

# ACTION BRIEF

## Gender-based Political Violence in Bolivia

### A Barrier to Women's Political Participation

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# Acronyms and glossary

<b>ACOBOL</b>	Association of Women Councillors of Bolivia ( <i>Asociación de Concejalas de Bolivia</i> )
<b>Agrupaciones ciudadanas</b>	Civic groups (Reforms in 2004 broke up the monopoly held by political parties in municipal elections and opened up candidacy opportunities for civic groups ( <i>agrupaciones ciudadanas</i> ) and indigenous peoples ( <i>pueblos indígenas</i> ))
<b>Alcalde</b>	Mayor
<b>Cacique</b>	Local political boss
<b>Cocalero</b>	Coca-grower
<b>Comunarios</b>	Member of a village communal assembly
<b>Concejal/concejala suplente</b>	The substitute councillor takes over from the titled councillor when that person leaves their post, is absent for a prolonged period, or dies
<b>Concejal/concejala titular</b>	Titular or official councillor
<b>CSUTCB</b>	Confederation of Rural Workers of Bolivia
<b>Dirigente or alcalde comunal</b>	Head of the communal assembly in rural communities
<b>Katarism</b>	Katarism is a movement which emphasises an indigenous identity and advocates struggle against ethnic and class oppression. The movement is named after Tupak Katari, an Aymaran who led an uprising around La Paz at the end of the 18th century
<b>Latifundio</b>	Large landed estates held as private property, which may be farmed as plantations by tenant sharecroppers, or as traditional haciendas
<b>MAS</b>	Movement Towards Socialism ( <i>Movimiento al Socialismo</i> )
<b>Mestizo</b>	A mestizo is a person of mixed indigenous and European descent
<b>Minifundio</b>	Small holdings
<b>MNR</b>	Nationalist Revolutionary Movement ( <i>Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario</i> )
<b>OWA</b>	One World Action
<b>Pueblos indígenas</b>	Indigenous peoples
<b>Servicios Legales Integrales Municipales</b>	Municipal Integral Legal Services, units set up under the Family and Domestic Violence Law to provide women experiencing violence with legal advice

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# Executive summary



The new plurinational Constitution of Bolivia, which was ratified by popular referendum in January 2009, has both secured indigenous rights and recognised many women's rights which women's organisations and feminists had long fought for. Decentralisation is a key component of the Constitution and significantly, the Constitution affords for powers to be assumed by indigenous autonomous authorities. However, whilst such democratic decentralisation could confer a tremendous potential for much greater political participation of women, and in particular for indigenous women, who have largely been disenfranchised from the political process, there is a risk that the recognition by the new Constitution of practices and customs ("usos y costumbres") of indigenous communities in their governance

structures could come in the way of the realisation of women's political rights as prescribed by the new Constitution.

A further threat to women exercising their political rights, which has been extensively documented by ACOBOL, the Association of Women Councillors of Bolivia (Asociación de Concejalas de Bolivia) over the last decade, is the psychological and overt physical violence towards elected women representatives. This impacts severely on how effectively women can carry out their political roles. To ensure that women's voices are heard in decision-making processes and that policies reflect their concerns, it is imperative that this barrier of gender-based political violence is tackled urgently.

# 1 Background and context

## Bolivian politics and identity: the rise of indigenous peoples

The enfranchisement of indigenous groups in Bolivia are part of recent history. The 1952 revolution led by the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (MNR, *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario*) started a process of indigenous empowerment and a programme of social reform. This led to the emergence of a new generation of better-educated indigenous people who paved the way for indigenous activism (Katarism)<sup>1</sup> and for a string of social movements that set the national agenda around ethnic rights for the first time.<sup>2</sup>

The Agrarian Reform of 1953 was a turning point in indigenous peoples taking land and effectively dismantling the system of large estates (*latifundio*). Following the Reform, rural trade unionism was strengthened which eventually led to the establishment of the Confederation of Rural Workers of Bolivia (CSUTCB – *Confederación Sindical Unica de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia*) in 1979. However, in 1964 the army staged a coup which led to a period of 18 years of military rule until Siles Zuazo became president in 1982.

The early 1980's was marked by economic problems. The first neo-liberal structural adjustment programme was started in 1985 and led to increased poverty amongst various sectors, including indigenous farmers. This was in part due to macro-economic adjustment not being

accompanied by an increase in public investment in agriculture.<sup>3</sup> These neo-liberal reforms were intensified under President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada who came to power in 1993.

Starting in the early 1990's, not unsurprisingly, trade unions, grassroots organisations of small farmers, coca growers, indigenous peoples and marginal urban communities mobilised in protest, not only at the structural adjustment programmes but also at the U.S.-led coca eradication programmes. Ironically, it was also under Sanchez de Lozada's presidency that the indigenous Vice President, Victor Hugo Cardenas, played a key role in changing the constitution which brought about the perception of Bolivia as a multi-cultural society. In addition, Cárdenas introduced education reform, including bilingual and intercultural education. The 1994 landmark Law of Popular Participation (*Ley de Participación Popular*) was also passed which provided for an unprecedented degree of participation of the rural population in local government. The Law of Popular Participation also stipulated women's mandatory participation in both indigenous communal assemblies and in formal municipal councils.

However, by 1997 growing frustration at the divisive effects of structural adjustment and the U.S.-led coca eradication programmes, led to a powerful surge in civil society mobilisation and the creation of the Movement for Socialism (MAS – *Movimiento al Socialismo*) led by Evo Morales. Evo Morales' ability to organise and rally both indigenous organisations, trade unions, such as the CSUTCB, as well as other

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1 Katarism is a form of activism modeled upon the indigenous Aymara-led Tupak Katari Revolutionary Movement of Liberation which, in the 1970s, linked the attack on economic policies with the fight for the recognition of indigenous identities in a context of assimilationist cultural policies (Healy et al., 2000: 9; Gamarra, 2007: 7)

2 Paulson, et al., 2000: 122

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3 J.A. Morales, Structural adjustment and peasant agriculture in Bolivia. Found at: <http://www.cababstractsplus.org/abstracts/default.aspx>



social movements, was instrumental in him being voted in as a congressional deputy in the 1997 elections. During the 2002 elections, MAS came in second place with nearly 20% of the presidential votes, which represented a surprising upset for Bolivia's traditional parties. However, it was in the December 2005 general election, that Evo Morales was finally elected as the first, indigenous president of Bolivia with a clear majority of 54%. A new strikingly progressive constitution was approved by the people in a referendum in January 2009. This constitution is aimed at conferring far-reaching empowerment of indigenous peoples and nations. However, whilst many demands of the women's movement have been taken up by this constitution, including 50% quotas for women's political participation, the recognition of housework and non-

sexist language, it remains unclear as to how gender considerations will be taken into account in the otherwise wholesale recognition of indigenous economic interests, customs, and institutions, which could mitigate against the upholding of women's rights.

## 2 Women's political participation and gender-based political violence

### Barriers to women's political participation

Women's political rights have been well provided for in legal terms in Bolivia for a number of years. For example, in 1999 the Law of Political Parties (*Ley de Partidos Políticos*) was passed which mandates a 30% quota for women standing in elections as representatives of political parties. Following pressure from women's groups, and in particular from One World Action's partner ACOBOL (the Association of Women Councillors of Bolivia), the Civic Groups and Indigenous People's Law 2004 (*Ley Agrupaciones Ciudadanas y Pueblos Indígenas*) was passed, and the law raised the quota to 50% for women candidates standing to represent civic groups and indigenous groupings.

As indicated above, the new constitution and other recently approved legal instruments sanction a wide array of political rights for women, including gender parity (50%) in political participation and the penalisation of forms of discrimination based on sex and gender identity. More specific provisions go so far as to stipulate that women have the right to not suffer physical, sexual or psychological violence within the family *and society*, and that the state has an obligation to prevent and penalise gender-based violence.<sup>4</sup> The December 2009 general election saw record numbers of women becoming members of the Plurinational Legislative Assembly, with 47% of Senate seats and 25% of Congress seats going to women. Significantly, there is gender parity within the Cabinet with women holding key ministries, such as the Justice Ministry.

4 Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, art. 15, II–III

However, despite these formally granted rights and a specific reference to gender-based violence occurring in the public sphere, legal provisions stand starkly at odds with the concrete realities of Bolivian women. Both the public and the private life of rural and urban women are severely limited by social norms that downplay their public role as decision-makers and thus reinforce their political marginality and their powerlessness within the household.

The framework offered by the Law of Popular Participation for municipal planning, allows communal indigenous organisations in rural areas to identify development needs and to contribute to local planning. However, women's child-care and agricultural responsibilities often make fulfilling their public role difficult, thus discouraging them further from challenging the already strong socio-cultural barriers that keep them from taking up positions in communal assemblies. Other socio-economic barriers include basics such as lack of roads and transport, no access to education, lack of health facilities, absence of community meeting rooms, lack of communications etc. This dearth of basic facilities contributes to isolating women and increasing their dependency on men. This isolation is more pronounced among poor rural women and poses a grave challenge to women being able to participate freely in political processes.

It is no surprise that the social rules that prevent women's equal participation in rural communities are very easily replicated at the municipal level,<sup>5</sup> where decision-making is regulated by similar cultural norms. Indeed, of all women councillors in municipal institutions, only

5 Pape, 2008:45

**Cecilia Mendoza, Local Councillor,  
Belén, Potosí**

*“It is very difficult to organise meetings as villages are spread out and transport is very poor. We have to walk 3–4 hours sometimes to get to a road where we can get a lift. This is why more men are involved in politics. They find it easier to travel and are not as isolated as women. Spaces for women to meet are also limited and this is an added burden. I have organised women in 40 villages and we have together built a place where we can meet on a regular basis. Despite this, meeting together is a challenge due to lack of resources, transport and the men in our families with whom we have to negotiate every time”*



5% are mayors (*alcaldesas*). Furthermore, a mere 19% of women are official councillors (*titulares*), while 72% are substitutes (*suplentes*). Additionally, only 8% of councillors representing indigenous groupings are women.

Particularly in rural communities, patriarchal practices often mitigate against women’s political participation.<sup>6</sup> For example, community meetings are invariably presided over by a man,<sup>7</sup> and although all members of the village communal assembly (*comunarios*) are expected to express their views, it is the husbands<sup>8</sup> who are expected to represent and express their wives’ voices, although this rarely happens in any genuine way. In fact, women’s public voices are often relegated to topics considered

appropriate to women such as maternity and health issues.<sup>9</sup>

Women’s reluctance to get involved in community and local government politics as councillors is partly due to their social role as ascribed by indigenous Andean traditions, and partly due to the public humiliations and gender-based harassment and violence that they are subjected to as candidates, and which continues throughout their term in office.

A lack of financial and technical resources to carry out election campaigns and the systematic misapplication of quota laws makes it difficult for women to achieve office. Once in office, women face further hurdles, including an insufficient understanding of public administration which is often compounded by a lack of education, caring obligations and the highly patriarchal and personalised style of governance which is evident in many

6 Coelho, 2009:27

7 Pape, 2008:45

8 The *comunario* is a member of the village communal assembly.

9 op. cit. 47, 51



**Berta Cartagena, Local Councillor, Rurrenabaque, Beni**

*“I am an elected councillor. The substitute [suplente] is a man also from the same local community. He used social pressure and our shared networks to threaten me and pressured me to draw up a document mandating equal powers and responsibilities between him and me. The document even allowed an equal distribution of my salary”.*

councils. Women also report that they are subject to more criticism and are under more scrutiny than their male colleagues and that they are sometimes deceived into resigning their posts or coerced into signing fraudulent documents.

Even in urban settings, social norms often make it difficult for the husband to accept that his wife is engaged in social and political activities outside the home.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, women’s fragile position is reflected in their need to respond to multiple loyalties – including the electorate, women’s organisations, other councillors<sup>11</sup> and often highly hierarchical and male-dominated party structures.<sup>12</sup>

As both institutional mechanisms and women’s particular educational and economic disadvantages work to reinforce women’s public marginality, episodes of overt violence are appallingly commonplace. Data provided by the Bolivian state agency (*Servicios Legales Integrales Municipales*) indicate that between November 1994 and July 1997 a total of 25,875 cases of gender-based violence were reported in the

nine departments of the country. These included instances of physical or sexual attack (10,250), psychological violence (6,776), rape and murder (82).<sup>13</sup>

Socio-cultural practices, a hostile political environment, economic and educational constraints and, above all, politically motivated violence contribute to women not wanting to stand for office for a second time both at the local and national levels. Research by ACOBOL has shown that only 9% of women councillors stand for two terms of office.

### **Accountability vs. gender-based political violence**

Accountability means that when women raise their demands in decision-making processes they are heard and addressed. The ‘Just Politics Cycle of Political Accountability to Women’ developed by One World Action on the basis of UNIFEM’s ‘Cycle of Political Accountability’ explains these dynamics. Women themselves must be the drivers of this cycle and mobilising by women’s organisations is crucial in ensuring that

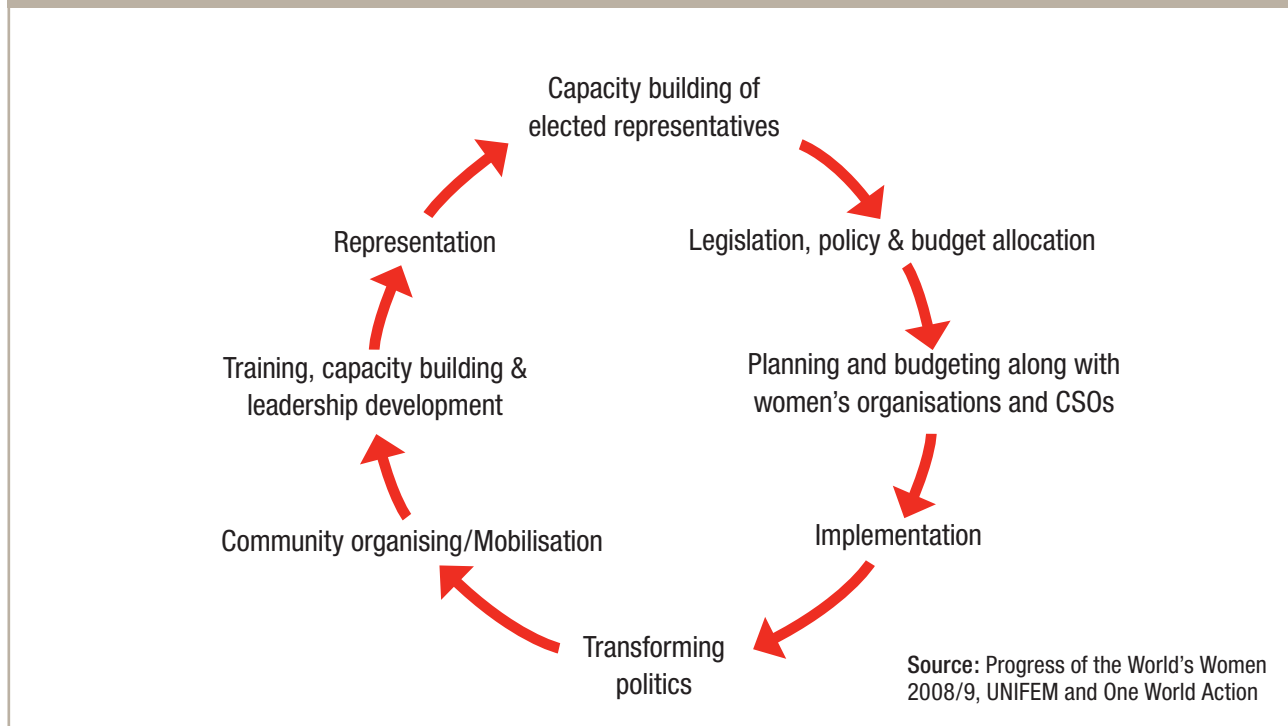
10 ACOBOL, 2008

11 Clulow, 2005:22

12 Pedwell, 2008: 21

13 UN Inter-agency Campaign on Women’s Human Rights; <http://freeofviolence.org/bolivia.htm>

**Figure 1: The Just Politics cycle of political accountability to women**



women politicians reflect the demands of women. Women's representation in politics is the starting point for gender-sensitive legislation and policy. Gender-sensitive planning and budgeting are then necessary for public officials and responsible state bodies to implement laws and policies in gender-responsive ways. Women's political actions are thus truly transformative when such laws and

policies are put into action and make a real difference to women's lives.

Gender-based violence especially political violence is a great barrier to building and strengthening accountability to women. Gender-based violence especially in the political arena prevents the cycle of accountability from going full circle.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Goetz, 2008

**Ada Gutierréz, Local Councillor, Villazón, Potosi**

*"I am one of the few councillors who has been re-elected. More than 90% of women councillors do not stand for re-election. It is common for them to be bullied by colleagues and often they are pressured into resigning"*



**Mercedes Arispe, Local Councillor, Toro Toro, Potosi**

*“I was accused of only working with women and being interested only in women’s activities. I tried to explain that focussing on women’s needs would also address the needs of the community at large and that I focussed on women because they were the neediest. The men in the council tried to pressure me into resigning but I resisted and have continued with my activities”*



Domestic violence reduces the scope for the public articulation of women’s needs by exacerbating women’s isolation; it also reduces women’s bargaining power at home. Since women’s opinions ought to be collected by the husband and represented in communal meetings in Bolivia, domestic violence acquires a political significance in that it contributes to disrupting the public representation of women’s viewpoints.

At the municipal level, even when some women do make it into office, their ability to push through gender-sensitive legislation and development projects that respond to women’s needs is often obstructed by the effects of verbal, psychological, sexual and physical harassment and violence from male colleagues. The lack of development opportunities for women is therefore a direct reflection of gendered and violent attitudes that exist both within the private and public spheres.

**Gender and Ethnicity: conflict and contradictions**

It has been suggested that the systemic oppression that women often suffer

in indigenous communities derives from a contradiction between women’s (individual) human rights and indigenous (collective) rights.<sup>15</sup> As shown in Figure 2, this contradiction is played out on various levels, with uncodified social norms, as well as legally stipulated rights to ethnic self-determination, both coming into conflict in the lives of indigenous women.

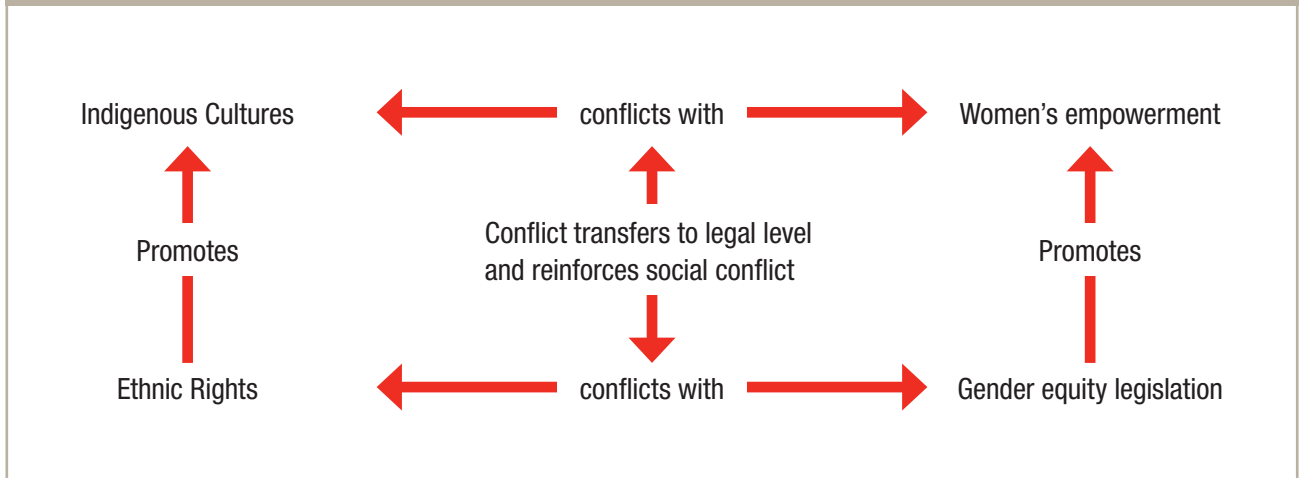
The 2009 Constitution grants indigenous communities the right to their cultural identity, practices and norms, as well as the right to exercise their political and economic systems according to their own “cosmo-vision”.<sup>16</sup> In doing so, the Constitution recognises and protects indigenous gender ideology, which limits women’s participation to that ascribed by traditional Andean gender roles, and thus prevents the effective realisation of those very gender equity guarantees that are contained in the Constitution.

As indicated in figure 2, women’s under-representation in communal institutions can be sanctioned by Andean “cosmo-

<sup>15</sup> Pape, 2008: 42, 55

<sup>16</sup> Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, art. 30, II, 2–14

**Figure 2: Gender and ethnicity conflicts**



vision”, which expresses itself in the ideology of gender complementarity<sup>17</sup> between the social and biological roles of the two sexes. Gender complementarity is used to justify the idea that decisions made solely by men are inclusive of women’s views and interests,<sup>18</sup> which in turn is used as a pretext for making it unnecessary for women to participate in decision-making. As a result, due to their lack of decision-making power on behalf of the community, the mandate of women

councillors in municipal institutions is very weak and lacks legitimacy in the eyes of the constituency.

The new Constitution does not limit itself to supporting indigenous values and practices; it also endows customary judicial authorities with power. The functions and competencies of these authorities are allowed to be exercised according to traditional principles and norms.<sup>19</sup> Such sanction of traditional authorities by the Constitution could

17 Pape, 2008: 46

18 op.cit. 54

19 Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, art. 190, I



**Gregoria López, Local Councillor, Pazña, Oruro**

*“Women have low self-esteem and we are constantly discriminated against in the workplace. We need more workshops and regular training to increase our knowledge and to become more confident. We need to understand the law better. Regular meeting and networking with other elected women councillors is an experience that strengthens us and we need to raise the resources to continue these crucial activities”*

**Fernanda Collapa, Local Councillor, Yocalla, Potosi**

*“It is very difficult to get the support from male councillors for any activities that focus on women. Recently, I tried to get the council to allocate some funds from the general budget to set up a few centres where women can learn some economic activities to support themselves. There was no support from any of the other councillors, including the women. Eventually I raised the funds from local NGOs and have now set up four such centres for women”*



empower undemocratic political bosses (*caciques*)<sup>20</sup> to block gender equity legislation from being enforced, especially legislation that prevents political or domestic violence against women.

## **Political Participation and Socio-Economic Empowerment**

The recognition of communal forms of economic organisation devolves considerable power to indigenous authorities in relation to land tenure systems and allocation of natural resources. The state upholds the collective titling of indigenous land and recognises the right of indigenous authorities to apply their own norms, administered by their structures of representation, in the allocation of access and user rights. As a result, women's access to land is controlled and regulated by the customary principles dictated by the gender division of labour of Andean cultures.<sup>21</sup>

Women's gendered role in agricultural production, enforced by indigenous practices and institutions, may negatively impact on women's livelihoods. While women do many of the agricultural tasks, men are usually in charge of resource management, especially for those resources managed collectively. Similarly, men often take charge of community infrastructure and development projects, including health projects. More effective participation by women in community governance structures would empower them to have greater access and control over collectively held natural resources, but the extent to which they can do this would still be hampered by the right of indigenous authorities to apply their sometimes patriarchal norms. Again, it remains for contradictions in the Constitution between indigenous rights and the rights of women to be addressed.

<sup>20</sup> *The Economist*, January 22nd 2009

<sup>21</sup> Pape, 2008: 47

## 3 Our partner: ACOBOL

In this complicated scenario, the role of women's organisations is crucial. Rural women need to be an integral part of municipal and communal political processes and structures; safe and inclusive political spaces need to be opened up for this to happen. Civil society also needs to engage in the national legal process to foster dialogue on the gender/ethnicity issue and to develop innovative solutions to the current legal difficulties posed by contradictions in the Constitution.

One World Action's partner, The Association of Women Councillors of Bolivia (ACOBOL), has been active in this and has significantly contributed to improving the effectiveness of women's political voice, thus leading to real changes in the socio-economic realities of rural and urban women.

The interests of 2,127 women councillors and mayors from all political parties, citizen's groups and indigenous people's groupings, and from all nine departments of the country, are represented by ACOBOL. They work to build the capacity of women representatives to carry out their role in local government, as well as to support the candidatures of women standing for municipal posts. Their

capacity-building initiatives aim to support the efforts of women councillors in making local government more accountable and responsive to the needs of rural and urban women. Through their work on combating gender-based political violence, they are also striving to create safer spaces for women to implement gender-sensitive development policies, thus making local governance a truly transformative and empowering process for women.

ACOBOL has been successful in promoting women's political participation by working at various levels. They have lobbied at the national level for equal representation of women and were instrumental in getting the Law for Civic Groups and Indigenous Peoples (*Ley Agrupaciones Ciudadanas y Pueblos Indígenas*) passed. This law broke the monopoly of political parties, allowing for groups of citizens and indigenous communities to be politically represented. The law also mandated 50% quotas for women for the first time.

Through workshops, radio programmes, and exchanges with other women councillors, ACOBOL has provided women with the confidence and skills to undertake electoral campaigning and to have a much

### **Nilda Fernandez, Vice-President, ACOBOL, from Sabilla, Oruro**

*"Each of the 36 ethnic groups in Bolivia has a different structure of traditional authority. None of them accepts women as heads of the traditional authority. The new Constitution has at least 40 articles that address women's rights. But the Constitution also recognises indigenous laws. ACOBOL is working on trying to resolve this contradiction".*





**Casilda Flores, Local Councillor,  
Toledo, Oruro**

*“Women face discrimination because they do not know how to read or write. Political parties need to support women more and build their skills. It is very important for women to be organised and to support each other. The networking opportunity that ACOBOL offers is critical for us and it is important that all women representatives are part of the network.”*

better knowledge of local government administrative structures and systems. Their success lies in their understanding and response to the very diverse context in which they work, (language, ethnicity, class, rural/urban) be that in developing multi-lingual texts or developing appropriate educational methodologies etc. Another key factor in the success of their work is the enabling environment which ACOBOL and its members have created, whereby the potential party political divides between members are subsumed under their specific gender needs as women in politics.

To tackle gender-based political violence, ACOBOL has lobbied for the past ten years for the ‘Law against Harassment and Gender-Based Political Violence’ (*proyecto de Ley contra el Acoso y la violencia Política en Razón de Género*) to be passed. This law sets out to protect the political rights of women and the exercise of their function<sup>22</sup> by specifically typifying gender-based threats and violence as a crime. Under the definition provided, political violence or harassment are

acts such as persecution, kidnapping or aggressive conduct, which are committed against a woman with the intention to impede the fulfilment of her rights or duties, or to induce her to take decisions against her will (within the bounds of the law). While this legal proposal would be a powerful instrument to deter perpetrators and to provide for municipal-level initiatives against gender-based political violence, the issue of conflicts with customary judicial authorities regarding women’s rights remains to be resolved.

To tackle gender-based political violence ACOBOL is also developing a national network against Gender-based Political Violence, which will ensure a coordinated response by state and non-state actors to cases of gender-based political violence brought forward by councillors. These actors include public officials, the police, the Ministry of Justice, the Electoral Court, and women’s organisations. They are also supporting women councillors to get regulations passed in their councils directing the Ethics Committees of municipal councils to resolve accusations of gender-based political violence brought by women councillors.

<sup>22</sup> *proyecto de Ley contra el Acoso y la violencia Política en Razón de Género*, art. 1

# 4 Recommendations and ways forward



## 1 Capacity building of women and building women's leadership

A prerequisite to women's political participation is their improved access to basic services and institutions, security of livelihood, timely resources and the ability, skills and confidence to participate in political processes.

The process of building political accountability to women should start by strengthening women's leadership and building women's awareness of their political and socio-economic rights. Local level initiatives should also aim to forge a network of alliances with diverse sectors of civil society to widen opportunities for advocacy and to build a politically active constituency of rural and urban women.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> See BOND, 2009: 30 for more details on projects on collective mobilisation through media campaigns implemented or promoted by British civil society and which focus on Bolivia.

### 1.1 Civil Society in Bolivia should:

- a Improve the lobbying capacity of women's networks so that they can be effective in promoting attitudinal change in elected representatives and political parties
- b Build capacity and confidence of poor rural and urban women so that they are able to participate in political processes
- c Strengthen women's knowledge on women's rights, gender issues, understanding of public administration and political processes and responsibilities
- d Strengthen women's political tools and skills such as public speaking, financial resources, technical support, negotiation skills etc.
- e Use election periods to put forward women's manifestos which can be used

as a charter of demands for future lobbying

- f Raise awareness of political and electoral processes among rural and urban women voters
- g Encourage and support women in carrying out public and political roles

### 1.2 The Government of Bolivia should:

- a Use bilateral and multilateral development aid to strengthen women's organisations and networks
- b Improve infrastructure and communications to enable women's access to institutions and to support their participation in political processes
- c Ensure that women's practical needs such as roads, transport, communication, meeting places, health education etc. are addressed so that their strategic engagement is strengthened
- d Enact legislation and implement policies that will support and strengthen the values of gender equity which are enshrined in the new Constitution
- e Institute gender responsive budgeting at all stages of the budgeting process so that women's needs and interest are addressed in a systematic manner

### 1.3 Bilateral and multilateral donors should:

- a Earmark and prioritise funding for programmes and activities that will strengthen women's organisations and networks
- b Support and resource activities and programmes that will strengthen women's political participation and tackle violence against women in Bolivia

- c Acknowledge and rectify the contradictions that exist between their middle income country strategies and their gender policies and plans

## 2 Ensure women's political rights are implemented and that local government structures are safe for women

Women face many challenges in gaining political office and in expressing their views in local government and in indigenous governance structures. Forms of psychological and overt physical violence towards elected women representatives severely impact on how effective women can be in their political roles. To ensure that women's voices in decision-making processes are heard and that policies reflect their concerns, the barrier of gender-based political violence has to be tackled.

### 2.1 Civil Society in Bolivia should:

- a Continue to demand for legislation and support to make the political environment non-violent and safer for women to participate in
- b Act as a watchdog to ensure that the new constitutional aspirations for gender equality and parity become a reality
- c Identify, support, mentor and enable women to participate in politics both at the local and national level
- d Support and encourage women to stand for re-election at the national and local levels
- e Build capacity and confidence of titular councillors so that they can carry out their responsibilities and participate effectively in politics

- f Build support and awareness among the media to publicise women candidatures and to champion women's issues
- g Sensitise and mobilise community leaders to stand up to gender-based violence as part of their representative duties

## 2.2 The Government of Bolivia should:

- a Address the contradictions that exist between women's rights and those conferred to indigenous institutions
- b Acknowledge and address the fact that gender-based political violence is a real obstacle to women's political participation in Bolivia.
- c Ensure that the proposed "Law Against Harassment and Gender-Based Political Violence" (*proyecto de Ley contra el Acoso y la violencia Política en Razón de Género*) is passed in this current term.
- d Propose and implement accountability mechanisms, including sanctions to ensure that quota laws and other provisions for the protection of women's political rights are applied
- e Propose mechanisms to help ensure that 50% women continue as titular councillors until the end of their five year term
- f Ensure that sufficient resources are available for all the new tiers of local government and autonomies.
- f Generate discussion to solve the legal contradiction between women's individual rights and indigenous collective rights
- h Set up and resource legal municipal offices tasked with monitoring cases of political violence

- i Make it illegal for men who have a record of political or domestic violence to stand for elections.
- j Ensure that all commitments made in the new Constitution on gender equality in political participation be made a reality, including in the jurisdictions of indigenous autonomies
- k Improve the capacity of elected representatives, state officials and legal bodies to understand issues of violence against women, in particular gender-based political violence
- l Enact their commitments to international and regional conventions and agreements such as the Human Rights Declaration, CEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action and Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women

## 2.3 Bilateral and multilateral donors should:

- a Support and lobby the Bolivian government in implementing its progressive legislation on women's political rights and press for any contradictions between indigenous rights and women's rights to be addressed.
- b Work to hold central government accountable to constitutional guarantees against gender bias in politics and gender-based political violence.
- c Ensure that adequate funding is earmarked for programmes that address women's rights and encourage and support their political participation in middle-income as well as low-income countries.

# 5 Conclusion

One World Action and ACOBOL believe that while democratic decentralisation can offer powerful opportunities for women in Bolivia, local realities may pose serious challenges to the realisation of women's rights, especially when women's rights come to conflate with other axes of social differentiation such as ethnicity. The need to address incoherencies between rights concerning indigenous customary practices and those concerning women is imperative if the new political spaces opened up by the new Constitution are to be capitalised on by all, especially women. To take advantage of these spaces women also need the political tools and skills such as public speaking, understanding of public administration, financial resources, technical support, the support of women's organisations and allied social movements, and above all an environment free from political harassment and violence.

Commitments made by the Bolivian state to international and regional conventions, such as CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women should be fully enacted. As part of this, legislation to tackle gender-based political violence is essential if the political environment is to become non-violent and safer for women to participate in. Such legislation needs to be backed up by accountability mechanisms, such as effective sanctions, and networks bringing together state actors, such as the police, judiciary, health services and local government with women organisations so that cases of gender-based political violence can be taken forward. Public officials and political leaders also have to be mobilised to stand up to such violence as part of their representative duties.

The experience of ACOBOL offers some important lessons on how gender analysis has to be mainstreamed into decentralisation plans and local governance structures so as to ensure that local dynamics and social norms do not make women invisible in local politics, but in fact guarantee equity and freedom from violence, thereby making political accountability a reality for women.

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