

**Project Title: Defensoría de la Niñez y la Adolescencia (Local Ombudsperson for Children and Youth)**

**1) Basic Data**

**Country:** **Bolivia**

**Initiators of the project:** Originally the project was initiated by UNICEF Bolivia. Now it has become part of a government supported, official, national policy.

**Project focus:**

Focus areas	emphasis		
	low	—————▶	high
Situation Analysis		•	
Child and Youth Participation	•		
Cross-Sectoral Approaches		•	
Strategic Partnerships		•	
Attention for disadvant. groups			•
Linkages with CFC Networks		•	
Advocacy Strategies		•	•
Resource Mobilisation	•		
Institutional and Legal Reforms	•		
Capacity building			•
Monitoring & Evaluation	•		

**Target group:** At present, 50 municipalities in the Amazon and Andes regions have functioning Defensorias.

**Starting / ending date:** Started in 1998, this is an ongoing project.

**2) Background**

**The situation of the target group**

In Bolivia, 59% of the population live in poverty; 24% of the total population of 8.7 million people live in extreme poverty.

These statistics show the difficulties under which Bolivian children live:

- As few as 50% of children complete the full vaccination programme;
- Infant mortality is 58 in 1000 live births;
- The main causes of death in children are diarrhoea, respiratory diseases and malnutrition;
- Only 7% of young children have access to Integrated Early Child Development Services;
- More than 20% of children younger than 14 years of age are not registered at birth;
- 55 % of the rural schools offer an educational programme that stops at the third year of schooling;

- 11,000 children live in institutional care.

The main problem targeted by the Defensorias is child abuse. This is a serious problem within Bolivian society since about 58% of Bolivian children have been confronted with violence. Another problem the Defensorias deal with is that of fathers who refuse to support their children financially after the dissolution of a parental relationship.

### **Political context**

In 2000, a major breakthrough was achieved with the implementation of the Código. This is a national law which enforces the protection of child rights. The Código obliges each municipality to set up an office of Defensoria to function as a local ombudsperson to protect the rights of youth and children. This is supported by national policies of decentralisation. It gives delegated responsibilities to the departmental and municipal governments.

### **Justification of the initiative**

The Defensoria's cases and decisions will ultimately be integrated into a nationwide network. This network will deal with cases of child rights' violations and will enable monitoring and assessment of the situation of youth and children.

## **3) Description of the Initiative**

### **Main goal of the initiative**

The main goal of the initiative is to set up a nationwide network of municipal Defensorias which will support children whose rights are being violated. This support can be juridical as well as psychological. The Defensorias function as a local ombudsperson for child rights.

### **Objectives of the initiative**

The objectives of the initiative are:

- To offer juridical and psychological support to children whose rights are being violated.
- To advocate and promote the protection of child rights.
- To collect data on the situation of children at the local level.

### **Roles played by stakeholders**

The stakeholders and their respective roles are:

The Vice-Ministry for the Child: Coordination at national level and responsibility for the capacity training and supervision of the Defensorias.

Departmental Services for Social Care (SEDEGES): Responsibility for the monitoring and evaluation of the Defensorias within their departments.

The Defensorias: Implementation at municipal level; juridical and psycho-social assistance to children and youth and advocacy on the realisation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

UNICEF: Support to the Vice-Ministry for the Child and structural support to the departmental programmes in the Amazonian and Pro-Andes regions.

### **Time-frame and planning cycles**

Each year, there are two visits to each Defensoria. The findings gathered during these monitoring and evaluation visits are presented in a yearly national report.

## **4) Strategies**

### **Situation Analysis**

A national census was undertaken in 2001. This census included questions to elicit greater insight into the living conditions of children, e.g. housing, access to basic services, if they were registered by birth, etc.

For 2003, a detailed analysis has been planned for more than 50 municipalities.

### **Children's and youth's participation**

Children and youth do not directly participate in the activities of the Defensorias. But the Defensorias often work together with the Bolivian Alliance for the Child, a youth organisation that promotes the involvement of children and youth.

### **Cross-sectoral approaches**

The Defensorias are staffed by a multi-disciplinary team: a juridical professional, a psychologist and a social worker. This enables the Defensorias to offer a wide range of support and to organise cross-sectoral activities.

### **Strategic Partnerships**

Municipal committees have been set up to monitor and coordinate the activities of the Defensorias. These committees include representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGO)s, the municipality and institutions working with children.

### **Linkages with CFC networks**

The initiative is linked to the Bolivian Alliance for the Child (Alianza Boliviana en favor de la Niñez). This is a national network of organisations promoting child rights.

### **Special attention for disadvantaged groups**

The initiative is aiming at children whose rights are violated. The Defensorias focus especially on children working in prostitution and children in institutions.

### **Advocacy and awareness-raising strategies**

One of the tasks of the Defensorias is to undertake activities to advocate and raise awareness of the absence of child rights, e.g. the abuse of children and the omission of birth registrations.

### **Institutional and Legal reforms**

The initiative is a result of a national law theCodigo which obliges all municipalities in Bolivia to establish an office of Defensoria.

### **Resource Mobilisation**

The Defensorias do not mobilize their own resources. In addition to funding given by UNICEF, they are funded by the Municipalities.

### **Capacity building activities and methods**

Training is an important component of the initiative. The staff of the Defensorias are trained at departmental level in child rights issues. When their training is concluded, they are able to set up capacity building activities in the municipalities.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

The Departmental Services for Social Care (SEDEGES) make two visits annually to monitor and evaluate all the Defensorias in their department. The reports of these evaluations are sent to the Vice-Ministry for the Child where the data is processed. The Defensorias also keep records of all cases that are brought to their attention.

## **6) Conclusions**

### **Highlighting of good practices and opportunities for replicability**

The fact that the municipalities are responsible for the establishment and funding of the Defensorias is positive, since it creates more local ownership of the initiative. However, the funding is inadequate.

### **Future challenges and problems.**

A grave problem has arisen in that the municipalities give minimal financial support to the Defensorias which results in very low wages for staff. Because of this it is very hard to find qualified professionals to work as Defensorias. There is a high turnover of professional staff who leave to take better-paid jobs. This has a seriously negative effect on the continuity and sustainability of the projects.

## **7) Consulted Documentation**

Information provided by Lieve Demaegd, UN Volunteer, UNICEF, La Paz, Bolivia.

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