximum impact, activities coincide with national and international events such as Bolivian Women's Day and International Women's Day.

Creation of an 'Observatory of Gender Equity'

IFFI has created a national Observatory of Gender Equity (see box) – a governance and media monitoring mechanism – which has carried out detailed analyses of municipal legal services. Recognising the value of this scrutiny, the Directorate of Equal Opportunities has now made a formal proposal to incorporate the mechanism into its own office. The Observatory has led media campaigns to counteract gender stereotypes, and received a national award for its media monitoring work. One of the outcomes of sustained media support was a series of proposals to establish special courts for cases of violence against women.

Observatory of Gender Equity

The Observatory of Gender Equity focuses on three key issues: gender-sensitive budgets, gender-based violence, and gender and media. The latter involves analysing and making proposals relating to sexist images and content and feminine stereotypes in the media. One of its publications, *Gender construction in advertising: short sighted or intentional?*, led to the creation of annual awards for gender sensitive adverts, which includes booby prizes for those perpetuating sexist stereotypes. See: www.iffi.org.bo

Lessons

- The Women's Platform started on a small scale in the city of Cochabamba and gradually incorporated members from other areas. This gradual, organic growth allowed it to address the complexities of building a diverse movement as they arose.
- As it has grown, the Platform has sought to reach women who are not already members of women's organisations, supporting them to recognise their rights and build their self-esteem.
- One of the key success factors in establishing an effective Platform was identifying a common goal for diverse actors to work towards, which allowed them to speak with one voice. This involved a lot of negotiation and compromise along the way.

"Everything that the constitution says about women was written by the women's movement."

Katia Uriona, Director of the Women's Coordination Network

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.

