

El programa de bi-alfabetización en el Valle Alto

(Literacy Program – Valle Alto)

As a member of the NGO Aynisuyu, I had the opportunity to work on a Literacy Program in the Valle Alto, Cochabamba, Bolivia. I travelled to various communities in the Valle Alto, attending and observing literacy workshops.

Program Context

Bolivia is situated in the heart of South America, sharing borders with Argentina, Chile, Peru, Brazil and Paraguay. It has a rich culture and stunning natural beauty. The landscape varies from the Altiplano in the west, with an altitude of over almost 4000 meters above sea level, to the tropical Valles in the center of the country and the Llanos, or plains, in the north and east. Bolivia is economically the poorest country in South America and its 8, 274, 325 inhabitants are principally indigenous: Aymara, Quechua and Guarani.

Valle Alto – The Valle Alto, located in the south-east Department of Cochabamba, is one of the most densely populated areas in the country. It is composed of 15 municipalities with a total population of 170,570 people. With an altitude ranging from 2500-4000 m.a.s.l., the Valle Alto has year-round spring temperatures between 18-24 degrees Celsius. Two principal cities, Cliza and Punata, are the urban centers of the rural region. Indicators of development vary from one municipality to the next, but on average are lower than the rest of the country. Due to recent climate conditions, such as droughts and floods, the economic crisis and unemployment within the country, the area has been gravely affected by the emigration of Bolivians to the United States, Argentina and Spain.

Province	Municipality	Population	Density (people/km2)	% living in poverty (2001 census)	Consumption per capita (\$US/year)
Bolivia		8,274,325		58.60	
Cochabamba		1,455,711		55.00	
Valle Alto					
Tiraque	Tiraque	35,017	13.84	84.1	690
German/Jordan	Cliza	19,992	344.21	46.9	1,223
German/Jordan	Toco	6,460	97.52	78.7	720
German/Jordan	Tolata	5,316	67.09	51.4	1,284
Punata	Punata	26,140	286.21	44.9	1,459
Punata	Villa Rivero	5,857	54.05	81.6	670
Punata	San Benito	12,720	90.83	55.6	1,018
Punata	Tacachi	1,210	75.02	80.5	701
Punata	V.G. Villarroel	1,808	25.33	92.2	537
Arani	Arani	11,542	51.28	68.0	928
Arani	Vacas	12,511	35.21	94.9	472
Esteban/Arce	Tarata	8,715	24.57	69.9	952
Esteban/Arce	Anzaldo	9,126	13.40	93.9	397
Esteban/Arce	Arbieto	9,438	67.05	54.4	999
Esteban/Arce	Sacabamba	4,718	23.63	98.2	409
Total/Promedios	15	170,570	84.62	73.0	831

Location:

The Literacy Program takes place in 9 municipalities in the Valle Alto of Cochabamba: San Benito, Villa Rivero, Villa Gualberto, Villarroel, Arani, Tarata, Cliza, Sacabamba and Toco.

History:

Since 1998, Aynisuyu has supported the establishment of COMUVA (Coordinadora de Mujeres del Valle Alto/ Women's Coordination of the Valle Alto). COMUVA's goals include the participation and empowerment of women in local and regional development, implementing projects that allow women to generate income and improving the living conditions of women and their families. COMUVA is formed by 16 municipalities and has 450 affiliates.

In 2002 the Literacy Program was implemented to improve local development. The program consists of three modules, each having a duration of ten months.

Module 1-Sexual and Reproductive Health

Module 2- Nutrition and Health Safety

Module 3- Human Rights, Citizenship and Fair Treatment

Program Goals:

The Literacy Program in the Valle Alto allows the women to achieve the following:

- The ability to understand, discuss and apply knowledge of relevant subjects. The program focuses on sexual and reproductive health, human rights, gender equality, nutrition and food safety, agro-ecology, rights, citizenship and fair treatment. These themes allow participants and their families to improve their health conditions, food safety and rights, building stronger and healthier communities.
- The program facilitates the organization of women at a community level. The strategic formation of women's groups at a community level encourages and allows for the greater female participation and influence in each municipality.
- Women are given the opportunity to reflect on their reality as campesino women, their role within the family and their rights, within an environment of trust and confidence.
- The literacy program enables women to become literate in both Quechua and Spanish, encouraging them to participate in Bolivian society while maintaining their identity and culture as Quechuan women.
- The literacy program encourages the establishment of female leaders, broadens women's knowledge and improves self-esteem. Community organizations in the municipalities of the Valle Alto are strengthened through the participation of women in public decisions and politics, benefiting and improving the lives of both campesino men and women in the region.

Establishment of the Literacy Program

1. Selection of Communities

In each municipality two to four communities are selected to participate in the literacy program. The communities are selected based on the presence of an incipient women's organization and the presence of female leaders interested in the process or available to offer support.

2. Identification and Selection of Female Leaders within the Community

In each selected community, one or two women are chosen to be program facilitators. These women must display leadership skills, work with a women's group or demonstrate a willingness to work and improve the capacity of their community. The selected women should have community support and strong reading-writing skills.

3. Training Facilitators

Once selected, the potential facilitator attends a five day training workshop. The themes presented include: social-economic context and culture, alternative education, interactive learning, the content of each module, the use of the teacher's literacy guide. The facilitators meet monthly to share information, evaluate progress, address difficulties and offer one another solutions.

4. The Formation of Women's Community Groups

The facilitator forms groups of 12-20 people within each community. Priority is placed on illiterate women, but other interested women and men are permitted to attend the literacy sessions. The group is a communal organization of women, with a chosen director and a facilitator that communicates and interacts with public leaders and authorities. The facilitators understand the reality and life of the women in their community and encourage a process of reflective development within the group.

5. Implementation of the Literacy Program

Each module has a duration of 10 months with weekly meetings in each community. During the meetings the women discuss the theories and subjects presented in the lesson and complete activities including reading and writing exercises. The women work and learn within the vision and reality of their community. Weekly continuity of lessons enables stronger understanding and application of the topics discussed.

Aynisuyu offers support and observes the progress of the program. They evaluate participant progress and learning, attend meetings to support the facilitator, motivate groups and offer resources to meet the needs of each group.

Other Activities within the Program:

1. COMUVA Monthly Meetings

Twenty to forty community leaders, representing each municipality, meet to plan activities amongst different municipalities, strengthen each organization and share information and discuss strategies.

2. COMUVA Annual Meeting

Two hundred and fifty women gather from different communities to socialize, share experiences and make decisions regarding the function of COMUVA. Every two years a director is elected to represent the members of COMUVA.

3. Inter-Organization Exchange Trips

Women are given the opportunity to travel to other municipalities to exchange experiences and participate in the activities of other women's organizations.

Aynisuyu's Literacy Project has placed specific emphasis strengthening Women's Organizations at a community level and encouraging participation in municipal politics.

This is achieved by:

1. Providing aid and direction in presentation of demands to the municipal government, including small projects that will benefit the community.
2. Offering three workshops on political lobbying. The workshops address the law of popular participation, social control, and current issues in public politics. The workshops give women the necessary tools and knowledge to participate actively and positively in Municipal Development Plans.
3. Supporting the participation of community leaders in community summits, enabling women to participate in the planning of community management/development and the distribution of funds. Women are given the opportunity to defend their rights and request funding for their organizations and activities.
4. Encouraging an ethic of reciprocity by supporting economic enterprises initiated by women's organizations. Such endeavours generate income allowing community members to improve the diet of their families. Women are given financial support, enabling them to implement a project. Within six months each woman is required to give the same amount of money to another community member allowing them to begin a project.