

# Gender and politics in Bolivia

## Violent repercussions of the political 'empowerment' of women

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## 'Se los pido de rodillas, no nos maten por una silla'

Graffito from Bolivian feminist group Mujeres Creando:  
'I am begging you, do not kill us for a seat'

## List of Acronyms

<b>ACOBOL</b>	Association of Councilwomen of Bolivia
<b>CSO</b>	civil society organisation
<b>FEJUVE</b>	Federación de Juntas Vecinales (Federations of Neighbourhood Councils)
<b>FMA</b>	Fundación Machaqa Amawta
<b>MAS</b>	Movimiento al Socialismo

## Foreword

Often, policy advocacy on the political parity and empowerment of women focuses on getting the right kind of legislation passed. Bolivia introduced world-leading electoral quotas that have led to more women in the ballot and formally occupying seats of power at national and local levels. This should be cause for celebration, because today, the country ranks as having the world's second highest ratio of women to men in the national legislature.

However, realities on the ground are much more complex and messy. In Bolivia's case, as this paper documents and explains, the passage of progressive laws has proved insufficient in genuinely empowering women. An unintended consequence was triggered – widespread bullying and outright violence towards women elected to office in what is still a predominantly macho society threatened by the redistribution of power.

In 2012, a new law was passed to address the intimidation and violence inflicted upon women leaders. Yet women in Bolivia, regardless of their political background, still face harassment and bullying.

This paper is a case study – a documentation of a particular historical experience in one country that could serve as a reference point in assessing similar initiatives to empower women elsewhere, and to advise about potential pitfalls. It calls attention to how programmes to support women's advocacy groups remain vital, and that more innovative ways to deal with changing existing social norms are essential for development. It also highlights the need to recognise that there are different competing interpretations of women's rights advocacy, and that more dialogues and conversations are necessary to better define and deal with the challenges.

This paper is a contribution from Christian Aid Bolivia and its partners to ongoing discussions on Sustainable Development Goals 5 (gender equality and women's empowerment) and 16 (peace, justice and effective governance). It is also a contribution to the Women in Political Leadership Working Group of the Gender and Development Network, a membership network of UK-based non-governmental organisations.

### **Eric Gutierrez**

Senior Adviser on Governance and Tackling Violence, Building Peace

## Introduction

The body of municipal councillor Juana Quispe of Ancoraimes, a small town in Bolivia's La Paz Department, was found near a river on 13 March 2012. Her murder increased the pressure on the government to approve a law that would protect the increasing number of women who had reached public positions in national and regional levels of the government and who were subjected to violence and intimidation.

Juana Quispe was one of many women elected after the passing of the Law of Electoral Regime in 2010. This law includes articles promoting parity in political participation of women and men at all levels of government, and it enacts provisions in the new Bolivian Constitution, approved by the 2009 referendum, requiring gender parity in the National Assembly and national cabinet members.

The introduction of this law immediately resulted in a greater presence of women on the ballots and in local governments. After the 2015 elections, women occupied 47% of positions in municipal councils across Bolivia. However, these women met challenges that underscored how their empowerment was more in form rather than substance. There were negative reactions from men to their presence on municipal councils. Their proposals and actions were met with disdain and ridicule, if not outright hostility. Even before these laws came into effect, elected women representatives already suffered from discriminatory sexist attitudes that led to psychological abuse, as well as overt physical violence when performing their roles.

These attacks have been mainly restricted to local governments, especially in rural areas, but have also been directed at indigenous women elected to the National Assembly and regional governments. Women from indigenous communities were looked down upon and suffered from routine discrimination.

In response, the government passed Law 243 Against Political Harassment and Political Violence Towards Women in 2012. This was meant to protect 'all women candidates, elected and designated officials or those exercising a political or public role'.<sup>1</sup>

Although this law represents important progress in women's participation, many civil society organisations (CSOs) and female authorities have criticised its shortfalls. It does not include protection for women who participate in CSOs, including grassroots movements or indigenous, communal organisations. Many public servants are not aware of the law or what it entails. Most importantly, in many cases, complaints are processed and decided by officials who could themselves be the harasser. In addition, women who want to denounce harassment or violence need to resign first to be able to make the denunciation.

Thus, despite the government's willingness to implement this law, the lack of clarity on the roles and functions of subnational authorities, and its lack of budgetary support have meant that, in practice, the law has been ignored in local governments, and women from rural areas had to go to La Paz if they wanted to denounce cases of political violence.

Through its work to improve the implementation and impact of this law, Christian Aid and its partners in Bolivia have learnt that in order to promote more inclusive women's participation, it is important to work with CSOs, because this is where most women and men get their first training and exposure to become leaders. Another lesson learned is how to engage in these empowerment processes with both women and men, identifying the power dynamics that exist in their organisations or territories and how these affect them. Power analysis has helped CSOs and men and women in communities to understand the dynamics of change. But more politically smart analysis and awareness of the particular challenges faced by women from poor, rural communities are needed, so as to support them and implement the protection law effectively.

Additionally, the coordination between national and subnational levels of government has been crucial for the effective implementation of national laws and policies. In particular, it is important to ensure that local governments have the resources and political will to support women's participation.

To understand and analyse the context and challenges faced, particularly by poor women, and to probe into the issues around the implementation of laws intended for their empowerment, the next section provides a background into how women reach positions of political power in Bolivia. The following two sections review the efforts at promoting women's political parity in government, and the reality on the ground that they meet, respectively. Finally, this paper ends with lessons and recommendations that could hopefully spark more conversations on dealing with the challenges.

## How women reach positions of political power

Bolivian women have traditionally been important participants in political processes. During colonial times, many women led or participated in the struggles against Spanish rule. In the second half of the 20th century, they fought against dictatorships, or became movers of grassroots movements to protect their territories and to demand rights.

However, despite their presence in these emblematic moments, the number of women in positions of power in the State and in civil society does not reflect the important contributions women have made to Bolivia's history.

To understand the challenges women face in Bolivia, it is important to understand the different types of organisations in the country, and the role women play in them. Civil society in Bolivia has different ways of organising itself – some are set up in the traditional ways still used by indigenous people; others are more akin to the structure of a trade union. Women have been participating in these two types of organisations and have also had access to spaces in different levels of government. Usually the indigenous and urban organisations are seen as a stepping stone to public institutions.

### Indigenous institutions

Both in the highlands and the lowlands of Bolivia, many communities have done their best to keep many aspects of their indigenous identities relevant. These include the way they organise their societies.

For indigenous people, their territory and sense of community are what enables identifying themselves as belonging to an indigenous group. This has meant that in most cases, their struggles have had a collective approach that also affects the role women and men play in these organisations.

Among Andean indigenous groups, some communities have kept a traditional organisation that existed before the colonisation process, the *Ayllu*,<sup>2</sup> the traditional form of community and basic socioeconomic unit. In the lowlands, however, communities respond to the structures introduced by missionaries in this region, with *capitanías* (captaincies) or *cabildos* (councils) for each community that make up the territory.

In the *Ayllu*, the representation of women and men is equal, since Andean cultures see complementarity as an important value that makes a society balanced. Thus, in terms of gender relations, political participation and representation, there is complementarity of men and women: the concept of *chacha-warmi* (literally man-woman) implies that neither women nor men can reach the leadership of the most important communal positions on their own, they need to do it as a couple, since single men or women are perceived as incomplete.

However, though communities have a male leader and a female leader, in practice, the woman's role is more symbolic. When there



are important negotiations or meetings, it is the man who has the real power to make decisions and to express opinions.

The reasons for this largely symbolic role can be found in how these community institutions work. The positions, or *cargos*,<sup>3</sup> are typically rotated among every head of household, giving each the opportunity to develop the necessary capacities to be an effective leader. The leaders then start a *thaki* (path) that includes *cargos* of ever increasing responsibility to reach the main positions in the community. It is in this designation of leaders that women start to lose ground: they are not perceived as the best choice for leadership.<sup>4</sup> Because women have a double work burden – they are typically responsible for care as well as productive tasks – they have little time for political participation.

Despite the improvement in education in Bolivia, women in rural areas still struggle to reach similar educational levels as men. In some cases, they cannot read or write as easily in Spanish, and they do not have the same access to informative meetings where men learn about legislation and state policies. Besides this, in many Andean communities, the men are seen as the heads of the household because they are the ones who can own land; this means that usually it will be the husband or the eldest son who will be invited to represent the family.

All of this has led men to see women as mere attendants, since their education levels are typically lower; women do not have as much information as men do; and women are regarded as weaker and 'not capable of so much sacrifice'.<sup>5</sup>

In the case of the indigenous organisations in the lowlands, though the election of leaders is typically not rotated, the situation for women is very similar to the Andes. Although women are elected as *capitanas* or *corregidoras* in their communities, it is usually men who represent their territories and who participate in meetings with elected officials. The challenges faced by women are similar, because the public education system does not reach many of these communities in the countryside. Another aspect that affects mostly women in the Amazon is that the communities are widely dispersed and the distances they have to travel to reach the biggest towns make it difficult for them to attend meetings or training sessions.

Both the Andean and Amazonian indigenous local organisations have formed broader organisations to represent their interests at territorial, regional and national levels. The leaders representing them at these levels follow the logic of their local organisations. This means that although most organisations are supposed to represent both women and men, most leaders are male.

This has led to the creation of women's organisations that are supposed to work at the same level as their counterparts. However, in most cases, they discuss issues related to the traditional reproductive role of women.<sup>6</sup>

## **Sindicatos**

After the National Revolution in 1952, the revolutionary government set out to create a homogeneous national identity. In practice, this meant that indigenous communities in the Andean region would lose their traditional institutions in favour of *sindicatos agrarios*

(agricultural unions). In addition, indigenous people came to be considered and called *campesinos* (peasant farmers).<sup>7</sup> In the lowlands, land was taken from indigenous people and distributed to people who had moved there from the highlands or from other countries. By and large, indigenous people were regarded as an obstacle to the agricultural development and progress of Bolivia.

The *sindicatos* replicated the organisational logic of the indigenous organisations from the Andes, although with a more evident bias towards all-male participation. However, it is important to note that *campesino* women, who started organising themselves in small women's associations (*clubes de madres*), had been very important during the different *campesino* mobilisations of the 1970s. This led to the creation of the National Federation of Campesino Women from Bolivia, also known as Bartolina Sisa.

Bartolina Sisa emerged in a stronger position than other indigenous women's organisations, as it was treated in a similar manner to the male *campesino* movement. However, in the last 10 years Bartolina Sisa has directed its interests into its main objective of protecting the government of Evo Morales.

The other *sindicatos*, such as the main workers' union (Central Obrera Boliviana) or the Confederation of Intercultural Communities (Confederación Sindical de Comunidades Interculturales de Bolivia), are mostly men-oriented and led.

In urban areas, the main organisations respond to professional interests, but others exist, such as the Federations of Neighbourhood Councils (FEJUVE). Although there are still obstacles to women's participation, these movements have opened a space for female leaders to become involved in politics at local and national levels.

## State participation

Although women in Bolivia have been present in the different levels of government as members of the parliament, ministers or in other positions, the first time a quota was introduced to guarantee women's political participation was in 1997 when the Law of Political Parties (Ley de Partidos Políticos) was passed, establishing that 30% of election candidates had to be women.<sup>8</sup> This quota was raised to 50% in 2010 by the Law of Electoral Regime (Ley del Régimen Electoral).

Although the Law of Popular Participation (Ley de Participación Popular) did not address gender issues directly, it did open the door to the participation of indigenous and rural groups in formal state spaces, by strengthening the importance and responsibilities of municipal governments. The joint effect of these reforms gave more opportunities for women in urban and rural areas to enter the political arena.

In this way, the participation through political parties or civil associations were inserted to the logic of the 'path' of political participation, meaning that the leaders who fulfilled their roles in their organisations could be invited to partisan politics; in some cases leading to positions in public office.

Despite the increased presence of women in the years after these laws were passed, there still was a strong gender bias against the roles these women play. In 2004, there were more men than women on municipal councils and most of these women have alternate positions.<sup>9</sup> These limitations can be explained by the fact that the law, although progressive, does not affect the traditional gender roles in Bolivian society and thus does not help eliminate the barriers to women's participation, mainly those related to their double work burden.

## Promotion of women's participation, results and shortcomings

As mentioned earlier, different Bolivian governments have passed laws to promote women's participation in politics. Three of the most important are the Law of Political Parties, the Law of Electoral Regime and the Law Against Harassment and Political Violence Against Women.

Though these laws are typically regarded as progressive, they have been criticised (especially the Law of Political Parties) as strengthening a system that is discriminatory towards women. These laws are criticised for failing to address the structural causes of discrimination, such as the traditional gender roles that limit women's participation, and the limited access of rural women to education and other public services.

Indigenous feminists, such as Julieta Paredes, consider that these laws have had a negative impact on the feminist movement in Bolivia. For Paredes, the institutions that promoted these laws focused mainly on women who already had a voice and had become part of the party system, and had not paid attention to those who could not reach that system. Another of her concerns is that the women who promoted the Law of Political Parties benefited from these advances by appropriating for themselves the interests of all Bolivian women.<sup>10</sup>

Some of these challenges also related to the requirement that 30% of candidates be women, established by the Law of Political Parties. But it did not stop there, and there were some problems with implementing the law. For example, when this law applied for the first time in the municipal elections of 1999, many men were present on the ballots, but using women's names. 'There were many irregularities in the lists of candidates for municipal council... candidates who changed their names to be registered as women ("Victoria" instead of Victor or "Carla" instead of Carlos, for example).'<sup>11</sup>

These types of actions, the low percentage of female representation required and the need to go beyond electoral lists moved women's groups to promote a new electoral law, passed in 2010. This law also includes the principles of parity and alternation in all the lists of candidates and in public positions (see box).<sup>12</sup>

Another law passed to improve women's political participation is Law 243 Against Harassment and Political Violence Towards Women. Women's organisations had been asking for this law for years, as many women, especially those elected at local levels, had been harassed by their male counterparts. Between 2004 and 2012, Bolivian police received more than 4,000 complaints of harassment from women participating in politics.<sup>13</sup>

The murder of councilwoman Juana Quispe in 2012 moved the government to pass a law to: 'Establish mechanisms to prevent, attend to and sanction against cases of political harassment and/or violence toward women, to guarantee their political rights'.<sup>14</sup>

'These laws were carried on by so-called women's NGOs, who did not see themselves as feminists and instead talked about gender equality... they neutralised the popular dissatisfaction and frustration and, besides, identified themselves as women representatives of the state and the international cooperation.'

Julieta Paredes<sup>10</sup>

'Electoral law 026 upholds the principles of gender equity and equality by... applying parity and alternation in the lists of men and women candidates for all government positions and positions of representation, in the internal election of leaders and candidates of political organizations, and in the own rules and procedures of indigenous native and peasant nations and peoples (Art. 2); Gender-based parity and alternation between men and women will be respected, so that there would be one woman incumbent candidate and, next, one man incumbent candidate; one woman deputy candidate and, next, one man deputy candidate, and thus successively (Art. 11).'<sup>12</sup>

Although it was first regarded as an important achievement for women, social organisations and female leaders now question this law for its many shortcomings. It only protects women who are candidates, or who have been elected to public office; there is no clarity about the procedures for presenting a complaint or denunciation, or how to implement the law effectively at different levels of government.

The law recognises four different ways for women to present a case: administrative, criminal, constitutional and electoral. For the administrative option, this means presenting the case to the organisation that employs the aggressor, and for the electoral way, the law has been interpreted as requiring the resignation of the woman who wants to present the case before they can consider the denunciation.<sup>16</sup>

But to understand what led women's organisations, especially the Association of Councilwomen of Bolivia (ACOBOL), to advocate for this law,<sup>17</sup> it is important to assess the progress made in female representation.

### The reality of women's political participation under the new legislation

The progress made by Bolivia in this aspect can be best assessed when by comparing the data from the beginning of the democratic era:

- In 1985, there was one titular female deputy and no female senators.
- In 1989, there were four titular female deputies and no female senators.
- In 2010, there were 33 titular female deputies and 17 female senators.<sup>18</sup>
- After the 2009 elections, 47% of senate seats were occupied by women.
- In the same year, women represented 43% of the total number of council members, compared to 19% before the application of parity.<sup>19</sup>
- The percentage of councilwomen at a national level reached 47% in the 2015 elections.<sup>20</sup>
- In the same election, 29 women were elected as mayors, in comparison to 23 in 1999.<sup>21</sup>

However, this increase in political participation 'generated negative reactions from their male peers, and in some cases from female peers as well, expressed through physical aggression and even through femicide'.<sup>22</sup> In some cases, 'men still think that giving more room for participation to women implies a loss of their privileges'.<sup>23</sup>

Law 243 Against Political Harassment and Political Violence Towards Women defines political harassment and violence as:

- Political harassment includes acts that put pressure on women to resign, women's persecution by disseminating personal information, bullying by giving women functions that do not respond to their posts, and threats.
- Political violence can be physical, psychological, or sexual, with the goal of restricting a woman's political rights.<sup>15</sup>

In the period from 2000 to 2009, ACOBOL received 249 complaints of violence and political harassment against women in local governments.<sup>24</sup> 'In 2010, from a total of 279 female mayors and councilwomen, 48% declared to have been a victim of political harassment and violence.'<sup>25</sup>

At the municipal level, these acts included 'changing the time of Council sessions without notifying councilwomen, abduction, sexual violence, home destruction and expulsion from the communities'.<sup>26</sup>

Between 2010 and 2015, 300 cases had been denounced, 299 of which had not been resolved at the beginning of 2015.<sup>27</sup>

These cases come from urban and rural areas and from the highlands and the lowlands, as can be seen in the stories of Juana Quispe, Daguiimar Rivera and Fanny Nina.

## Juana Quispe



The most emblematic case of political violence against women in Bolivia, and the one that moved the approval of the law to protect women is Juana Quispe. She was elected in April 2010 as a councilwoman for the municipality of Ancoraimes, in the region of La Paz.

Although she had been asked by the ruling party, Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), to be their candidate, she declined and stood as a representative of a different citizens' organisation.

During the first session of the Municipal Council, a group of people asked for her resignation, a demand that was accepted by the president and the vice-president of the Council, and Juana Quispe was removed. After this, she went to court and presented different legal resources to be reinstated. This legal battle lasted for 20 months, after which she received the court's support. Despite an initial refusal to accept this ruling, she was finally reinstated. Thirty-two days after coming back to the Council, she was found murdered.<sup>28</sup>

## Daguiimar Rivera



A few months after the approval of the law to protect women from political harassment and violence, Daguiimar Rivera, a councilwoman from the municipality of Guayaramerín was murdered.

She had been elected by a party opposing the mayor, who was from the MAS. Three weeks before her death, Rivera had presented denunciations of corruption against nine people in the Municipality, including the mayor, for which she received threats.<sup>29,30</sup>

After her death, ACOBOL reported that a letter announcing Rivera's death had been shared with the media before the murder.<sup>31</sup>

## Fanny Nina



Fanny Nina became the president of the Federations of Neighbourhood Councils (FEJUVE) in El Alto in 2009. In that year's elections, FEJUVE discussed the failure of the government to comply with the demands that had arisen after the unrest of 2003: the October Agenda. However, one of the candidates for the FEJUVE presidency, and who was elected as a vice-president, represented the ruling party, MAS.<sup>32</sup>

In 2010, Fanny Nina presented a list of demands to the national authorities; this list reflected the October Agenda. After the national government refused to negotiate with her and other FEJUVE leaders, the vice-president of this organisation took her office, accusing Nina of not respecting their statutes and of going behind the back of the organisation.

The Honour Tribunal of the FEJUVE determined that Nina had done no wrong, but she was unable to return to her position as president.

However, this did not stop her. During the mobilisations of December 2010 against a rise in the price of petrol, she had an important role in the protection of the people's interests, which led to threats against her, telling her that she would disappear during the mobilisations.<sup>33</sup> Finally, in January 2011, she was hit by a car and had to spend several days in a clinic.<sup>34</sup>

## Learning and steps forward

These experiences from Bolivia have shown that the adoption of progressive legislation, often seen as the goal for advocacy and reforms, has proved insufficient in genuinely empowering women. What further work, therefore, is needed to change long-entrenched norms, including institutions and practices, that discriminate against women? How could the structural causes of such discrimination – such as women's lack of access to education, information and leadership opportunities that are normally available to men – be addressed more systematically once and for all? Could bottom-up, participatory methodologies and sustained cultural sensitivity reinspire and reinvigorate collective efforts to empower women? Given these questions, it appears that Christian Aid Bolivia's inclusion of political harassment and violence against women as a specific part of its work since 2013 appears to be a step in the right direction.

Christian Aid's partners Fundación Machaqa Amawta (FMA) and UNITAS had already seen the effects that political harassment and violence have had on women's participation, since FMA had been contacted by Juana Quispe and UNITAS by Fanny Nina.

The stark insufficiency of legislation to genuinely empower women was highlighted in an exchange experience between female leaders from the highlands and the lowlands. During this event, the common denominator for these women was political harassment, whether they came from grassroots movements, indigenous organisations, local governments or the National Assembly. Women across Bolivia were facing the same issues, regardless of their political affiliation or ethnic background.

Nevertheless, these women showed great strength and will to overcome these situations (see boxes). Furthermore, they have carried out efforts to analyse the limitations of the law. They pointed out that the law was not well-known, especially in rural municipalities; that the cases presented by the women had not yet been resolved and there was no clarity about how the law should be implemented.

As such, FMA and UNITAS took the opportunity to bring women and men from different civil society organisations from rural and urban areas, including the Organisation of Councilwomen of La Paz, to work together on a proposal for improving and regulating the law that could be presented to the government. With the support of a lawyer, they drafted a proposal that was presented to the Ministry of Justice. The participants in the project created a national commission of representatives. The commission is in charge of sharing the proposal, not only with national authorities, but also with the media and other social movements.

The Ministry of Justice agreed with the proposals, especially with the inclusion of social leaders in the law. Despite this, the regulation has not been approved yet. On one hand, there is a power struggle between the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Autonomies that is blocking the discussion on this matter; on the other hand, it is difficult to define a mechanism through which a public entity would

## Mercedes Mamani

### Substitute MP



'The more women prepare, the better our chance to demand our rights as women in public, political, social and economic spaces... we need to keep going; sometimes there are many obstacles in our way, many men and women hurt you with their words.

'Sometimes your morale is low... your self-esteem goes down when people tell you that you are not doing anything. Some female authorities are attacked by leaders of their communities, physically and verbally. I see how some fellow female MPs cry... this is why we have approved the law against political harassment. We have seen many female authorities murdered because of this.

'We have been chosen by grassroots movements, but we are not respected. There is still this idea of looking at us, with our indigenous attire, with no respect. It seems they want to see a white brother instead... they do not value us.'



have the power to sanction political violence or harassment in civil society organisations.

This is an important issue, because the government should not become involved in internal problems of unions, indigenous movements or grassroots organisations. However, an autonomous and politically independent entity could work if its structure and functioning had been defined and agreed with civil society's participation.

In order to move forward the advocacy work despite these blocks, the national commission, with the support of UNITAS, organised a media campaign in March 2017, to keep the issue on the agenda and to reach people outside the political sphere.

The work of FMA and UNITAS with social movements had already allowed women to discuss issues related to political harassment, but it has become a more important part of their work since working together on the proposal for the regulation.

Both partners work on empowerment and participation, FMA with indigenous women and men in the north of the Bolivian Amazon, and UNITAS with small urban organisations across the country. Both focus on changing attitudes in women and men as a way of strengthening organisations and leaders.

Something the organisations have noted in their training processes is that gender cannot be approached in a workshop where the NGO technicians explain gender justice to the participants. Since the 1980s many NGOs in Bolivia have been talking about gender, political participation, economic empowerment and gender-based violence. However, for the women and men who participated in these projects, especially in rural areas, this approach was too foreign to their reality, and it seemed almost as if gender discussions were trying to promote a westernised vision of women as the ideal to attain.<sup>35</sup>

This caused problems for indigenous women's movements, since they were perceived as creating problems in communities by 'making women fight with their husbands'.<sup>36</sup> Indigenous women's perception of the laws promoting women's participation is that these policies benefited mainly middle class women.<sup>37</sup> These perceptions can be explained because, despite their progressive nature, these laws are insufficient to change the structures that obstruct women's participation, especially those related to the time women spend providing care. This is less of a problem for urban middle-class women, who have the resources to pay for care services. A politically aware, contextually specific approach is required to overcome barriers faced by women with less power and resources in order to make the law work for them.

What our partners have taught us with their work is that men and women from any background can become women's rights defenders, if the realisation of gender inequalities comes from their own reality and experiences. The popular educational approach to this is fundamental, as it is based on joint knowledge construction, respecting and appreciating the knowledge already owned by the different actors, and on liberating not only those who 'suffer' the power imbalances as 'oppressed', but also liberating the 'oppressors'. This could also be interpreted as working on

## Lidia Ramos

### Councilwoman, San Pedro de Tiquina



'The president of the council wanted to manage everything according to what he thought was right. I questioned him... but did not have the support from the councilmen. The president of the council knew how to put pressure on the Mayor [a woman] and on me. I almost resigned because the pressure was too much to handle. The Mayor asked me to stay because otherwise she would be alone... at that moment, I thought that, as a woman, I couldn't let this happen... so in the future more women could have these opportunities.

'The second councilmen proposed to me to quit at the second month after the election and that they would give me another post; I made him think that I would do that... but I am no one's puppet to be used to win an election. I did not accept and since then... he was against me... but in my municipality we agreed to work together for the municipality instead of our political parties.

'We have a budget for gender support, we did workshops with Bartolinas and Tupak [female and male peasant farmers' unions in La Paz]. There is a lot of machismo, but if we do the workshops only with women, how are we going to change things? We always have to do this with men and women, together, to speak about things honestly.'

'masculinities' to include both women and men in our struggles for gender justice.

Their approach, working from the bottom up, and identifying the different power dynamics that exist in their communities and organisations, makes it easier to discuss issues related to gender. Also, working at a local level with social organisations and local governments, but in coordination with the national level, helps touch on some of the structural issues that block women's participation.

Creating their own space and lobbying for more acceptance and invitation to closed spaces has helped to overcome barriers and create opportunities. In this way, both partners work to change the attitudes that perpetuate women's subordinate role in the family, the organisations, the communities and that influence the role they are given in the public space. Another effect of this work is that women and men have more information and arguments to hold local governments accountable on these issues.

As a result of this approach, FMA has had important successes in its work, especially with indigenous communities in the highlands of Bolivia. For example, four women who participated in its projects stood in the national and regional elections of 2014 and 2015, as candidates for municipal councils and the national assembly, with the support of the men from their communities.

In the case of UNITAS, its work bringing together different small urban organisations has changed attitudes among the participants; for example having men expressing their willingness to defend women's rights in their organisations.

However, both UNITAS and FMA acknowledge that there is still a lot to do. Besides their work with grassroots movements, they are committed to work together with other actors that have a better relation to governmental entities that could help improve existing legislation.

As a result of our work to date with gender and politics in Bolivia, Christian Aid recommends:

- Working from the bottom up with participatory methodologies.
- Talking about gender needs to include contextual and cultural sensitivity in order to ensure ownership of projects.
- Ensuring that our work goes beyond the approval of policies and laws. The implementation of these policies must also be supported.

## End notes

- <sup>1</sup> Bolivia: Women celebrate landmark approval of law against political harassment and violence, iKNOW Politics, 30 May 2012, <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/2012/05/bolivia-women-celebrate-landmark-approval-law-against-political-harassment-and-violence>
- <sup>2</sup> The *Ayllu* is an Andean form of social, economic and political organisation at communal level.
- <sup>3</sup> The term *cargo* is used in Spanish to represent a position that implies an obligation or a load. In Bolivia, especially in indigenous communities, reaching a leadership position is seen as providing a service to the community, or fulfilling an obligation. It also acknowledges that being a communal leader implies some sacrifices and expenses; thus, accepting a *cargo* means accepting a load and a responsibility.
- <sup>4</sup> *Gender-based Political Violence in Bolivia: A Barrier to Women's Political Participation*, Felicity Manson-Visram, Luca Jacopo Uberti and Tara Brace-John, One World Action, 2010, p7, <http://oneworldaction.org.uk/GenderBased.pdf>
- <sup>5</sup> *Proyecto Interculturalizando la Equidad de Género en Bolivia*, Teresa Arteaga, 2011, p90, [http://saberbolivianos.com/investigadores/tarteaga/equidad\\_genero.pdf](http://saberbolivianos.com/investigadores/tarteaga/equidad_genero.pdf)
- <sup>6</sup> See note 4, p8.
- <sup>7</sup> Historia de los Movimientos Indígenas en Bolivia, Confederación Sindical/nica de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia, [www.puebloindio.org/CSUTCB3.html](http://www.puebloindio.org/CSUTCB3.html)
- <sup>8</sup> See note 4, p7.
- <sup>9</sup> Participación popular y el Movimiento campesino Aymara, Roxana Liendo, 2009, p132.
- <sup>10</sup> *Hilando Fino Desde El Feminismo Comunitario*, Julieta Paredes, 2008, p6, <http://mujeresdelmundobabel.org/files/2013/11/Julieta-Paredes-Hilando-Fino-desde-el-Fem-Comunitario.pdf>
- <sup>11</sup> *Avances en la participación política de las mujeres. Caminos, agendas y nuevas estrategias de las mujeres hacia la paridad en Bolivia*, Marlene Choque Aldana, 2014, p355, [http://tse.go.cr/revista/art/17/choque\\_aldana.pdf](http://tse.go.cr/revista/art/17/choque_aldana.pdf)
- <sup>12</sup> Bolivian women's political agenda in the 2014 elections, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2014.
- <sup>13</sup> iKNOW Politics Report on Violence Against Women in Politics, iKNOW Politics, 2014, <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/learn/knowledge-resources/report-white-paper/iknow-politics-report-violence-against-women-politics>
- <sup>14</sup> *Informe Foro Nacional De Analisis De Propuestas Para La Aplicación De La Ley No 243 Contra El Acoso y La Violencia Política Hacia Las Mujeres: Proceso De Elaboración De Política Pública Y Reglamentación De La Ley No 243 "Contra El Acoso Y Violencia Política"*, 2013, [http://info.comvomujer.org.pe/catalogocomo/21\\_Informe\\_Foro%20Nacional\\_Aplicaci%20f3n\\_Ley\\_N%20243\\_BO\\_2013.pdf](http://info.comvomujer.org.pe/catalogocomo/21_Informe_Foro%20Nacional_Aplicaci%20f3n_Ley_N%20243_BO_2013.pdf)
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid, p7.
- <sup>17</sup> See note 4, p15.
- <sup>18</sup> See note 14, p11.
- <sup>19</sup> *Pensando los feminismos en Bolivia*, Conexión Fondo de Emancipación, 2012, p288, [www.conexion.org.bo/uploads/Pensando\\_lors\\_Feminismos\\_en\\_Bolivia.pdf](http://www.conexion.org.bo/uploads/Pensando_lors_Feminismos_en_Bolivia.pdf)
- <sup>20</sup> Porcentaje de Mujeres y Hombres en 20 Concejos Municipales, Observatorio de Género, [www.coordinadoradelamujer.org.bo/observatorio/index.php/general2niv/mostrar/boton/2/sub/17/id/50/tem/2](http://www.coordinadoradelamujer.org.bo/observatorio/index.php/general2niv/mostrar/boton/2/sub/17/id/50/tem/2)
- <sup>21</sup> ¿Cuál paridad? Bolivia tendrá 310 alcaldes y solo 29 alcaldesas, *Página Siete*, 9 April 2015, [www.paginasiete.bo/nacional/2015/4/9/cual-paridad-bolivia-tendra-alcaldes-solo-alcaldesas-52861.html](http://www.paginasiete.bo/nacional/2015/4/9/cual-paridad-bolivia-tendra-alcaldes-solo-alcaldesas-52861.html)
- <sup>22</sup> See note 14, p11.
- <sup>23</sup> *Entre la igualdad y la complementariedad. Roles y relaciones de género en territorios indígenas del Norte Amazónico de Bolivia*, Fundación Machaqa Amawta, 2015, p33.
- <sup>24</sup> See note 13.
- <sup>25</sup> See note 14, p11.
- <sup>26</sup> See note 11, p352.
- <sup>27</sup> Concept note presented to Christian Aid Bolivia for project implemented by UNITAS.
- <sup>28</sup> Caso Juana Quispe, DDHH, <http://nuevademocracia.org.bo/observatorio/index.php/casos/item/985-caso-juana-quispe>
- <sup>29</sup> Sicarios asesinan a una concejala opositora en Guayaramerín, Beni, *La Razón*, 20 June 2012, [www.la-razon.com/ciudades/Sicarios-concejala-opositora-Guayaramerin-Beni\\_0\\_1636036434.html](http://www.la-razon.com/ciudades/Sicarios-concejala-opositora-Guayaramerin-Beni_0_1636036434.html)
- <sup>30</sup> 2012- Denunciamos El Asesinato De Concejala Daguimar Ribera, Cladem, [www.cladem.org/america-y-el-caribe/83-cladem-bolivia/698-2012-denunciamos-el-asesinato-de-concejala-daguimar-ribera](http://www.cladem.org/america-y-el-caribe/83-cladem-bolivia/698-2012-denunciamos-el-asesinato-de-concejala-daguimar-ribera)
- <sup>31</sup> Multitudinaria marcha exige dar con los asesinos de la concejala Daguimar Rivera, *El Día*, 20 June 2012, [www.eldia.com.bo/index.php?cat=148&pla=3&id\\_articulo=93532](http://www.eldia.com.bo/index.php?cat=148&pla=3&id_articulo=93532)
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- <sup>35</sup> See note 19, p136, p195.
- <sup>36</sup> See note 5, p67-68.
- <sup>37</sup> See note 19, p286.