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# Voces Bolivianas (Bolivian Voices)

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## 1. What was the aim of the project/program?

Voces Bolivianas (Bolivian Voices) is an organization comprised of Bolivian bloggers that teaches the use of citizen media, including the use of blogs, digital photography, video, and audio to Bolivians from underrepresented groups. Participants in these trainings and workshops have included members of indigenous groups, those from rural areas, and those living in lower socio-economic areas. These groups have historically been underrepresented on the internet, and the inclusion of these new bloggers to the national online conversation allows all Bolivians regardless of geographic location, class, or ethnicity to express their ideas and viewpoints. Much of the mainstream media often portrays these groups and regions in an unfavorable light or only when there is a crisis or conflict. With the emergence of these participatory media tools, members from these underrepresented groups can now choose how they are portrayed.

## 2. Who did you reach? Who participated? How many?

Hands-on and interactive workshops have been held in 6 of the 9 departments throughout the country, and the most active participation has taken place in the cities of El Alto and Santa Cruz. A community-wide outreach attracted participants from all walks of life including public school teachers, ex-soldiers, public university students, indigenous tribal leaders, factory workers, artisans, and social workers have been some of the participants who answered the call to learn about the use of these participatory media technologies. Through demographic surveys, we learned that approximately only 1% of the participants had internet access at home, and that their primary reason for using the internet at cyber-cafes was school or work-related research.

To date, 195 individuals have taken part in the one-day or multi-month workshops led by Bolivian bloggers. The most active of participants have been invited to take part in other Voces Bolivianas activities, such as attendance in the national bloggers conference and the Voces Bolivianas Summit to be held in January 2009. This national meeting will bring together participants and facilitators to interact with one another in person, when most of the prior contact was online. They will also help decide the future direction of Voces Bolivianas.

## 3. How long did the program or project run?

The first workshop began in September 2007 in the city of El Alto. With start-up funds provided by [Rising Voices](#), the outreach arm of Global Voices Online, the original plan was to concentrate in that city and offer one series of workshops. However, due to the overwhelming interest from

Bolivians wanting to learn about these new tools, and the excitement and participation from national bloggers, it was decided to expand activities to the Plan 3000 neighborhood of Santa Cruz. From there, more workshops continued and on April 19, 2008, an ambitious national project called Bolivian Voices Day took place in 9 sites across 7 cities where simultaneously with the help of bloggers, 86 new bloggers were trained. VB continues offering workshops.

#### **4. What was the impact? What changed? Give concrete examples.**

Since Voces Bolivianas began one year ago, it has led the movement to bring more underrepresented voices online. For example, before the project started in El Alto, there were approximately 4 active blogs in a city of nearly 1,000,000 residents, mainly of Aymara indigenous descent. After the first two projects, there are now five times that number. This awareness by the Bolivian blogosphere has also resulted in many more national bloggers to become part of the movement, volunteering their time to lead workshops, and also support the new bloggers through commenting and interaction. Pre and post-tests were given to all participants and attitudes by the new bloggers toward their ability to express themselves increased dramatically. They cite that they were unaware that such possibilities existed.

Perhaps the greatest impact has been personal empowerment and the emergence of voices online from groups that have traditionally and historically been marginalized and excluded from the internet. These new bloggers represent Bolivians with ideas and who have great pride in their communities. Now they are equipped to share that information on the internet where it has already reached a national and international audience.

One of Voces Bolivianas' first bloggers was Cristina Quisbert, who writes at [Bolivia Indigena](#) and has also started an English language blog at [Indigenous Bolivia](#). During the first class' graduation ceremony, she said, "The voices of the indigenous peoples are our voices. If we do not write it ourselves, then who will do it?"

Another well-respected new blogger is Virginio Sandy, a chief elder from his indigenous community of Ayllu Bombo located in the department of Oruro. He travelled two hours to participate in the workshop located in the regional capital, and since then has become one of the most active bloggers at his blog [Nacion Suyu](#). He represented Voces Bolivianas on the panel about digital inclusion at the national bloggers conference held in La Paz in August 2008.

Finally, Dora Romero, a 24-year-old linguistics student at the public university in El Alto is also one of our success stories. Not only does she write [her blog in Spanish](#), but she has also started a new blog written in the [indigenous language of Aymara](#). She has received favorable comments from readers who remark that they are proud that a young Aymara has sought to keep her language alive. She has become especially active in the Voces Bolivianas community by leading a workshop in the rural Altiplano town of Achacachi. Here members of the Aymara indigenous group learned about blogging to express themselves in their native language.

As Voces Bolivianas moves forward reaching more members of these underrepresented communities, more bloggers like Cristina, Virginio and Dora are bound to emerge.

#### **Additional Links:**

Voces Bolivianas featured on the BBC (The World):

<http://vocesbolivianas.org/2008/01/31/medios-voces-bolivianas-en-el-bbc/>

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/misc/newsid\\_7240000/7240004.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/misc/newsid_7240000/7240004.stm)

Voces Bolivianas at Rising Voices: <http://rising.globalvoicesonline.org/projects/voces-bolivianas/>