

This article was downloaded by: [Oxfam UK]

On: 19 June 2015, At: 09:28

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office:
Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Gender & Development

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cgde20>

Supporting the collective power of Bolivian women to attain citizenship rights: the Raising Her Voice project

Soledad Muñiz & Hannah Beardon

Published online: 25 Nov 2011.

To cite this article: Soledad Muñiz & Hannah Beardon (2011) Supporting the collective power of Bolivian women to attain citizenship rights: the Raising Her Voice project, *Gender & Development*, 19:3, 383-393, DOI: [10.1080/13552074.2011.625642](https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2011.625642)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2011.625642>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

Supporting the collective power of Bolivian women to attain citizenship rights: the Raising Her Voice project

Soledad Muñiz, and Hannah Beardon

'Raising Her Voice' (RHV) is a global programme from Oxfam GB to promote poor women's rights and capacity to participate effectively in governance at every level: raising women voices, increasing their influence, and making decision-making institutions more accountable to women. The present article is based on the findings of a case study of the Bolivian RHV project, prepared for the mid-term evaluation by Soledad Muñiz and Hannah Beardon. The case study was developed using participatory methods to encourage a wide range of perspectives and deep, collective reflection on the challenges and achievements, to date, of the Cochabamba Platform of Women for Citizenship, and the contribution of RHV to these achievements. The present article describes both the key findings of the case study, and the methods used to capture such a complex change process so deeply embedded into external historical and political processes.

Key words: gender equality; governance; women; voice; citizenship; equity; cultural diversity

Introduction

'Raising Her Voice' (RHV)¹ is a five-year programme of work, launched in 2008 and managed by Oxfam GB with UKAid funding, to promote women's political participation and representation. Working with women's organisations and citizenship non-government organisations (NGOs) in 17 countries² across the world, RHV aims to support poor women to raise their voices, participate effectively in governance at every level in order to claim their rights, and make decision-making institutions more accountable to women.

The RHV portfolio is broad and diverse, with projects working in very different social and political contexts and with a broad range of partners, requiring different strategies and activities to support and promote women's participation in governance processes. As such, the portfolio aims not only to support the women and communities

involved in the five-year process, but to build strong learning and evidence of the types of strategies and partnerships which can support women to participate in public decision-making, and claim and monitor their rights.

Mid-term evaluations were carried out on each of the national RHV projects, and in early 2011 an overview evaluation of the global coordination function was conducted by independent evaluator Leitmotiv, led by Hannah Beardon, to provide a sense of the progress, challenges and opportunities half-way through the programme. The evaluation identified a theory of change which drives and unites the projects, the different methods and approaches used and the impacts and changes seen. The insights and recommendations were designed to support the final half of the programme, and work in gender, governance and women's rights more widely.

How Oxfam is supporting women to raise their voices – and be heard

The overall aim of RHV is to promote poor women's rights and capacity to participate effectively in governance at every level: raising women voices, increasing their influence, and making decision-making institutions more accountable to women. Within that broad goal, each of the 17 national projects across Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America has developed its own strategy based on the social and political context, and its existing relationships and expertise. For example, the African projects have primarily focused on the implementation of the African Union's Protocol on Women's Rights, which in Uganda required a campaign for ratification of the Protocol; in Mozambique, where ratification had already been achieved, the team focused on influencing and pushing through legislation on key issues such as the domestic violence bill. Strategies included coalition building and capacity building for collective action, and public awareness-raising of key women's rights issues. In Nepal and Indonesia, Albania and Armenia, the projects have focused much more on building structures for women to engage effectively in local public decision-making and engagement, alongside the skills and confidence of women to participate.

The mid-term evaluation of the global RHV portfolio identified a strong theory underpinning all of this work, of how Oxfam and its partners contribute to changes in women's political participation and representation. This focuses on three main spheres that influence women's opportunities to participate in public decision-making: personal, political and social. The 'personal sphere' includes work to strengthen women's capacity and confidence to participate or the attitudes that affect their mobility and participation. In the 'social sphere' RHV teams work with organisations that can support women's participation and representation, and also to raise public awareness of women's rights and issues. Finally, they work on the 'political sphere' with women leaders and representatives to make political structures more open and responsive.

RHV is an international programme of Oxfam GB, implemented at the national level by country offices with partners ranging from community-based organisations to

international advocacy coalitions, and with a small global coordination team to draw together and share learning. Oxfam has a clear and stated commitment to women's rights, and in some contexts the work links clearly into existing Oxfam work and priorities including prior policy work on the African Union Protocol, or grassroots capacity building and citizenship processes. However, the specific focus on women's political and citizenship rights, as opposed to livelihoods and social or economic rights, is new to many of the country teams.

The mid-term evaluation found that by developing, testing and documenting different strategies to support women's active participation in public decision-making and accountability processes, RHV was providing significant value to Oxfam and its partners in social change and development. But as the project funding period comes to an end (some of the projects are three years long, others five years) it has been important for the global coordination team to support Oxfam colleagues at national and international levels to integrate the learning and focus into their wider programme work. This has been done quite successfully in Asia, for example, where the regional team are building on the experiences and partnerships built up in Nepal, Indonesia and Pakistan – as well as the findings of a peer review process in Nepal – to develop a strong programme of work on the issue.

RHV Bolivia – building collective voice from diversity

One of the countries participating in RHV is Bolivia. For several years, Oxfam in Bolivia have been working in partnership with the Institute of Integrated Training for Women (IFFI) to support local and national processes of capacity building and collective action. IFFI have been working with other women's organisations and activists to develop collective action and voice as the Cochabamba Platform of Women for Citizenship. Members of the Platform have worked together to influence and monitor public decision-making, and have received support for organisational development and capacity building. With the financial and methodological input of RHV, IFFI and the Platform have been able to extend this work and expand the scope of the Platform to include more indigenous women's groups, as well as connect to women's movements in other countries. This expansion has required a renewed effort to construct common identity and collective voice with women from different organisational and social backgrounds.

Women, democracy and citizenship in Bolivia

'A dream of Bolivian people is to build an inclusive, equitable and just society'. Thus begins the UNDP's (2010) Report on Human Development in Bolivia. The report presents clear evidence of increasing political and legal equity, highlighting the access of indigenous peoples and women to political power structures. The report also affirms

that Bolivia has built a direct democracy, with participation, representation and community development at its heart.

This has not happened by chance. For the last three decades, women's and indigenous people's movements have worked from sunrise to sunset for a new Bolivia. This social struggle has been the basis for political change and strengthened dialogue, consensus and coalition building, respect for diversity and cultural integration in the country.

The current government, headed by the indigenous president Evo Morales, has built on this history, and involved social movements in developing a new constitution for what is now officially the 'Plurinational State of Bolivia', as well as the local and national laws required to make it reality. As such, many of the demands of the Bolivian women's movement, including social, economic and educational equality, are now written into the constitution 2009. In an interview for the case study, Katia Uriona, Director of the Bolivian Women's Coordination Network, explained: 'Everything that the constitution says about women was written by the women's movement' (interview with Katia Uriona, 11 April 2011, La Paz, Bolivia).

In Bolivia today, women are participating at every level of political decision-making, although there is still a long way to go at some levels to attain equality in participation and representation. Half of ministers, and nearly half (45 per cent) of congress members are women. Yet, in 2009's elections, just 17 per cent of candidates to electoral lists were women, and only 21 women were elected as heads of local government, out of a total of 337. The Bolivian women's movement considers the increase in numbers of women political leaders an achievement. However, they know that the effective participation of women in formal political spaces depends on more than their shared concerns being constructively debated; it requires the building of a collective voice for women, and for these arguments to be heard.

When the opportunity to participate in RHV arose, Oxfam in Bolivia saw that it was closely aligned to its national strategic goals around supporting or promoting 'active citizenship', transparency and accountability in governance. Oxfam built RHV onto existing work in a long-standing partnership with the IFFI in Cochabamba, in central Bolivia. For 30 years, IFFI has been working in Cochabamba for women's equality and equity at every level in society, seeking to unpack patriarchal structures from a feminist perspective. This partnership between Oxfam and IFFI was centrally concerned with working for women's rights, and adding value to each other's work at local, national and international levels. In this way, RHV in Bolivia helped to expand and strengthen the ongoing empowerment of Bolivian women.

The RHV Bolivia case study – a participatory reflection on change

The present article is based on the findings of a case study of the RHV Bolivia project, prepared for the mid-term evaluation by Soledad Muñiz. The case study

was developed using participatory methods to encourage a wide range of perspectives and deep, collective reflection on the challenges and achievements to date of the Platform of Women for Citizenship, and the contribution of RHV to these achievements. The case study aimed to support the wider evaluation report with more detailed and contextualised analysis of the programme's work and value, to illustrate how change in women's political participation and representation happens and the contribution Oxfam and RHV have made. This article describes both the key findings of this case study, and the methods used to capture such a complex change process, so deeply embedded into external historical and political processes.

The case study focuses on the extent to which RHV has resulted in greater participation and awareness of women's organisations in political processes, exploring the history and dynamics of the women's movement in the area, and its links to local and national political processes and institutions. A process of reflection and analysis engaging activists and organisations from the urban and rural/indigenous women's movements, actors from local and district governments and Oxfam staff, helped to understand the role and value of the Cochabamba Platform of Women for Citizenship, the dynamics of public decision-making processes and changes in women's leadership and relevant policies. It also drew out learning and insights into the contribution of RHV to coalition building, capacity building and advocacy processes and explored how the growth of the Platform had affected the wider goals of women's participation in governance.

The research included desk-based research and fieldwork between March and May 2011 conducted by Soledad Muñiz, with support from Hannah Beardon (the lead consultant for the overall evaluation).

Understanding how social change happens

The research was concerned with understanding how social change happens. RHV in Bolivia has supported and contributed to an existing process of women's empowerment, collective action and political engagement. As such the case study needed to understand the value of RHV and Oxfam's contribution in terms of a wider and longer process. Using participatory methods Soledad could draw on perspectives and learning from a wide range of stakeholders to unpick some of the dynamics and challenges at work:

- Working with Oxfam GB and RHV staff to understand and articulate the theory of change behind the project – what is the vision or goal it is working towards, how does it expect change to happen across which different dimensions or levels, and what is the particular contribution of RHV in this.

- Reflecting with IFFI as to how they understand the value and opportunity of unifying the gender movement in diversity, how it supports or influences their work and how they are building on this success.
- Exploring the other work of RHV and partners and how it interlinks to opportunities provided by the movement and progress towards the wider objectives of RHV. This meant talking to partners, staff of the Gender Equity Observatory, women activists and government officials in Bolivia.
- Exploring the role and added value of Oxfam (including a short session with relevant Oxfam staff in-country) to understand Oxfam GB's added value in the struggle for women's participation in governance in Bolivia, RHV's value to Oxfam and the linkages and potential future work emerging.

The research method

In Bolivia the first author had conversations with more than 70 actors, mainly in participatory spaces to facilitate reflection about the history and dynamics of the women's movement, and the effective strategies and relationships to build sustainable and effective changes to women's political participation and representation. The development of the case study was an opportunity to learn and reflect, a process which can itself lead to change. The participants in the research at IFFI and Oxfam in Bolivia were grateful for the reflection spaces, noting the importance of such participatory communication processes to share knowledge and construct effective plans based on experience and learning.

Rather than follow the activities and outcomes of RHV specifically, the case study was developed in the mould of a 'critical story of change'³ to locate and understand RHV's contribution to a wider process of social change with its roots in political and social action of many different actors. A critical story of change critically challenges practice, recognising that development is complex and messy. It embraces context to reflect the tension and challenges, and learning and reflection are at the core of the process.

The research used participatory methods to draw different perspectives from a range of actors involved in the process of raising women voices in governance, particularly focusing on the role of the Cochabamba Platform of Women for Citizenship in the wider context, the relationships and dynamics, the enabling and inhibiting factors of change, and the added value of RHV and Oxfam to the process. In these methods, the facilitator challenges the stakeholders to think about how they work, and they are fully involved in the design of the story. The end result presents a specific case of change which is unique and unrepeatable, but by showing change in relation to the social and political context, also draws out generalisable learning on how to promote social change and women's rights in practice.

The findings: active citizenship and voice

In Cochabamba, the RHV project has had three main areas of action: creating spaces for education and sharing among women leaders; strengthening the Platform of Women for Citizenship; and monitoring women's rights and gender equity through the Observatory of Gender Equity.

Creating spaces for education and sharing among women leaders

To empower women in the Platform's member organisations, IFFI has facilitated a variety of seminars and workshops. From dialogues on how to decolonise and 'depatriarchalise' social structures and training on political participation and leadership, to courses for information technology and other skills. Under the RHV project, in 2008 IFFI inaugurated the Adela Zamudio Training School to develop personal capacity, facilitate reflection, and help build a collective vision of gender and other intercultural concepts.

Strengthening the Platform of Women for Citizenship

In Cochabamba, the Platform of Women for Citizenship has provided a space for women's organisations and groups to agree on key strategies, build on each others' strengths, strengthen and build the skills of their member organisations. As part of RHV, IFFI and the Platform were able to incorporate women's organisations from peri-urban and rural areas of Cochabamba into these processes and conversations that urban organisations had been having since 2000. In 2011 the Platform decided to rotate meetings of the Coordination Committee around the province of Cochabamba, to strengthen the coalition and the active participation of diverse member organisations.

The Platform has enabled women to hold government to account on their rights and entitlements, and local organisations have been able to monitor local government spending and create new opportunities for political engagement. The Platform has also worked on events for women to meet and discuss with government officials, consolidating spaces for political participation and advocacy. Ultimately, the members said the result of this work is that they now know their rights and obligations (comment from participatory exercise with 42 women members of the Cochabamba Women's Platform Coordination Committee, April 2011).

Monitoring women's rights via the Observatory

The Observatory created as part of RHV Bolivia facilitates citizen monitoring of gender equality and equity in a context of cultural diversity. It provides information and analysis for monitoring gender and women's rights, particularly focusing on budgets and the media. For example, IFFI analyses and pulls up sexist images, content and stereotypes in the media. The organisation's publication, *Gender Construction in Advertisement: Short Sighted or Intentional?*⁴ informed the creation of annual awards

for gender sensitive adverts as well as 'booby prizes' for those perpetuating sexist stereotypes. Members of the Platform of Women for Citizenship participate in the analysis, decisions and award ceremonies.

Discussion – building a broader collective voice

The work of the Platform and IFFI is longstanding and well advanced, and with the support of RHV this work was developed further. Through RHV, the Platform could invite a wider range of women's organisations, including rural and indigenous women's groups, and this meant that they began to incorporate cultural integration as a guiding principle of their collective work. The Platform highlights the importance of unity in diversity, and that collective bodies participate in decisions concerning the redistribution of power and wealth. As such the incorporation of new groups, with different understandings of concepts as basic and fundamental to the Platform as 'gender equality', required a long and deep process of reflection and debate.

A cornerstone of this process was to build shared understanding, so the Platform developed a space called *Warmipachakuna*, the universe of women. The Platform members helped to develop an annual event with the same name for the day of the Bolivian Woman, to stimulate experimentation, imagination and creativity for a broad understanding and cultural expression of diversity. Each year the festival hosted 400 women to share audiovisual sessions, theatre, photography, literature, talks, rituals symbolising reconciliation between urban and rural women, exhibitions and thematic workshops. Different topics were chosen for the discussions, artistic and cultural presentations, including: identities, human rights and citizenship; women making history in Bolivia; power and empowerment; de-colonisation and 'de-patriarchalisation'.

A second cornerstone of the RHV process was to build safe spaces for meeting and training. Workshops, conferences, seminars, meetings, festivals, forums, mobilisation campaigns and courses have provided safe spaces for women to increase their power to be and to act, to organise, negotiate and build trust, share ideas and agree on actions for the Platform and the national women's movement. In this way, coming together has been at the heart of women's political participation. 'In the Platform there is exchange and understanding among different women', affirms Toribias Lera from Platform member COAMAC, laughing at old stereotypes of rural and urban women (interview with Toribias Lera, 13 April 2011, Cochabamba, Bolivia).

The third cornerstone of the RHV process was raising this collective voice with government, by participating in important opportunities for citizenship participation. Securing the effective participation of the women's movement in the process of developing and rolling out the new constitution was essential. After the 2009 constitution, Bolivia has decentralised power to departments, municipalities, and indigenous territories. This meant that the Platform needed to influence the

development of the Cochabamba's autonomous Statute, secondary laws and public policies to build constitutional changes into departmental services and policies. The Platform created a Commission to elaborate joint response, and participate with one voice in the preparation of the draft Statute. The final draft included 51 proposed additions by the Platform. Gonzalo Vargas, who co-ordinated the government process in Cochabamba, said: 'Women's organisations were a constant presence in all the commissions... the Platform has won its space. It is a representative body and has legitimacy' (interview with Gonzalo Vargas, 14 April 2011, Cochabamba, Bolivia).

This validates the RHV theory that work with women to build their capacity and confidence for citizen action and participation (personal sphere) and to strengthen their organisations and spaces for collective action (social sphere) can have a significant knock-on effect on the political sphere, in terms of policies and accountability.

Conclusion: supporting local processes through international programmes – a two-way street for learning

At the heart of the success of RHV has been a joining of forces to make women's voices heard more effectively. Building women's capacity and confidence to participate, and developing safe spaces, is not only empowering to the individual, but also to the coalition and its members – the personal and social spheres. This collective force has then been able to open up new spaces for participation in the political sphere, which has led to greater representation, changes in public policy and increased participation in public decision-making.

In a participatory reflection, Cecilia Estrada, Director of IFFI, and Rodrigo Alvarez at Oxfam in Bolivia both commented that, in a global programme like RHV implemented with a country programme in partnership with local organisations, trust and regular communication are very important. They also agree that their work at local and national level has benefitted from the reach of RHV. Cecilia said: 'Participating in international meetings has allowed the exchange of experiences' (participatory reflection with IFFI programme team, April 2011). Both organisations have valued this exchange highly.

As a global portfolio, RHV has been able to contribute to existing social processes in different countries, developing separate national projects with common goals and funding and accountability structures, but quite different approaches and contexts. The case in Bolivia shows that advances in women's political representation and participation have not resulted directly from RHV, but from a long-term and dynamic social process involving diverse actors. Oxfam and RHV have provided some funding to these processes based on trusted and effective partnerships and common goals. Sometimes this results in completely new partnerships or processes, in and at other times (including in the Bolivia case), the results have been the extension or expansion of existing ones.

But being part of an international portfolio means more than just funding and capacity; it also strengthens the opportunities for two-way communication and learning, and the opportunity to develop strong evidence and approaches to support this type of work in the future. The global coordination function of RHV provided a very loose framework for projects at the beginning. But over time they have been able to incorporate learning from national projects on how change happens and begin to develop an overview of learning and approaches from the 17 different processes, which has the potential to influence other international processes on women's rights.

RHV is half-way through its five-year strategy. Plans have been implemented, monitored and reported on in the 17 different countries, and approaches tried, tested and adapted. Results have been documented and impact is starting to be seen on the lives and rights of women in some contexts. From this experience, RHV is starting to develop strong evidence of how changes to women's political participation and representation – or voice – happen, and can be supported, and why it is important to do so. A strong common theory of change for women's right to be heard is emerging. The second half of RHV will focus more on sharing learning and experience between the projects, but also using it to influence other key players to strengthen work on women's right to be heard in Oxfam and beyond.

Soledad Muñiz conducted the in-depth case study for Bolivia. For the last three years, she has been an Associate at InsightShare, a UK-based organisation using participatory video with people and groups to grow in self-confidence, trust and skills to act for change. She has been based in the UK and Argentina. Postal address: Correa 1960, Ciudad de Buenos Aires, 1429, Argentina. Email: munizsoledad@yahoo.es

Hannah Beardon was the lead consultant for this evaluation. She has been based in Colombia, UK and now Spain. She specialises in issues of participation, communication and power, initially working with ActionAid's Reflect unit and now as an independent consultant. Postal address: Calle Baja 36, 18440 Cadiar, Granada, Spain. Email: hannahbeardon@hotmail.com

Notes

- 1 Multiple strategies and approaches in different countries can be used as effective ways of working towards the single goal that women's voices are heard. This article focuses on RHV in Bolivia, but in each country the project has developed different activities and programmes based on local expertise, experience and partnerships, to fit the specific needs and nature of the context. In Armenia and Albania, for example, RHV partners worked to create spaces and skills for local women leaders to participate in political decision-making. In other countries, for example Nepal and Indonesia, the project built on grassroots processes of women's empowerment linking them to local and national policy advocacy and public sensitisation work. In eight African countries RHV focused

on advocacy for the ratification and implementation of the African Union's Protocol on Women's Rights, as part of the coalition for African women's rights, SOAWR. For more information, please see the following sources: RHV (<http://raisinghervoice.ning.com>); Oxfam in Bolivia (www.oxfam.org/es/bolivia); IFFI (www.iffi.org.bo/)

- 2 These countries include: Africa – Gambia, Liberia, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda; Asia – Nepal, Indonesia (Papua and Aceh), and Pakistan; Latin America – Bolivia, Guatemala, Honduras, and Chile; Eastern Europe – Albania and Armenia.
- 3 Critical stories of change' is a methodology developed for use by development INGOs in exploring their impact and added value as partners in wider, complex processes of social change. More information is available at: http://www.povertyandconservation.info/docs/20080215-AWF-BL-FFI_Cambridge_Workshop_07_Carrol_ActionAid.pdf, and: http://actionaidusa.org/news/publications/stories_of_change/
- 4 Available in Spanish upon request: iffi@supernet.com.bo

Reference

- UNDP (2010) ['The changes behind the change: inequalities and social mobility in Bolivia'], UNDP National Report on Human Development in Bolivia, http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/national/latinamericathecaribbean/bolivia/NHDR_Bolivia_2010.pdf (last accessed 19 September 2011; in Spanish)