



Monitoring the Human Rights of People with Disabilities Country Report : Bolivia

Conceptual framework and scope

Disability Rights Promotion International (D.R.P.I.) is an international project aimed at establishing a system for monitoring disability rights across the globe, according to human rights norms and principles and particularly those set out in the recently adopted United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. The project develops tools, methods and capacity among persons with disabilities and their organizations to monitor disability rights.

Country reports are based on D.R.P.I. research to monitor the status of rights of people with disabilities at two levels: systemic and individual. The systemic focus reviews national and regional legislation as well as case law, government programs and policy to assess the degree to which disability rights are being protected, promoted and fulfilled. The individual focus documents individual experiences of access to or denial of human rights of adults with various types of impairments. On the basis of these analyses, country reports present recommendations to improve the human rights situation of people with disabilities in the countries monitored.

The information is collected, analyzed and presented by persons with disabilities and their organizations. In Bolivia, the D.R.P.I. study was led by a confederation of organizations called Confederacion Boliviana de la Persona con Discapacidad (C.O.B.O.P.D.I.).



Photo: Monitors, site coordinators and other members of D.R.P.I. Bolivia team at the training seminar in Santa Cruz.

Systemic focus findings

The Bolivian state has signed but not yet ratified, the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. At the national level, the Constitution of Bolivia contains provisions that protect the human rights and freedoms of all citizens, and prohibit discrimination on various grounds, including disability. Prohibition of disability-related discrimination in employment, education, health and social services, both public and private, is also enshrined in Law 1678 of 15 December 1995, the most important legislation framing issues of disability in the country. In practice however, these provisions have not been sufficiently enforced. Law 1678 created the National Council of People with Disabilities as a decentralized body of the Ministry of Human



Photo: Monitors practice conducting interviews.

Development charged with implementation of disability policy in Bolivia. The same law, however, still advances an understanding of disability that is informed by a medical, rather than by a rights-based approach. This study has further found that even where the Bolivian state has introduced improved legal measures, these are often not translated into practice because of a lack of knowledge about, and commitment to, disability rights among public officials, private entities and society in general.

In addition, this study has also documented that important gaps and deficits persist in the provision of services for people with disabilities in the areas of education, employment, communications, accessibility and health. These gaps compound the discrimination and marginalization experienced by people with disabilities in the Bolivian society. Official data indicate that over 65% of people with disabilities in Bolivia live under the poverty line (Instituto Nacional de Estadística and PNUD, 2005).

The disability movement in Bolivia is organized in a large confederation (C.O.B.O.P.D.I.) which brings together the national associations representing the various constituencies in the disability community. The Federation is active in promoting the human rights agenda for people with disabilities in Bolivia.

Individual focus findings

102 interviews with persons with various types of impairments were conducted and analyzed for this study. Data were collected in two regions of the country: La Paz and Santa Cruz. The study examined experiences of access and denial of human rights faced by people with disabilities, by considering in particular five key human rights principles: **dignity** (perceptions of self-worth), **autonomy** (ability to make choices and decisions on issues that affect one's own life), **non-discrimination and equality** (having disability-related differences respected and disadvantages addressed), **participation and inclusion** (being able to participate fully on equal terms with others) and **respect for difference** (being recognized and valued as equal participants).

This study has found high rates of discrimination and violation of human rights on the grounds of disability among the interviewees. Abuse often took place in the **family context** where over 50% of the respondents reported having faced discriminatory attitudes which prevent them for participating as equals in family life.



Photo: Monitors practice conducting interviews.

In addition, the study revealed that the **education system** and the **labour market** are spheres of life where many people with disabilities have encountered discrimination and exclusion. This has led many to look for work in the informal economy which, in turn, offers low and precarious income, affecting their quality of life.

Respondents have also indicated that the Bolivian **social welfare** and **health services** do not respond adequately to their needs and in many cases operate in ways that create further discrimination for them. Barriers to access transportation systems, in particular, were reported by a large number of people with disabilities, particularly those with mobility impairments, exposing many to multiple forms of discrimination and violations of their fundamental rights and freedoms.

Conclusions & Recommendations

Based on these findings, C.O.B.O.P.D.I., the **Bolivian confederation of organizations of persons with disabilities that led the study, decided upon the following conclusions and recommendations:**

- **Awareness Raising**

Disseminate the report to raise awareness in society and at the political level about the human rights situation of people with disabilities in Bolivia

- **Develop economic and social programs**

On the basis of the outcomes of this report, develop new employment initiatives for people with disabilities, and new social programmes at both the local and national levels

- **Implement disability awareness program through the Ministry of Education**

To fight the current stereotyping of people with disabilities and promote a more inclusive Bolivian society a national disability awareness program should be implemented through the Ministry of Education, to reach children across the country as well as their families



- **Revise legislation and policies**

With the active involvement of disability organizations, Bolivian legislation and policies in the area of disability should be revised, amended or replaced to reflect the treatment of disability as a human rights issue, and to implement the norms and standards of the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

For more information and to read the full report in Spanish and English, visit the D.R.P.I. website at www.yorku.ca/drpi.

Photo: Two monitors at training seminar in Santa Cruz.