

▶ Fighting Violence against Women in Latin America



Preventing Violence is Our Obligation

▶ Counterpart

The Family Protection Brigade (Brigada de Protección a la Familia – BPF) is a special unit of the Bolivian police and is responsible for cases of family and domestic violence. It not only investigates cases, but is also involved in violence prevention activities and in supporting and offering protection to affected women. Unfortunately, BPF's funds are insufficient, especially for work in rural areas, while the "demand" from the population is high, the unit being the most popular venue to deal with the issue of domestic violence.

At the moment there are 62 such brigades in Bolivia, which, fortunately, are increasing in numbers, including in rural areas.

▶ Cooperation

The cooperation between the regional program ComVoMujer and the BPFs is based on shared objectives: the Bolivian police wants to strengthen the BPFs – which requires adequate funding to achieve efficiency in the prevention and support of victims of domestic violence – whereas ComVoMujer seeks to prevent and eliminate violence against women.

To serve these goals a two-pronged strategy has been developed. One prong involved a participatory communication concept under the slogan "Prevention is our obligation" together with a matching information campaign. This slogan reflects the campaign's aim to raise awareness among the rural population and to underscore both that it is their right to access the services of the BPFs, and that the BPFs are a government service whose mandate is to provide assistance and support in cases of domestic violence. For this purpose information material (printed and audio-visual) has

been produced and distributed by the BPFs. For the sensitization and education about the problem of violence towards women, the material has been adjusted to fit the various cultural differences among the Bolivian population (e.g. urban vs. rural, highlands vs. lowlands).

The second prong involved capacity building among staff. The focus has been on efficiently providing accurate and current information on gender-based violence, since the main priority of the BPFs is to provide the best possible support to victims of gender-based violence.

▶ Lessons Learned and Impact

The collaboration has highlighted the need for serious institutional commitment. Thus, the High Commander of the Bolivian police got involved, and in cooperation with the regional program ComVoMujer, decided to designate a female General Coordinator to oversee the implementation of this project.

Psychologically, it was important to strengthen the growing sense of belonging and pride among the BPF police force to do something for the good for the community. This led to growing commitment to prevention initiatives and an expansion to rural regions.

Given the severity of this problem which in fact





concerns every member of society, the integration of state and non-state actors has proven to be strategically important. Moreover, even though the measure is still on-going, it is already visible that its biggest success is the creation of a roadmap for the prevention of domestic violence and assistance to victims. This truly “inter-institutional” product has been created in a participative process by a number of organisations such as the Department of Social Services (Departamento de Gestión Social – SEDEGES), holistic legal services (Servicios Legales Integrales – SLIMs), the child and adolescents’ rights ombudsman (Defensoría de la Niñez y Adolescentes – DNA), the special forces unit against crime (Fuerza Especial de Lucha contra el Crimen – FELCC), and several non-governmental organizations and other institutions dealing with the problem.

Such an inter-institutional collaboration allowed for an effective and coordinated strategy to avoid both redundancies and missing components. In this way, synergies were created, resources saved and results enhanced – factors all of which improve aid to the victims of violence.

It is also noteworthy that the police force has standardized the process of dealing with victims of violence, a process which has been incorporated into the curriculum of the national police academy. Until now, every task force acted at its

own discretion and relied on the willingness and commitment of the staff to get involved. Now there is the “Guide for the Care of Victims of Violence in the Family”, which ensures uniformity of police procedures. It is based on experiences and good practices and is primarily aimed to avoid a re-victimization of individuals who have contacted the police. As a result, the police are now more aware of this problem and have the tools to carry out their duties with greater efficiency and effectiveness.

This police reform process, with the training of personnel of various operating units, will be continued and completed in each of the capitals of the nine departments. During this training specific plans for the prevention of violence against women and violence in the family are designed to be implemented in three major cities.

Now, victims who report to the BPF units can count on educational and information material that puts them in a position not to simply accept domestic violence as natural or acceptable behavior. On the contrary, they become aware that claiming help from the BPF is their right as citizens and that the BPF officers are legally obligated to offer their support. This right empowers the affected women before the police and the offenders; they no longer need to feel alone in their attempts to break the cycle of violence.



Regional Program ComVoMujer

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