



Two girls drawing in the Bilingual School Machaqa, Bolivia. Photot: Kathrine Dalsgaard

BOLIVIA CASE STUDY

EDUCATION, INEQUALITIES AND THE STRATEGY OF INFLUENCE

In Bolivia, exclusions have historically been at the centre of social mobilizations and struggles, most of the time related to unsolved inequalities excluding indigenous people. In 2003, a huge social mobilization led by indigenous organizations, claimed the nationalization of the hydrocarbons and the need of a new Constitution that recognize indigenous nations. As a result, the first indigenous citizen was elected as president in 2005, and most of the dreams of the Bolivian population about equality, inclusion and distribution seemed to start a new path towards social inclusion. Under the new development paradigm “Vivir Bien” institutional changes took place (a new Constitution and new Education Law). Since 2006, income poverty and income inequalities reduced substantially. The drivers were: a pro poor growth, increased resource mobilization for social spending (including cash transfers), as well as income distribution coming from gas exploration. However, horizontal inequalities explain most of the hard exclusions we still need to solve.

1 CONTEXT

Bolivia is a country of 10 million people. According to the last census 70% of the population live in urban areas, and about 40% identify as indigenous. It is a young country compared to the LAC mean, in 2015 the median age was around 22 years. Exclusions have historically been at the centre of social mobilizations and struggles, most of the time related to unsolved inequalities in social, economic, and political rights that excluded indigenous people from 36 different indigenous communities.

Some important milestones in the history of the fight of indigenous people for an equal and inclusive society during the 20th century are: the 1952 Revolution, the guerrillas fighting for the poor and confronting military governments in the seventies, persistent social conflict during the “nineties” that ended up with the “called gas war” that took place in 2003. This last huge social mobilization claimed hydrocarbons nationalization and the need of a new Constitution recognizing indigenous nations, as well as collective rights.

In times of liberal reforms, from the mid eighties until the late nineties, income inequalities, extreme and moderate poverty remained unchanged. Even though policies aimed at reducing poverty were at the centre of the political discourse, this period has been characterized by “human development without income”, as a way to describe the progress towards universal education and health, as a result of policy and rural urban immigration.

In 2006, the first indigenous citizen was elected democratically as president, with this election, most of the dreams of the Bolivian population about equality, inclusion, distribution, and inter-culturality seemed to start a new path towards social inclusion. Under the umbrella of the new development paradigm called “Vivir Bien”, important institutional changes took place: following the approval of the new Constitution in 2009, Bolivia had also approved a new Education Law *Ley Avelino Siñani y Elizardo Pérez*, focusing on intercultural plurilingual education.

In a context of political transformation, poverty and income inequalities have reduced substantially. The drivers were: a pro poor growth, increased resource mobilization for social spending (including cash transfers), as well as income distribution coming from gas exploration. However, horizontal inequalities explain most of the hard exclusions we still need to solve.

However, in spite of these huge changes, horizontal inequalities still persist in most of social economic and political indicators. Exclusion in education occurs along the whole education process: enrolment, attendance, and completion. Moreover, Intersecting inequalities are at the centre of the problem. For example, in 2014, been indigenous, woman, rural and belong to the poorest quintile reduced school attainment about **5 times compared to a nonindigenous man belonging to the richest income quintile**. These intersecting inequalities explain most of the hard exclusions we still need to solve. (2,5 years versus 13).

2 EDUCATION INTERVENTIONS

Before institutional changes, education system has historically excluded indigenous cultures, as captured by the following story

"I remember my book that I used when I was little...it said, 'Mother eats cake.' First of all, I didn't know what cake was. Second, there was [a picture of] a mother, but she was blond, with white complexion, with a dress, shoes. But when I looked at my mother, she was brown-skinned with braids, short with sandals, with her worn, swollen feet...That type of education, where did it lead us? To the point where we admired that type of mother and we looked down on our mothers...the school had made us value other cultures, another model of mother, another way of life."

Between 2012 and 2015, our programs were aimed at promoting citizenship and political participation of indigenous people, improve quality of education, and end up with patriarchy and marginality

Our partners in this challenging task were nine with local, indigenous, and youth representations. We developed activities in two education fields: 1) 18 indigenous curriculum were elaborated, emphasizing productive skills, intercultural and bilingual education 2) strengthening youth social control and improving their capabilities and opportunities to produce and access to the labor market in fairer conditions. Oxfam in Bolivia has also worked on a gender based analysis of local gender budgets.

3 LESSONS LEARNED AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

Two lessons learned from this experience refer to: i) the lack of knowledge and technical skills of the school communities to influence policies related to inclusive budget and social education spending in the local levels ii) the lack of a spending/budget monitor on how the state spends gender and education budget that are mandatory by law.

In this context: Oxfam in Bolivia has been working on the country narrative on inequality. Some of the questions that will guide our work are:

- ✓ ¿Is there a citizenship rent that pays more for being in a richer region that helps understanding horizontal inequalities? What are the gender inequalities that matter? ¿What about gender justice concerning

fiscal and education gaps? ¿How can we work on them through education?

Our starting point is the current economic and fiscal context

- ✓ First, 2016 seems to be a new turning point on our development trends. The state has new national plan (2016-2020) that includes among its 13 objectives, the end of material and spiritual poverty, exclusion, as well as promotes universal access to public basic services, education and health. This coincides with ODS agenda.
- ✓ Second, the country is expected to grow at a slower pace in the years to come, the government has committed to increase public spending – This will mean a resource mobilization as never seen before in our country. We should take advantage of this opportunity.
- ✓ In this context, the fiscal challenge in Bolivia seems to be to be building effective social spending monitor as we have proposed to the FAIR tax justice and also to a European Union fund. We are waiting for the responses until the end of this year.
- ✓ In the short run we plan to launch our national report on inequalities focusing on the challenge to ensure social spending sustainability, education and health spending progressivity, as well as universal access to quality education and health. This, along our work on the tax havens agenda will be a new starting point in our influence strategy.

Much needs to be explored about how education spending can be more progressive and help narrowing gender gap. We believe that youth participation may help to build a sustainable advocacy strategy aimed at reducing intersecting inequalities.

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