Joint Programme: Productive Patrimonial Assets Building and Citizenship Programme for Women in Extreme Poverty in Bolivia

Supporting Greater Economic Autonomy and Empowerment of Indigenous/Peasant Women Entrepreneurs in Bolivia

Thematic Window: Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment

Main Participants: UN: UNDP (leading agency), UN Women, UNIDO and FAO. Government entities: Vice-Ministry of Equal Opportunities (VIO)
1. Introduction

For the Government of Bolivia, poverty reduction is the highest priority on the National Development Plan agenda. In line with national priorities and international commitments to achieving the gender-related Millennium Development Goals, the Joint Programme on Productive Patrimonial Assets Building and Citizenship Programme for Women in Extreme Poverty (the Programme) has provided indigenous rural women from the poorest areas of Bolivia with sustainable livelihoods for themselves and their families and is simultaneously strengthening their abilities to fully exercise their citizenship and political rights.

To achieve its aims, the programme has introduced seed and start-up capital, with some participants having also received venture and shared venture capital contracts. The Programme has built skills among women to improve the management of their businesses, the quality of their products and their marketing and uses facilitators to foster contact between women’s enterprises and markets. The programme also employed a strategy to increase the exercise of women’s citizenship and political rights through the provision of identity documents and citizenship education for women, communities and local authorities, ensuring land ownership is in women’s names and guaranteeing their inclusion in housing programmes and the defense of their ownership rights.

The programme has created an institutional environment that is increasingly favorable to providing information to and educating members of rural communities, municipal governments and a variety of government and non-governmental institutions on the basic rights of women.

2. Initial Situation

In Bolivia, women’s participation in the labour market, particularly in rural areas is low. In 2009, 77 per cent of women worked in the rural sector, 16 per cent in the service sector and only 6.4 per cent in manufacturing. Also, 63 per cent of women were family workers or unpaid apprentices, and 24.6 per cent were self-employed. Only 9 per cent of women were formally employed and thus entitled to social security benefits (health and long-term insurance).

Rural poverty has also driven an increasing number of people to migrate to the cities, a trend which by 2007 had turned 13 per cent of the rural households into single parent households headed by women, thus worsening rural poverty rates. Poverty was also compounded by lack of land ownership, access to financial services or support to procure resources needed for economic activities, together with the enjoyment of full civil rights often hindered by lack of awareness and of identity documentation.

3. Strategy

The Programme has introduced an innovative strategy to provide assets for excluded rural families. The strategy consists of two interrelated elements. The first was through a non-reimbursable direct monetary transfer component that provided seed capital, startup grants, joint venture and risk capital. The second element was focused on training and advisory services, including: a) the development of suppliers who, once a market for their goods had been guaranteed, would ensure that the production of livelihoods for the families involved would be sustainable; b) the provision of housing; c) changing the procedures of land deeds to allow women to be sole owners or share property rights with their spouses, thus consolidating their right to own or inherit land; and d) legal and civic services providing identification documents and civic education for the full exercise of citizenship.

The Programme targeted poor women living in rural areas. The focus on tailored business assistance and technical training, combined with civic capacity strengthening and the full exercise of women’s rights has proven effective. From the women’s perspective, the value added of the Programme was the increased income that enabled them to better meet the daily needs of their families, including improved food security and child education. Also, identity documentation and organizational strengthening contributed to their stronger positioning and participation in decision-making in their homes and communities.
4. Progress and Results

The Programme contributed to reducing poverty by providing financial support and financing to women entrepreneurs, and empowering them in decision-making in family and community issues. Women in 2,507 Rural Economic Units (REU) received funding for an average of US$1,407, and 212 collective REUs for an average of US$7,582, with the participation of 4,445 women. The Programme improved employment rates or created employment for 4,640 women. Funding contributed to a substantial productivity growth, with reported incomes increasing by up to 50 per cent. In addition, nearly 2,000 women received basic management training and learned how to account for expenses and revenues in order to better understand how much money their businesses were making or losing, and many others received technical assistance to improve production. Participating women reported assigning an average of 63 per cent of their profits to address their children’s needs and their family food needs. The remaining 37 per cent was used for their own needs or family savings. Prior to participation in the Programme, 63 per cent of the women were not qualified for financial services. By the end, all women in the Programme had access to services such as savings accounts, credit lines, remittances, and payment for services, among others.

The Programme has also enabled 12,817 women to fully enjoy their citizenship rights for the first time by helping them obtain birth certificates and identification cards, which are required to have access to bank loans and to exercise the right to vote. In the interviews conducted, 94 per cent of the women declared that they had progressed significantly with the support of the Programme.

The political advocacy and social control capacities of women’s organizations have also been strengthened by contributing to increased rights awareness through leadership training sessions for women, and broadening their scope and participation in public life (unions, associations, etc.). Due to the lack of identity documentation and lack of information before the Programme was implemented, only 22 per cent of women participants voted. Today, 97 per cent of them take part in local and national electoral processes. Equipped with identity documentation, the women are able to create organizations authorized for political participation. Thirty per cent of the women entrepreneurs who participated in training sessions on the exercise of citizen rights have been nominated for electoral lists for the election of community and productive organizations leaders. Out of the total candidates, 60 per cent have been elected. In addition, 15 per cent of the participating women are active involved in community organizations. Municipal authorities have also been educated on women’s rights, and four municipal governments have projects underway to expand support to gender equality.

5. Lessons Learned and Challenges

- The Programme has shown that rural women can benefit significantly from direct support through non-reimbursable funding to strengthen their business, generate income, and improve their self-esteem and to be acknowledged as players in their own development process. This also translates into improved well-being for the family.
- The Programme has shown that capacity-building among women is best achieved by providing tailored, on-site, technical assistance that addresses a specific demand and by giving priority to practice. This kind of technical assistance generates important productivity leaps, whereby small businesses become medium-sized and even larger business initiatives.
- Capacity-building and awareness-raising activities addressed to political authorities and community leaders have proven to be effective to increase levels of support to the Programme and develop a favorable and gender sensitive environment.

6. Sustainability and Potential Application

The intervention methodology developed during the four years of the Programme (2009-2012) and
Based on Bolivia’s specific conditions will serve as the key blueprint for a new public policy framework design focused on reducing poverty and empowering women, according to UNDP Bolivia Deputy Representative Claudio Providas. The Minister of Productive Development and Plural Economy is already developing this policy. Due to the combination of focused financial support and public policy tools, findings, practices and lessons from the Programme can be applied in rural areas, medium-sized cities and suburban areas, with a focus on women in extreme poverty but also on other vulnerable groups, such as youth and the elderly.

The key to the sustainability of the Programme is local commitment and ownership. Two municipalities have agreed to continue providing identity documentation civic services with their own resources. Eleven municipalities have signed agreements and provided resources to support women’s businesses, and the Programme model is starting to be scaled up by the national Ministry of Productive Development and Plural Economy. Agreements have also been signed with five municipalities to co-finance and expand women’s cooperatives. Further, the Department of Equal Opportunities has strengthened its regulatory tracking system to monitor changes in relation to women’s economic empowerment.

7. Main Sources