

# **A Traditional Peasant Organization Engaged in Social Monitoring in the Municipality of Totora, Carrasco Province, Cochabamba Department, Bolivia<sup>1</sup>**

## **Summary**

Since 2001, 3600 peasant families from the municipality of Totora—traditionally organized into 83 rural unions comprising 13 subcentrals and the Agrarian Central of Moyapampa (CAM), have delegated a representative to receive three days of training per month on social monitoring of local government (the Mayor's office). The mayor's office currently receives funds from taxpayer contributions [coparticipación popular], HIPC, the National Treasury [Tesoro General de la Nación (TGN)] and the Productive and Social Investment Fund [Fondo de Inversión Productiva y Social (FPS)]. The peasant delegate has been given the title of *trainer* and in four 6-hour sessions a month provides culturally and linguistically appropriate training to men and women from each community. This has made it possible to overcome the rhetorical, standardized approach of training only a few peasant leaders using a strongly theoretical approach, while failing to achieve the full exercise and practice of verification and oversight of funds managed for specific periods by an administrative unit, in this case the municipal government and the mayor.

## **Background**

The Totora municipality has a population of 13,995 inhabitants. Quechua is the native language of 97% of the population and only 3% are fluent in Spanish. In addition, over 50% of the population is illiterate and of the remaining 50% (that is supposedly literate) 40% can only write their signature<sup>2</sup>, but cannot read or write, 40% can read but lack comprehension skills, and 20% have average basic reading and writing skills, although the figures are lower for women than for men.

In this context, peasant participation in the development of the municipal PAOs has been minimal. The legal content of the 2000 National Dialogue Law and other laws is incomprehensible and seems removed from the social context: “rural peasants can do little

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<sup>2</sup> The signature has become a sort of social status indicator, and because of this it can be observed that 80% can sign their name.

or nothing if they are ignorant of the laws that allow and empower them to participate, monitor, exercise oversight, and ultimately report infractions.”<sup>3</sup>

After a thorough analysis of their situation, the peasants living in the municipality of Totora concluded that “if we wait for the government to educate and train the peasants, then they will already have died of poverty, and condemned future generations to the same fate.”<sup>4</sup>

In order to reverse this reality, they decided that all families in the communities should learn how to participate in municipal life through peer training. Someone needed to decipher the difficult language used by government technical personnel. And that someone is a trainer delegated by the community itself who, in conjunction with other committed experts from the Services and Technical Assistance Center, analyze and design training curricula. In doing so they have changed the path of history. A history in which, for over 150 years, rural inhabitants have not been familiar with the first articles of the Political Constitution of the Bolivian State, much less recent laws providing for the participation of excluded sectors, or the latest laws on social accountability of those responsible for managing civil society’s economic resources.

At the moment, peasant organizations are collective actors. They express their interests and values within a legal and institutional framework; they make demands of the government and this eventually becomes their *raison d’être*. By creating their own mechanisms for representation and leadership, they are at a disadvantage in their interactions with the government. It is therefore appropriate that they be considered genuine representatives of civil society.

## **Objective**

Build individual and collective skills in legal participatory mechanisms among rural peasants, men and women, for social monitoring of municipal administration in the Totora Municipality.

## **Processes and Methods**

### **Who**

Three institutions support the initiative: CESAT, the Central Campesina de Moyapampa Totora, and the Municipal Government. Work is coordinated, although each entity retains its individual identity and objectives.

**CESAT**, is an institution whose mission and vision is to strengthen marginalized rural peasant organizations to promote integral natural resource management.

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<sup>3</sup> Conclusions of Congresses of Peasants.

<sup>4</sup> Totora peasants in general, who also confirmed that the government is not interested in adult education, much less in legal frameworks.

**CAM, The Peasant Central of Moyapampa [Central Campesina de Moyapampa]**, is a civil society organization with traditional demands in the areas of education, health, production, and the integral development of all of the communities.

**The Municipality**, The highest local administrative and political authority

Participation of Trainers		Population participating in the training sessions	
Local Unions [Sindicato Comunal]	Women's Organizations	Local Unions [Sindicato comunal]	Women's Organizations
<b>64</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2820</b>	<b>248</b>

**Quality of Relations:** A project steering committee has been formed made up of the mayor, the men and women peasant centrals, the president of the training committee (yuyal pacha).<sup>5</sup> The objective is to evaluate technical and methodological modifications.

### What

GOALS	ACTIVITIES / COURSES
Allocation of funds from tax contributions to peasant communities; improve peasant participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tax co-payments</li> <li>• HIPC</li> <li>• Participatory planning</li> <li>• Peasant demands</li> </ul>
Increase social participation in decision-making for equal access and control over municipal resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social oversight mechanisms</li> <li>• Rights and citizenship</li> </ul>
Improve mechanisms and techniques for planning, monitoring, and evaluation of PAO Municipal Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social oversight mechanisms</li> <li>• Peasant monitoring</li> <li>• Peasant Interchange</li> <li>• Peasant Evaluation</li> </ul>
Recover and restore the balance of peasant life strategies with equity and reciprocity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing of experiences and new knowledge about social oversight</li> </ul>
Strengthen and consolidate women's and men's peasant organizations in the area of social oversight.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation conferences</li> <li>• Coordination mechanisms between peasant organizations and local government</li> </ul>

### Monitoring and evaluation (Three strategic phases)

- ☞ The peasant central and its organized entities will evaluate municipal projects during their quarterly assemblies and annual congress.
- ☞ Meetings to develop the PAOs, where peasant participation is vital.

<sup>5</sup> Yuyal Pacha is a name used by peasants involved in the project. In Quechua it denotes producing knowledge by examining the past and taking the present into account when planning for the future.

- ☞ Reports by the Municipal councils and oversight committees to the CAM peasant organization.

### Accountability

The financial and technical reports that the mayor presents to the peasant organization are the focal point of information sharing between trained peasants and the municipal government seeking to increase transparency in municipal management.

The project was implemented in four phases, which are summarized in the chart below.

PHASE	PROCESS	METHOD AND PARTICIPATION
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diagnostic survey and dissemination</li> <li>• Agreements</li> <li>• Definition of scope</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peasant workshops</li> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreement on objectives</li> <li>• Project design</li> <li>• Agreements</li> <li>• Tripartite pacts</li> <li>• Cofinancing and resource leveraging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peasant workshops</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Peasant congresses</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project initiation</li> <li>• Trainee selection</li> <li>• Thematic validation</li> <li>• Validation of monitoring and evaluation tools</li> <li>• Validation of evaluation system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peasant workshops</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Seminar congresses</li> <li>• Training sessions</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience sharing</li> <li>• Sharing of findings/outcomes</li> <li>• Modifications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peasant to peasant</li> <li>• Peasant, institution, mayor's office, municipal council.</li> </ul>

### Resources

We have identified monetary and non monetary costs

- Dollars

NOVIB HOLLAND	MANOS UNIDAS SPAIN	MAYOR'S OFFICE TOTORA	TOTAL/ANNUAL
7,340.00	20,000.00	2,660.00	30,000.00

- Nonmonetary: **145,000.00 dollars**, funded by Totorá peasant families, (the trainer contributes work days for peasant training)

## **Outcomes**

### **Individual capacity-building**

- 60% of peasant families in the Totora municipality have increased<sup>6</sup> knowledge of the existing legal framework, citizen participation laws, and HIPC resources.
- 60% of peasant families in the Totora municipality participate in municipal planning meetings, mainly POAs.
- 50% of women, through their organization, participate in proposing topics of interest in the municipal POA.

### **Collective capacity-building**

- The peasant union has moved from making demands to articulating proposals
- The peasant subcentral understands the weaknesses and strengths in its territory.
- The peasant central invites the mayor to report on management issues on a monthly basis; the mayor is not resistant, but neither does he feel obligated.
- The mayor's office is experiencing a crisis in terms of structure and composition (normal disputes over space) but there is no management crisis.

### **Technical design or characteristics of program management**

The technical design consists of the dual management (peasant-technical personnel) of various concepts: for the peasants of Tortora these include coordination, concertation (not sell out or be associated with) civil society (peasant organizations, CAM), local power (territorial management), social participation (meetings, peasant congress to define municipal proposals), social oversight mechanisms (monitoring committees, peasant organizations), conflict viewed as the collective construction of two types of conduct (one peasant and the other nonpeasant).

### **New social and economic opportunities**

- Each community has organized to present new projects to entities such as the LIL INDIGENA.<sup>7</sup> Although only one has been approved, the impact of this has to do with the mere fact that basic initiatives have been presented.

### **Limitations and Opportunities**

- The fact that peasants have become more knowledgeable has created social resentment politically and in urban areas of the municipality.
- The peasants' reading and writing skills are incompatible with the technical discourse found in official government information on resource use and, therefore, peasant organizations require ongoing support.

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<sup>6</sup> It is more useful to be familiar with operational articles rather than the law in its entirety.

<sup>7</sup> Project funded by the World Bank to reactivate local economic initiatives.

- The creation of national and departmental level social oversight mechanisms represents an opportunity that requires future links and coordination between rural and urban areas.

### **Additional Resources**

Given the opportunity and interest, this experience could be replicated elsewhere. CESAT and the peasants of Titora could share experiences with others in similar situations. CESAT has manuals and thematic teaching aids for peasants.

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