

**CEPPS/IRI Quarterly Report
January-March, 2005**

**Bolivia: Improving Citizen Perceptions of Political Parties
USAID Cooperative Agreement # ACA 511-A-00-04-00016-00**

**Project Dates: November 6, 2003- May 31, 2005
Total Budget: \$550,000 Expenses to Date: \$516,246**

I. SUMMARY

Though Bolivia returned to democratic civilian rule in the mid-1980s, the nation remains one of the hemisphere's greatest challenges. Crushing poverty, a stalled economy, and increased political instability continue to compromise the future of Bolivian democracy. More concerning are the consistently low levels of public confidence in the nation's democratic institutions, particularly political parties.

To strengthen the institution of democracy in Bolivia, the International Republican Institute (IRI) is implementing a campaign aimed at legitimizing the role of political parties. This program provides Bolivians with the ways and means through which to aggregate and voice their concerns to both elected officials and party leaders. Key to bettering public perceptions of parties is civic education. Bolstering civil society's understanding of the role of the citizen, while concurrently providing basic information on democratic processes, IRI works to assuage current dissatisfaction with political parties, and democracy writ large, in Bolivia. The December 2004 municipal elections provided a particularly appropriate context in which to work with civil society in civic education, advocacy, and active democratic participation.

Activities include creating public forums for positive interchange between political parties and civil society, and launching a national civic education campaign to include radio programs, media training, and high school civics exercises. The goal of this project is to engage civil society in activities that will result in improved understanding of democracy, and as a result, political parties.

IRI worked in Bolivia in the early 1990s on a civic education campaign and has recently begun working with the country's political parties through the Regional Political Party Renovation Program. Today, IRI leverages its past experience along with growing political party relationships to conduct an effective program with Bolivia's civil society.

The International Republican Institute civil society program complements the National Democratic

Institute's (NDI) political party building initiative. The institutes work in tandem to improve citizen perceptions on political parties in Bolivia.

II. BACKGROUND

Few countries, if any, can match Bolivia's long suffering record of political instability. After more than a century and a half of independence, this Andean nation has been witness to nearly 200 coups and counter-coups. In February 2003, an economic recession, controversial tax hikes, and longstanding ethnic tensions led to a police revolt that nearly ended the government of President Sanchez de Lozada; several days of unrest left more than 30 persons dead. The government remained highly unpopular; its death blow came with a controversial plan to export natural gas to the U.S. through long-time rival Chile. An indigenous uprising in mid-October left approximately 70 persons dead and forced the resignation of Sanchez de Lozada on October 17. This was the bloodiest peace-time event in Bolivia's modern history, and led many observers to declare the Bolivian government a "broken system."

When Vice President Carlos Mesa assumed the Presidency, he pledged what is now referred to as "October's Agenda." This agenda constitutes three main action items: a July 18 binding referendum on the export of Bolivian natural gas, reform to the current gas laws, and a 2005 Constitutional Assembly. These items are highly divisive in Bolivia, and exacerbate deep ethnic, regional, and socio-economic tensions. The Referendum passed in July 2004 with 70% supporting Mesa's proposal. Eight months later, as the population grows frustrated with his inability to pass legislation on the gas issue, Mesa's approval ratings have dropped by 20% and the country continues to see paralyzing roadblocks and demonstrations. Given this context, preserving stability during the upcoming Constitutional Assembly and beyond will be critical in maintaining Bolivian democracy.

This project was conceived before the deadly riots of October 2003. At that time, the project's central objective was to help legitimize the role of political parties as an institution key to Bolivian democracy. Post-October 2003, IRI and USAID officials agreed that improving perceptions of democracy as a whole would be an appropriate addition to the original proposal. IRI continues to engage political parties in its work, and promote dialogue between the parties and civil society. Steady efforts are also made to properly inform and educate Bolivians as the country moves forward with "October's Agenda."

III. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

1. Create forums in which Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) will aggregate and advocate their interests to political parties.
2. Legitimize political parties through a civic/education campaign and the development of related contents to be included in high school curricula.

IV. QUARTERLY ACTIVITIES

Civic Education through TV

TV Program “Democracia”

IRI produced and aired five half-hour TV programs on youth and democracy throughout this quarter. Each show consisted of casual, dynamic conversation between six university students on a various facets of the upcoming Constituent Assembly (AC). These included the nature and function of an assembly and popular expectations for it, the reasons why Bolivia needs an AC and how it could help resolve the country’s problems, the work of the Congressional Special Commission to the AC (CECAC), the number of representatives to the assembly and the method for choosing them, and civic responsibility pre and post AC. The format includes segments of on-street interviews with ordinary citizens on the above mentioned topics, posing questions such as “How do you think an AC could help Bolivia?” and “What will you look for in selecting an Assemblyist?” All of the student co-hosts had previously participated in the focus group work conducted by IRI to measure youth perceptions of democracy, and had proven themselves to be articulate, curious, and charismatic. The students were of diverse backgrounds, and represented multiple socio-economic and ethnic sectors.

The series was aired on a public broadcast station, and received fantastic reviews from the ratings experts. Financial restraints and the short duration of the programs made quantifying viewer numbers impossible, however comments received from other TV professionals, members of the Electoral Courts, and audience call-ins indicate that the show is favored for its unique structure, hosts, and topics. The TV channel is broadcast throughout urban and suburban La Paz and in all of the departmental capitals. The chosen airtime is Saturdays at 7:00pm between other programs aimed at youth audiences.

IRI has been approached by the Bolivian congress to develop a similar program on youth and democracy for the Congress’ new public TV station. Similar requests have been received from leaders of El Alto with access to public broadcast stations.

Journalist Trainings

International Seminar on the Constituent Assembly

On February 22-23, IRI held an international seminar on the Constituent Assembly (AC) with elected government officials, civil society representatives, media outlet owners, and local, regional and national journalists and members of the press. The objective of the Cochabamba event was to share information pertinent to the AC and strengthen relations between legislators and journalists.

Over 70 journalists participated in the event and received first hand information from members of the Congressional Special Commission for the Constituent Assembly (CECAC) and the Executive Commission on the Constituent Assembly (UCAC). The presentations included a study of regional experiences with Constituent Assemblies, a background on the proposed legislation to govern the AC, and proposed methods of civic education on the upcoming process.

Discussions also addressed the need for coordination among the multiple institutions involved, and for clear and regular dissemination of information regarding the AC.

A significant result of the seminar was the signing of an accord for open and consistent communication between the CECAC, the Bolivian Press Confederation, and the Bolivian Association of Reporters. In signing the accord, the institutes agreed to the timely provision of information to each other, to the provision of quality and substantive information, and to generally act in good faith with one another not just for benefit of the institutions at hand, but for the benefit of the Bolivian public.

A series of national informational seminars on the law governing the AC is being planned.

Civic Education: High School Initiative

IRI developed a civics manual, called *Hacia una Cultura Democrática: Autoridad y Responsabilidad*, to be used at the high school level in Bolivia. The document addresses the themes of Authority and Responsibility, and serves as a catalyst for discussions on the role of citizens and elected officials in a democratic society, the history of democracy, and the current state of democratic politics in Bolivia. The manual is based on the Center for Civic Education (CIVICED) series “Foundations of Democracy”, but has been adapted to the Bolivian political reality. The section on Responsibility, for instance, is far more focused on the notion of responsibility as it refers to a *community*, as opposed to individual duties. The manual is the first of its kind to receive full approval by the Ministry of Education.

Implementation of the Civics Manual

This quarter, IRI conducted 73 teacher trainings on the use of this manual. Over 6,000 manuals were given to the 4,160 teachers that received training and would be implementing the course in their classrooms. With the average Bolivian classroom size being 40 students, approximately 166,400 students will benefit from the manual implementation this quarter. The teachers trained expressed great enthusiasm for the training and the classroom materials, and stated that such materials were virtually non-existent.

This quarter marked the end of the teacher trainings for this project. In total, 98 trainings were conducted with 4,500 teachers from the departments of La Paz, Oruro, Potosi, Cochabamba, Tarija, Chuquisaca, and Santa Cruz. As a result, 90% of all social studies/government teachers in Bolivia have been trained on the use of this manual. A final report on the implementation project is underway.

Seminar Series: Democratic Values and Principles

Information gathered through focus groups and polling indicates that the majority of Bolivian citizens understand democracy through only one of its characteristics: voting and elections. This limited understanding of democracy undermines the population’s ability to develop a profound democratic political culture that goes beyond the election cycle.

In an effort to deepen civic comprehension of democracy, IRI partnered with the Bolivian Association of Political Science (ABCP) and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) in the development of an instructional seminar on the values and principles upon which a democracy is based. The seminar is designed as a seven-hour course that explores the democratic principles of liberty, equality, and pluralism, as well as the democratic values of tolerance, dialogue, civic participation, responsibility, equity, transparency, and solidarity. The course is designed for an audience of adult leaders that have already participated in a leadership course sponsored by the IDEA Foundation and the Andean Development Foundation (CAF). Participants include leaders from civil society, unions, political parties, farmer's groups, neighborhood civic committees, and universities, as well as locally elected officials including council members and prefects.

This quarter, 10 trainings were held with over 435 participants in the cities of La Paz, Santa Cruz, Oruro, Cochabamba, Sucre, Tarija, and Potosi. Response from participants has been extremely positive, with repeated requests coming to both IRI and KAS for additional trainings. Post-seminar evaluations show that 83% of participants find the information provided high or very high in relevance to their civic activities. Before taking the seminar, 95% of attendees graded themselves as having a regular or good understanding of the seminar themes; post-seminar, this same percentage qualified their comprehension as good or very good.

IRI will conduct these trainings in Beni and El Alto next quarter.

V. RESULTS AND INDICATORS

Result 1:

To deepen Bolivian civil society's understanding of the democratic process and improve its relations with political parties, IRI will:

Indicator 1:

Create forums in which Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) will aggregate and advocate their interests to political parties.

The media seminar on the Constituent Assembly convened elected political leaders and members of the press in an effort to promote open and consistent flow of information on the AC to the media and to the general public.

Indicator 2:

Legitimize political parties and democracy writ large through a civic education campaign and the development of related contents to be included in high school curricula.

This quarter's civic education campaign used TV broadcasts to provide the public, particularly youth, sound information on the upcoming Constituent Assembly.

The high school manual was implemented in 73 trainings this quarter to over 4,160 teachers and therefore over 166,000 students. The IRI project to foment democratic values in civic

leaders was implemented in seven cities with 438 people.

VI. EVALUATION

IRI has effectively linked civil society outreach activities with Bolivian current events such as the Constitutional Assembly. Linking activities with Bolivian current events permits a focused civic education methodology and capitalizes on the natural human want of information in times of crisis. This strategy ties democratic theory to tangible, real life processes, therefore contributing to the development of a permanent democratic culture in Bolivia.

The media event this quarter ensured that the news sources in the country had access to first hand information on the AC from constitutional experts and elected officials. More importantly, the public accord signed between Congressional authorities and Bolivian press organizations commits both camps to fulfill their responsibilities and act in good faith for the benefit of the Bolivian people as the AC approaches.

The high school civic education initiative has seen completion this quarter. The IRI goal for teacher training was to reach 50% of all social studies/government teachers. IRI has met and exceeded this goal, training a full 90% of the target population on the use of the manual. The Institute has received an overwhelming response for follow-through teacher trainings, in addition to requests for the development of a second manual introducing additional civic values.

The quarter's TV programs served as an additional innovative tool to engage youth and educate them on democratic issues, specifically the AC.

The seminars on democratic values and principles provided Bolivian leaders with a more thorough understanding of the values intrinsic to a democracy. This training will help them in their capacity as community leaders to implement the principles of democracy and create a democratic culture that extends beyond the election cycle.

VII. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

- Democratic Values seminars in Beni and El Alto
- Preparation for project close-out