

BOLIVIA

THE NEW INSTITUTIONAL ADVOCACY: A HUMAN RIGHTS MODEL FOR THE INFORMATION SOCIETY



REDES Foundation

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Introduction

The Bolivian Constitution promulgated on 9 February 2009 restores a new historical process of structural reconstruction that proposes to change the neoliberal corporate state model into a community-orientated one. But since then, the country has experienced social, political and economic restructuring characterised by excessive state centralism, which has gradually affected all spheres of daily life, including internet development.

In November 2009 the federal police closed down the Cyber Crime Division, arguing that there were not enough cases to justify it. Since then, the situation has not changed. Between 2009 and 2011, the mass media reported on an increase in violations of human rights on the internet and using mobile phones, principally against young people, women and families.

In response to this situation, since April 2010 the REDES Foundation has implemented a programme called ENREDOMINO: Developing Active Citizenship in the Information Society. This involves several initiatives led by volunteers, including highly qualified professionals, unleashing new kinds of support for legislative reforms and for processes of creating awareness and sharing information about human rights in the information society.

A national culture of human rights in the information society

Bolivia has a short history of developing the information society. Between 2004 and 2005, a National Strategy for Information and Communications Technologies for Development (ETIC) was passed. This was the result of a multisectoral process that mobilised different sectors of the population. Nevertheless, due to the political instability and change of leadership that took place until 2006, this strategy was not adopted by the government, even though it has been inserted in the current National Plan for

Development. In August 2010, believing that the ETIC was still in a stage of “formulation”, the Agency for the Development of the Information Society in Bolivia (ADSIB), part of the Vice-Presidency of the State, decided to create a brand new Digital Agenda, restarting the entire planning process from scratch.

Over the last five years the state has invested in several infrastructure projects led by governmental entities. Some of the projects include: the installation of the Túpac Katari satellite; a project called Bolivia: Territory with Total Coverage (TCT) by the state-run telecommunications company ENTEL; One Computer Per Teacher, a programme by the Ministry of Education; and the academic network called CLEAR, run by the vice ministry. Though Bolivia has several initiatives aimed at reducing the digital gap, it does not have many initiatives aimed at eliminating the information and knowledge gap.

Institutional advocacy in the ENREDOMINO programme

Between 2009 and 2011 the situation of human rights in the Bolivian information society can be summarised as follows:

- The new Bolivian Constitution assumes a human rights approach to societal affairs, and this facilitates a human rights approach to the internet.
- However, no state policies dealing with access to information on the internet integrate a human rights approach.
- No state actor has promoted human rights on the internet.
- At the same time, there is evidence of the population’s overexposure to online crimes (e.g. cyber bullying, trafficking and child pornography).
- There are no approaches, methods or educational strategies that promote the responsible use of the internet or mobile phones.
- There are no experiences on human rights approaches documented in the domain of information and knowledge.
- Internet governance does not exist in Bolivia.
- No actor assumes leadership for directing the development of the digital culture with a multi-sectoral or transdisciplinary approach.

* Refers to the defence and promotion of human rights in the information society, working with professionals and volunteers from the REDES Foundation.

- Old ways of violating human rights are reproduced online and are not addressed, due to the lack of institutional capacity.

In April, 2010, the REDES Foundation presented the results of research – conducted using its own resources – on access to and social use of the internet in Bolivia. The results found that no initiatives existed promoting the responsible use of the internet, specifically those incorporating a human rights approach. This demonstrated the extreme vulnerability of children, teenagers and women in the online world. Despite the impossibility of raising financing, we decided to create the programme ENREDOMINO (a combination of the three words EN-RED-DOMINO, which can be translated as “In the network – or on the internet – I dominate”). The agenda of the programme rests on the assumption that volunteer professionals might take advantage of their institutional experience and initiate activities based on their networks and commitment to human rights.

In May 2010, a contest for producing mobile videos called *filmóvil* was held. With the support of more than ten institutional allies and 30 young volunteers, students gathered in the cities of La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz for the competition. The mass media was informed about the initiative, and Facebook was used intensively to promote it.¹ Nevertheless, the experience did not have good results because the daily use of the mobile phone was centred on the consumption of telecommunications services and not on the creative use of the video camera. The lack of technical support for the production and editing of mobile videos was also a problem. The volunteer professionals identified the importance of creating videos and educational animations to be distributed using manuals for audiovisual production; “how to” manuals for uploading information to the web; and primers on cyber crimes. On two occasions they ran courses on producing digital and interactive mobile content for students from rural areas. This material is available freely on the ENREDOMINO educational portal.²

Towards the end of 2010, the portal received the institutional support of the Vice Ministry of Science and Technology, linked to the Ministry of Education, the Office of the Ombudsman and ADSIB. This promoted the portal across the whole country and unleashed a variety of activities that influenced the development of the internet with a human rights approach. Amongst the actions that stand out:

- Conferences were held on legislative reforms and the right to information at the Bolivian Catholic University, UDABOL University, San Andrés University (UMSA) and the Department of Education.³
- The issue of digital violence was inserted into a law on school violence presented to the Commission on Human Rights in the Legislative Assembly.⁴ The TV programme *Renew You* on the state television channel also devoted a special programme to digital rights.
- Articles were published on the internet about human rights in the journal *Diálogos Transdisciplinarios en la Sociedad de la Información* (Transdisciplinary Dialogue on the Information Society). In December 2010 an issue of this journal was dedicated to the subject Identities in the Information Society.⁵ In addition, a publication was released with the help of the Office of the Ombudsman in October 2011 exploring the subject of human rights in the information society.
- The National Centre for the Democratisation of Digital Culture⁶ was created in the city of Cochabamba to prepare teenagers and women for the responsible use of social networks. This is co-managed by the CREPUM foundation.⁷
- The Vice-Presidency invited the REDES Foundation to draw up a new model of regulation for information and communications technologies (ICTs) in Bolivia.⁸ This directly influences ICT and telecommunications law in the country. It emphasises human rights, and focuses on important aspects of the internet such as electronic signatures, e-commerce and e-governance, democratisation of frequencies, telecommunication price control, and universal services projects.
- A national citizen group was created called Bolivians for the Right to Communication and Information.⁹

3 www.conaric.org.bo/site/php/level.php?lang=es&component=36&item=1

4 noviolenciabolivia.blogspot.com/2010/11/presentacion-del-anteproyecto-de-ley.html

5 fundacionredes.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=section&layout=blog&id=4&Itemid=11

6 www.fundacioncrepum.org/index.php?/2011040557/Ultimas-noticias/crepum-inaugura-en-cochabamba-el-centro-nacional-de-democratizacion-de-la-cultura-digital.html

7 Institution specialising in traditional family development.

8 comunicacionconderechos.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=93:comunicacion-con-derechos&catid=44:noticias&Itemid=131

9 www.facebook.com/pages/Bolivians-por-el-derecho-a-la-Comunicaci%C3%B3n-e-informaci%C3%B3n/188422331209779

1 www.facebook.com/pages/ENREDOMINO/104743696237782

2 www.enredomino.fundacionredes.org

- A seminar called Perspectives and Challenges of the Information Society in Bolivia¹⁰ was organised to commemorate Internet Day on 17 May 2011. It addressed a human rights agenda for the internet and was broadcast on television with the support of national and international partnerships.
- We ran a digital journalism workshop¹¹ with a human rights approach to train 22 journalists from the city of La Paz.
- A proposal for national research into interactive digital content generation was designed in September 2011.
- An agreement with the Communications Ministry was reached to provide technical advice on the right to communication and information to 300 teenagers using filmÓvil educational units set up in La Paz (September-November 2011).

These activities marked a turning point in the recent history of participatory construction of the information society in Bolivia. The programme continues to be run by ENREDOMINO, attracting the support of new professionals, young people and institutions interested in collaborating on initiatives that have a structural impact, low operating costs and the potential to create employment options for Latin American professionals.

Most of the interventions were reported on television channels with national coverage, in print, on the websites of institutional partners, and on social networks.

The new model for institutional advocacy in the information society in Bolivia

This relates to how an institution that has no economic resources may influence several issues related to human rights in the information society in Bolivia. The analysis can build a new “model of institutional advocacy” capable of being replicated by the global community.

Five elements determine the effectiveness of new institutional advocacy: a) a clear vision of the work proposed, b) activism based on professional experience, c) transdisciplinary research/action, d) management of information and knowledge for social innovation, and e) self-sustainability that combines volunteering with professional services.

Clear vision of the work proposed A view that proposed the use of ICT for development has been replaced with a programmatic approach that promotes collective structural construction of the information

society, allowing anyone in any context to be part of the re-shaping of his or her own local-global environment.

This vision is summarised as follows: 1) to build and promote a human rights approach through the strategic use of the internet and mobile telephones, 2) to influence cultural patterns that violate human rights that are reproduced in the information society, 3) to create real and virtual scenarios of global and local promotion and exercise of human rights and prevention of human rights abuses, 4) to demand that we act on and denounce all practices that violate the human rights of future generations through the internet and mobile telephony, 5) to promote the development of technological skills for the exercise of citizenship, 6) To educate people about the functioning of the internet so that they can surf without risk, and 7) to undertake structural reforms based on a human rights agenda in the information society.

Recognition of technical and professional experience We are all part of building the society we live in, so it is necessary to assume social responsibility for our environment. REDES suggests that we realise present opportunities by projecting their implications for the future, but considering the lessons of the past. Under this logic, all activities and all employment opportunities result in activism as a way of life. This recognises the potential of all people to imagine and create new forms of social life. It calls for sensitivity and social solidarity, and an awareness of the opportunities opened up by institutional experience and vocational placement for proactive proposals that contribute to living well.

Transdisciplinary research/action All activities should be informed by transdisciplinary research with particular emphasis on disciplines such as sociology, communications, anthropology, psychology, law, public management, information technology, telecommunications and interactive digital content production. This allows the intersection between human rights and the internet to be recognised in the everyday experience of the general population. Everyday communication is the best example of a transdisciplinary approach, and easily articulates various areas and approaches to knowledge and information.

Management of information, knowledge and capacities for social innovation REDES developed a set of activities that allow using, sharing, creating and disseminating information and knowledge to promote human rights and the internet, involving individuals and organisations interested in these issues. In all cases, information management is directed to realise “actions and events” that are innovative, whether as a focus (e.g. the information society), as a method (e.g. filmÓvil) or as knowledge (e.g. transdisciplinary research).

¹⁰ www.gobernabilidad.org.bo/noticias/13-web-20/824-organizacion-simposio-nacional-por-el-dia-del-internet-en-bolivia

¹¹ www.fundacionperiodismo.org/moodle

TABLE 1. Economic-technological vs. social innovation		
Type of innovation	Economic-technological innovation	Social innovation
Capital	Capital intensive	Intensive human intellectual capital, relationships and networks
Basic orientation	To create monopoly situations (single product) that generate high returns	To cover the extensive needs of social groups at low cost with high impact
Rights protection	Added to ensure the investment effort and sustain the monopoly	Very low: knowledge is free for public access
Complexity	Increasing level of technology	Growing at the interpersonal level; nominal risk of failure to use technology due to a lack of know-how.

Given this, information management and knowledge for social innovation can be compared to a traditional model of economic-technological innovation, as shown in Table 1.¹²

Self-management model that combines volunteering with professional services The volunteer work of highly trained professionals in some cases turned into job opportunities for consulting services. In these cases, professionals voluntarily devoted various percentages of their salaries to support the project activities in ENREDOMINO. These operating expenses subsidised income, electricity, rent and materials production. The system is open, free and contributions are made voluntarily, building trust among the team of professionals involved.

Conclusions

Bolivia has a weak digital culture because of low internet penetration levels. In 2011 a penetration rate of 1.2% was reported, which is equivalent to twelve people in 1,000 having an internet connection at home. A country with such low levels of digital inclusion must promote causes and advocate with the support of traditional media (TV, radio and newspapers), interpersonal communication (conferences, courses, workshops) and strategic alliances with institutions and individuals involved in the field of ICTs. In this context, it also reduces the possibilities of social organisation and resistance in cyberspace.

According to the National Institute of Statistics, in 2008 it was estimated that about 26% of the population accessed the internet via public access points (telecenters and cybercafés) and household connections. In April 2010, ENREDOMINO research on internet use among teenagers in the city of La Paz showed that all teenagers interviewed know how to search for information on the internet; seven out of ten

are distracted in their search navigation by pop-ups or hyperlinks; and that all are only aware of the search engines Google, Yahoo or Windows Live. Seven out of ten accepted unknown contacts on social networks, and three out of ten follow up casual online encounters in real life. In no cases were there explicit references about searching for information geared to the practice of their own human rights. It was found that the internet also reproduces old patterns of human rights violations, which affect three main population groups: young people, women and families.

There are two events which have highlighted the quiet work of ENREDOMINO activists: a) the WikiLeaks case and b) the design of a new regulatory model for ICTs in Bolivia. Both of these events were widely reported in the media and sensitised the Bolivian population to the importance of the internet and human rights.

Action steps

- Replace digital literacy with education in a human rights approach to technology and knowledge. Encourage the production of interactive digital content, strengthening gender rights in the region using the *filMóvil* methodology licensed under Creative Commons.
- Coordinate interventions that offer short-term, high-impact structural support, and which involve actions for strengthening social innovation.
- Broaden the base of actors who interact through converging media, such as internet activists, bloggers, TV presenters, students, opinion leaders and print journalists. All of these actors need to share in urban interventions and social innovation.
- Develop strategies that synchronise governmental policy with public strategy.
- Explore the potential of mobile telephony to promote human rights in the information society. ■

¹² Based on Morales, A. (2009) Social Innovation: An area of interest for social services, *Ekain*, June.

In the year of the Arab uprisings **GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2011** investigates how governments and internet and mobile phone companies are trying to restrict freedom online – and how citizens are responding to this using the very same technologies.

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