

## Training Aymara micro entrepreneurs – migrants in the city of El Alto

*El Alto is a city in Bolivia with one million inhabitants, the majority of them from migrant families of the Aymara altiplano and 70% of them members of the informal economy. The Energy and Population Research Centre (CIEP) is a Bolivian NGO which implements projects that create employment and income based on the knowledge and productive potential of the indigenous people of Bolivia.*

*The skills that incubate enterprises are strengthened through the technique of learning by doing, starting from the preservation of traditional know-how which is reflected in cultural craft products. Later on, products are added to the market to generate income. Productive cycles are reproduced with technical assistance to develop planning capabilities. The aim is sustainability in applying what has been learnt, creating leadership and aptitude for working as a group.*

*The values inherent in this training are: entrepreneurship, creativity, identity, interculturalism, citizenship, partnership, complementarity between producers and recognition of the work of women and young people.*

### 1. The geographic and socio-economic context of the problems

A few years ago El Alto was just an outlying suburb of the city of La Paz, in Bolivia; now it is a city of around one million inhabitants, mostly indigenous Aymara.

They are migrants who, due to the breakdown of the traditional rural economy, moved to the outskirts of a large city to live and work. Despite this, they continue to maintain close economic, social and cultural relations with the rural communities they came from. They supplement their low incomes in the city by selling products grown in the community at planting and harvesting time. In addition, the links are cultural and organisational in nature: they take part in community festivities and even hold positions as community leaders on a rotating basis.

Their involvement in the city takes the form of working in the informal sector, on the margins of a range of social benefits that those working in the formal sector receive, such as the right to job security, health care and a pension. They are mainly indigenous people and families with little education, especially the women, with high levels of poverty and extreme poverty. Their informal production units are based on family work, which in many cases does not pay for the participation of relatives or of trainees below the age of 30. The level of investment and use of technology is low, resulting in low productivity.

Women are involved in the informal sector, primarily in small businesses and micro enterprises producing craft goods reflecting their cultural identity. Despite the precarious nature of this type of work, it enables them to earn a wage of their own, supplementing that of their men folk, who are often faced with unemployment. This gives them greater economic independence and empowerment.

Craft products preserve indigenous techniques, materials and designs, and are destined mainly for the market, where people with higher incomes and tourists buy them.

The young people in these Aymara families also participate in the informal economy although, being better educated, they seek better jobs but do not often find them. Youth unemployment is high and often results in crime and gang membership.

## **2. The Energy and Population Research Centre (CIEP)**

CIEP (Centro de Investigación de Energía y Población) is a Bolivian NGO that trains people in order to promote alternative ways of generating income through training in productive enterprises, preservation of the traditional methods of producing cultural objects and adaptation of these traditional methods to the requirements of the market. It operates in several regions of Bolivia, aiming to achieve greater competitiveness in micro and small enterprises while knowing that the success of taking these measures depends on national policies which encourage and support productive development, as well as paying greater attention to rural areas.

The organisation was created to incorporate the use of technologies suitable for the social and economic development of poor people. The first thing it did was to focus on assisting with the preservation and diversification of the pottery of the rural communities of pot makers.

It focused its area of activity based on a description of the territory inhabited by potters in pre-colonial times produced by John Murra: Los Olleros del Inca (The Pot Makers of the Inca). Traversing the altiplano, he located them in the vicinity of Lake Titicaca, the Desaguadero River and Lake Poopó. This CIEP initiative had a major impact on the traditional production of pottery and diversified its production.

As part of this undertaking, CIEP came across the Collana Baja community, where only a few old people remained and continued to work at the trade.

## CHALLENGES

- Very little capability by the formal sector to involve the informal sector:  
The problems of the Bolivian economy do not make it possible for human resources and enterprises trained in the informal sector to receive the benefits of social welfare, job stability and level of income of the formal sector. Work must be done to extend these benefits to entrepreneurs trained in the informal sector.
- Intermittent nature of informal training:  
Training in productive skills in the informal sector does not rely on strong institutional structures or on stable financial resources. The State and NGOs must be involved in working together to integrate this type of technical training into formal schemes.

## SUCCESS FACTORS

- Entrepreneurial capability:  
El Alto reflects the dynamism of the population who are of Aymara origin in an urban context: persevering, creative, entrepreneurs, able to live frugally and to work long hours.
- Cultural riches in an urban setting:  
The Aymara culture gives craft products a cultural personality that is enriched with other cultural influences.
- Closeness to technological resources and markets:  
Training in the production of cultural crafts has greater likelihood of gaining access to new technologies and to markets with greater purchasing power in an urban context than do producers in rural areas.

### 3. Experience and results of the educational work with Aymara migrants

#### 3.1 Female potters

CIEP came into contact with the migrant families of the Collana Baja community in the Janko Kalani district of the city of El Alto with the aim of preserving their pottery making skills. A group was formed to undertake this task with the daughters of those potters who were still producing goods in their community. Even though they were helping their parents in the pottery, in order to involve other migrants it was decided to teach simple techniques, such as modelling by hand



*Miguel Limachi's hand made production in El Alto show the influence of the ancient pottery from Tiwanaku, the region from which he migrated. Source: CIEP*



*Ceramics made by women from El Alto, daughters of rural potters. Source: CIEP*

and using moulds. They learnt how to use enamel and how to operate an electric oven. They positioned their products in the market. CIEP supported this process until 2006, when it implemented a project which was the first stage in the producers becoming self-managing.

Through practice, the building and strengthening of productive skills reaffirmed a methodology tailored to each context. In the case of Chualluma, a community in the province of Camacho on the border with Peru, in the far north of the altiplano, the distance from the urban centres and inaccessibility because of the lack of roads meant that the training was focused on ancestral techniques, without any variations, to avoid being dependent on materials, tools or equipment that were difficult to obtain.

On the other hand, the techniques applied with the potters of Janko Kalani included technological advances which were present in an urban environment. It was necessary to reinforce the women's right to have access to technologies which until then seemed intended for men or people with higher incomes, ending the unequal access to new technologies.

The design of their products reflected the cultural changes that affect migrants and the aim of penetrating markets with greater purchasing power. The products that were successful were those which stylised the nostalgia for their community, such as replicas of houses, and utensils for serving food in which traces of the Aymara culture were subtly evident.

The development of this trade empowered the women as citizens:

- ▶ Their work was turned into a demonstration of pride in the legacy of their potter ancestors in the indigenous community.
- ▶ Their contribution to generating the family's income raised their importance within the family.
- ▶ Their involvement in a producers' organisation enabled them to learn about other regions and techniques, broadening their view of the world.
- ▶ Their presence in commercial centres and involvement in political advocacy made them powerful women.

### **3.2 Young producers**

In 2006, Project Concern International called upon CIEP to motivate the young people of El Alto about local development by making use of games in a show covering various public squares and educational centres. CIEP organised a series of



*What we see: Puppetry, pottery and candle making are part of the presentation in a cultural exhibitions hall in La Paz of The Productive Hands Network of Young Producers.*

*Source: CIEP*

tents called the “Productive Quarter”. A productive skill was shown in each of them: pottery, basket making, needlework, creative crafts and cookery. To the surprise of the students, an object was produced in minutes and then there was an opportunity for those wishing to do so to try out the technique they had observed.

The outcome of this motivational event was the spontaneous creation of a group of supporters who wanted to learn the techniques that had been demonstrated in the travelling “Productive Quarter”. This was the basis for the training of the “Productive Hands Network of Young Producers”, made up of children or grandchildren of Aymara migrants.

Between 2010 and 2011 an enterprise incubator methodology was applied to this network, in conjunction with other organisations. Its members mastered the productive skills they chose, developed sets of products, created their corporate image, organised exhibitions, appeared before the mass media, exchanged knowledge with young producers from other regions, coordinated with their local councils, established relationships with other networks, generated income for their families and replicated their knowledge by training other young people.

The diversity of the participants led to basic knowledge being passed on, and this continued to be improved. A ‘made by young people’ stamp was given to the products developed to attract young consumers. By this means, what we term creative crafts (the manufacture of candles, dolls and chipboard decorations) were

supported, with an ethnic touch set in an explosion of colours. In addition, there were also confectionery products based on Andean foodstuffs.

Both experiences were reflected in the following outcomes:

- ▶ Research into the lives of craft producers and their products (publications in books, newspapers and videos);
- ▶ Preserved and revitalised pottery production;
- ▶ A wide range of craft products;
- ▶ Products used in the everyday life of urban consumers;
- ▶ Access to technology through production centres;
- ▶ Corporate and product images (catalogues, posters, packaging, labelling);
- ▶ Young people's enterprises created;
- ▶ Producer networks organised;
- ▶ A presence at local, national and international exhibitions;
- ▶ Leaders who develop political advocacy for the benefit of their peers.

Annex 1 compiles the main skills developed in the different project components.



*Young entrepreneur leaders represent their peers on TV in La Paz.*

*Source: CIEP*

#### **4. Training methodology for incubating productive enterprises**

The following steps are taken in the comprehensive methodology for incubating productive enterprises:

##### **1) Diagnosis and preservation**

Research activities to preserve usages and customs in the production of cultural crafts within the framework of employment and the productive power of each region and analysis of supply and demand structures for this type of production.

##### **2) Training based on developing a productive identity**

###### **a. Introductory training**

Acquisition and reinforcement of knowledge and understanding of selected production techniques based on a review of the participants' productive tradition and their immediate environment, and the demands of the market they wish to reach.

###### **b. Further training**

Improvement of production techniques through replicas of prototypes designed based on the determined productive personality (product development).

##### **3) Reproduction of the productive cycle in relation to the market**

Experimental introduction of the product to the market. Assessment of the results obtained in each incursion to determine what and how to produce, in what quantities and for whom.

##### **4) Promotion of the productive units**

Development of corporate identity and product image by organised and associated productive units. Publicity about the work of the producers based on the development of their ability to organise events.

##### **5) Business management**

Strengthening administrative capabilities during reproduction of the productive cycles. Development of business skills in planning, implementing and monitoring production and marketing.

## **6) Strengthening partnerships and political advocacy**

Promotion of the desire to participate and become involved, development of leadership and understanding of the importance of involvement in networks. Legal standing and legalisation of own organisation. Organisation of individual, family or collective enterprises in parallel with the inclusion of the participants in subsequent productive cycles. Development of the productive personality of each enterprise to promote its partnership through complementarity, an Andean value where one part is integrated harmoniously and in a complimentary manner with the whole.

Distribution of information about rights, development of political advocacy strategies and search for ways of establishing them on a formal basis.

## **7) Access to financial and material resources**

Training in the use of microcredit, seed capital, leasing, funds to acquire materials, revolving funds.

# **5. Lessons learnt**

## **5.1 Lessons learnt from the Aymara women's project**

The strong presence of women in this economic area is a disadvantage that nevertheless presents opportunities.

The participation of adult women in training processes requires them to reorganise their everyday lives, which are divided between domestic tasks and activities that generate an income. For this reason, it is important to maintain motivation, promoting rapid success through short but intensive learning cycles.

The training is adapted to the varied levels of knowledge, skills and level of familiarity with their productive powers with the techniques imparted. From this, greater knowledge is obtained in periodic cycles of growing complexity. This involves monitoring each individual. For this reason, training cannot be done on a very large scale.

The women take ownership of their tradition, which anchors them in their identity and gives them strength to face the challenges of the urban environment, and of new technologies that are turned into an option that they can access as a right.

The holistic approach in teaching considers women as productive powers and as human beings with unacknowledged rights, delayed expectations and abilities to contribute to the development of their society.

The inclusion of members of the family as participants in the training process is important. Despite this, their children and husbands often limit the use of the potential of women who are fully trained.

Training develops women's self-esteem, the value of their ethnic origin, the status of their gender and their talent to create, produce, organise and consolidate. It empowers them to take decisions and to come up with goals and strategies to achieve them.

Because of the way in which they live, in an urban context Aymara women are used to facing challenges and to making a space for themselves in the territory which they inhabit. This status encourages them to participate in the challenges that this methodology continues to create.

## **5.2 Lessons learnt from the young producers project**

A characteristic of young people in the low income urban sectors is their high geographical and occupational mobility. In the 5 years we have been working with them we have seen them move house, change their main activity, change the way they integrate into the family and their objectives. Unlike working with women, which offers greater stability in the medium term, economic initiatives for young people are often short-term in nature. What remains in the final analysis is the ability to be an entrepreneur acquired in the process. This enables them to become involved in similar activities or to resume working at some other time. This characteristic requires institutions to pay them appropriate attention. Young entrepreneurs who have to wait a long time for financing end up choosing other options.

In the process of becoming producers, young people in the low income sectors find the opportunity to channel their rebelliousness, distancing themselves from forms of behaviour that do not build society, a risk that exists in a city such as El Alto.

They face an identity crisis that is the result of the double cultural pressure coming from their parents and grandparents, chained to their original Aymara community, and of the availability of means of communication which transmit a mass culture based on consumption. It is important to rescue the elements of cohesiveness and motivation that are present in their cultural identity, rich in new nuances.

They are often ignored as citizens, except when they take to the streets in social protest. For this reason, the training of leaders who are able to present demands aimed at encouraging economic initiatives that can be negotiated with local authorities and public and private institutions is included.

Young people need mentoring in the processes of putting what they have learned into practice, but at the same time they are predisposed to share experiences, thus becoming tutors of their peers. Opportunities must be created so that those trained can replicate what they have learnt.

A characteristic of young people is their sociability and their capacity to give. These qualities help to strengthen organisations.

In the experiences described, the participants consist of individual or family productive units or of units made up of a combination of several individual producers. Young people generally do not dare to become individual entrepreneurs.

As part of the informal economy, young producers have not achieved rights similar to those of salaried employees. The change from self-employment to decent employment is an issue still waiting to be addressed.

## **6. Factors that influenced the experience**

### **Impulses driving the initiative:**

- ◆ Interest from potential purchasers of craft products for objects with a cultural stamp;
- ◆ Creativity that emerges from the productive tradition of the rural altiplano surrounding El Alto;
- ◆ Interest by the population of the informal sector in mastering a trade related to their economy to support themselves with it;
- ◆ Less resistance to change by women and young people in the sector who are ready to include new ideas in their productive practice;
- ◆ Training of producer and implementer networks that instigate co-ordinated action for the common good.

The German Adult Education Association, *dvv international*, deserves special mention. It is noted for its non-bureaucratic support focused on key specific needs and its empathy for the efforts made by beneficiaries and implementers. This institution collaborated with research and dissemination, training, equipping and strengthening organisations. It recently encouraged the adoption of a systematic approach to the methodology and the design of a proposal to incorporate the experience into formal education.

Limiting factors:

- ▶ Narrowness of the internal market, resulting in low purchasing power by the population and therefore in low demand for products with a cultural identity;
- ▶ Limited development of the formal labour market which prevents the inclusion of those trained for jobs in related fields;
- ▶ Intermittent nature of international financing that converts this training programme into a slow process that discourages those it is intended for;
- ▶ Few financial resources contributed by the municipal authorities and a lack of stable coordinating bodies;
- ▶ Lack of a state agency to provide comprehensive support and coordinate inter-agency efforts.

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**Appendix 1: Table of skills developed**

Target group	Description of members	Skills developed in production and marketing	Products created	Sales outlets	Leadership skills developed
Female potters from Janko Kalani in El Alto	25 women from an original group of 40, housewives, recent migrants who were supported for 10 years.	Hand-made pottery and pottery made in moulds. Production and marketing management.	Decorative and utilitarian items that recall images of the producers every day life back in their rural community. Products decorated with elements of stylised iconography of the Andes.	Exhibitions in El Alto, La Paz, Colombia, Argentina, Chile, Germany, United States. Production for contracts for local and foreign markets.	Strengthening of collective ability for exercising leadership in their own organisation and in producer networks. Ability to pass on knowledge about production to their peers. Self-management.
Productive Hands Network of Young Producers	90 young people between 15 and 30 years of age, studying at school or university, or people seeking work, children or grandchildren of Aymara migrants who were supported for 4 years.	Creative crafts (manufacture of candles, dolls, party packs, chipboard modelling, wood carving, macramé, needlework, tailoring, and jewellery).	Products that are essentially decorative with universal appeal, except the doll which represents people from El Alto and the party packs which represent animals of the Altiplano.	Exhibitions in El Alto and in the city of La Paz.	Strengthening of collective ability for exercising leadership in their own organisation and in producer networks. Communication techniques for developing corporate image. Self-esteem and reappraisal of cultural identity. Political influence on local government.
Students at educational establishments in El Alto	200 young people from schools in El Alto of between 15 and 20 years of age who were supported for one year.	Chocolate shop and cake shop.	Chocolates and cakes containing Andean cereals.	At school break time and snack service contracts for public events.	Entrepreneurship.

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