



Photo: Archive CEADL

YOUTH BILL OF LAW IN BOLIVIA

How Empowering Youth as Active Citizens Can Contribute to Political Advocacy

Bolivia's constitutional reform of 2009 allows the different levels of government (municipalities and departments) to develop their own legislation related to social and economic development. Taking advantage of this change, youth organisations in the municipalities of El Alto and Sucre, and in the department of Tarija, decided to work together to influence local laws that better fit their own views and address their specific issues. Oxfam supported their efforts through the project, Es Hora... ¡Construye tu Ley! or It's Time... Build your Law!

Youth participation approaches

Youth-led implementation and unity: The project valued youth-led implementation and management whereby young men and women led the project's direction, promotion and success. This was achieved through working with 'Elected Youth Organisations' so that young people could lead different phases of the project. Youth-led activities included commenting on proposals for a designated youth bill, collating ideas into one draft

bill, and lobbying the municipal and departmental elected representatives and institutions. Young people also helped to organise a public relations campaign around the Youth Bill of Law.

This approach supported the sustainability of the project and meant that there was a smooth exit strategy, where the youth-led organisations took over full control of the project. The Youth Bill of Law proved to be a great unifying goal to mobilise a diverse group of young people.

Partnership with a youth-friendly organisation: Oxfam formed a partnership with Centro de Estudio y Apoyo de Desarrollo al Local (CEADL), an organisation with a wealth of experience working with Bolivian youth, many of its educators coming from youth movements. The partnership with CEADL was essential to be able to connect with youth organisations and activists in Bolivia. In this way, Oxfam was able to create new alliances and collaborate with local youth organisations that were not previously known to Oxfam. CEADL and Oxfam supported young people to lead the project, acting primarily as advisers and convenors.



OXFAM



Image from the interactive project website (www.construyetuley.com/inicio) which hosts the Toolkit for young people to take action to create a Youth Bill of Law in Bolivia

Recruitment and capacity building of youth-led bodies: CEADL and Oxfam invited different youth organisations and independent young people from Sucre, Tarija and El Alto to participate in a review of what youth law meant to them. Facilitated by CEADL and Oxfam, the review enabled young people to discuss what the youth bill was and how they might influence it. Following the first gathering, each city established its own Elected Youth Organisation. These three youth-led organisations then entered a process of capacity building and training in topics such as public administration, legislative procedures, lobbying and campaigning.

Training was targeted at the steering committees (15-20 young people in total) and also covered human rights issues, leadership, legal frameworks, the preparation of proposals and laws, municipal public administration, social control, and advocacy in their municipal and departmental areas. A complete 'Toolkit' is available online (in Spanish): <http://www.construyetuley.com/inicio>.

To support young people's engagement over the longer term, the project remained open to new applicants throughout its duration.

Building alliances: After the training process, CEADL and Oxfam acted as convenors, helping the Elected Youth Organisations to develop contacts with relevant authorities and public entities including departmental assemblies, municipalities and youth divisions. CEADL and Oxfam used their resources and reputation in Bolivia to help the Elected Youth Organisations gain access to authorities and decision-making spaces, establish essential alliances and to influence key institutions.

The Elected Youth Organisations and their representatives led several actions, including advocacy, drafting and unifying the proposals into one draft bill, networking and building relationships in all the municipal districts or departmental regions, establishing public campaigns using online and offline tactics, and monitoring legislative procedures and advocacy processes.

They also called meetings and ran events, asking CEADL and Oxfam to support on occasions that required direct coordination with public entities.

Establishing an autonomous youth-led organisation: In the case of El Alto, the Elected Youth Organisation continued beyond the project by converting into the 'Youth Committee of El Alto', an independent organisation responsible for the promotion of youth active citizenship in the region. To make this possible, CEADL and Oxfam helped to strengthen members' capacities and technical knowledge. The Youth Committee of El Alto then went on to lead every aspect of the project: creating alliances, visiting colleges and working with the authorities to create and implement the Youth Bill of Law. In this way, the young people were not only creating the Youth Bill of Law of their municipality, but also engaging the youth from their communities to be part of the mobilisation process and to contribute to the project.

Most of the young men and women who participated in the project are now active citizens of their community and are either involved in public entities or youth organisations.

Key youth participation successes

Handover of project leadership: The key to a successful youth-led project is to hand over project leadership to the young people early on, enhancing their ownership and engagement with the project. The whole methodology presented in the Toolkit is based on youth leadership and a meaningful participatory process. Beyond the result of having a new Youth Bill of Law passed, the whole participatory process for youth mobilisation was the project's most important achievement.

Provision of technical support: Support from CEADL and Oxfam's technical youth active citizenship advisors was essential to reinforce the capacities of the Elected Youth Organisations. Once the training process was complete and the young people had increased their skills, knowledge and rights awareness, they were able to lead the whole process themselves. This included mobilising the youth in their communities, but also the key actors who would be essential to implement the Youth Bill of Law.

Throughout the project, CEADL and Oxfam were available to guide and support the Elected Youth Organisations as and when required, right up to the point when the Youth Committee of El Alto could become totally autonomous. This strengthened young people's active citizenship, while demonstrating to the public how young people can be actors of change in their communities.



Culture of partnership: To ensure the success of working in partnership with – and being led by – young people, it is important to facilitate the creation of a youth-led body (committee, organisation, division) that then becomes a partner in the project. In this way, partners can work together as equals, with trust and learning embedded in the partnership. This approach also enables young women and men in the youth-led organisation to own decisions about how to implement and manage change. In this project, Oxfam had to keep monitoring the process to ensure there was enough support for the Elected Youth Organisations to deliver their actions.

Lessons for others

Consider gender from the outset: Gender needs to be considered from the very beginning and integrated throughout the project. Specific measures had to be taken to ensure the full participation of young women in Bolivia, as they have fewer opportunities to become involved as active citizens. Despite the challenges, the project managed to secure the active participation of 50% young women within the Elected Youth Organisations.

In future, it would be better to plan from the beginning how best to encourage young women to participate; in particular, to have specific measures to ensure that women are able to have their voices heard during decision-making processes.

Promote effective communication: Capacity building mainly centred around the more technical aspects of the project, including public administration and legislative procedures. It would have been relevant to include other aspects of capacity building and skills development, including organisational management and communication. Indeed, many of the challenges reported by the young women and men during the project were related to these issues; for example, a lack of effective coordination and communication between members of the Elected Youth Organisations.

This case study forms part of a series of case studies exploring how to go from programmes developed *for* young people, to working *with* them and on projects led *by* them.

© Oxfam April 2019

This paper was written by Oxfam's Youth as Active Citizens Community of Practice. Oxfam acknowledges the assistance of Youth Policy and Programme Advisors across the confederation in its production. It is part of a series of case studies written to inform public debate on development and humanitarian policy issues.

For further information on the issues raised in this case study please email IDavies@oxfam.org.uk, Christian.Tremblay@oxfam.org, or Robbert.vandeWaerdt@oxfamnovib.nl.

**ES HORA...
¡Construye tu Ley!**

- Nivel I**
¿Cuál es tu realidad?
- Nivel II**
¡Trabajando juntos!
- Nivel III**
¡De las palabras a la acción!
- Nivel IV**
Aprender, caminar y avanzar
- Nivel V**
Construyendo nuestra ley
- Nivel VI**
Más allá de nuestra ley

Image from the interactive project website (www.construyetuley.com/inicio) which hosts the Toolkit for young people to take action to create a Youth Bill of Law in Bolivia



OXFAM