

**“GREGORIA APAZA” WOMEN’S CENTER  
INTERCULTURAL FOCUS AND COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION TO  
ELIMINATE GENDER VIOLENCE. AN EXPERIENCE FROM  
THE EL ALTO MUNICIPALITY**

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**1. The situation and its context:**

1.1 Territory information:

- El Alto is the capital of the fourth section of the province of Murillo in the department of La Paz in Bolivia.
- Located at 4,100 meters above sea level, with a total land area of 8,194 hectares
- It is a predominantly urban municipality, divided into seven urban districts and one rural district, and there are four health districts.

1.2 Population information:

- El Alto's population consists of over 700,000 inhabitants; it is currently the third largest municipality in the country.
- 87.4% of the total population is urban, and 12.6% is rural.
- The population growth registered between censuses taken (1976-1992) reached an annual level of 9.2%, the highest in the country.
- The female population is 51% of the total.
- The municipality has a very young population, with 62% under the age of 25 years.

1.3 Poverty:

- IDH of 0.55, which places El Alto among the poorest. 73% of its population lives in poverty.
- Maternal mortality at a rate of 390 per 100,000 live births.
- Child mortality at a rate of 66 per 1,000 live births.
- Average schooling of five years. 12.7% of the population above six years of age does not have any level of schooling.
- Illiteracy rate of 11.8%.
- PIB 488.

1.4 Gender-based gaps in education:

	Women	Men
Illiteracy	18.9%	4.4%
No level of schooling	17.2%	8.15%
Presence in middle-level education	39%	60.8%
Presence in university education	35.2%	64.8%

### 1.5 Cultural characteristics:

- Predominantly migrant population. 43% of Aymara origin (one of the largest ethnic groups in Bolivia). 15% are migrants under the age of five years.
- Cultural syncretism, expressed religiously and in daily living, based on the Andean culture and the urban Chola culture.
- The couple relationship constitutes the nucleus of traditional Andean society; and as in other native cultures, being a woman is linked with being a mother.
- There are ideal criteria expressing the complementary nature of gender. In practice masculine is linked to authority and feminine to obedience.

### 1.6 Policies and public administration:

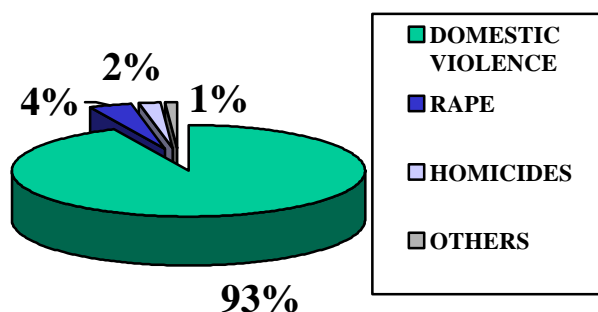
- Administration is decentralized.
- Legal framework for popular participation, at the local level.
- The entity for defining gender policy is a high-level office within the executive branch.
- With regard to the legal/normative framework, specifically in relation to domestic violence, Bolivia has experienced an important step forward with Law 1674 against Domestic or Family Violence (enacted in 1995) and its corresponding Regulations (1998) which establish State policy regarding acts that constitute violence in the family and refer to their prevention and services to address them. These legal norms have led to sector-based norms for addressing the problem, for the health sector and for police.

### 1.7 Problem:

At the national as well as local levels, there is evidence of gender violence that crosses over economic, social, political, legal, moral, ideological, psychological, sexual and corporal spheres—specifically, domestic violence, the most crude and generalized expression of violence against women. This form of violence is linked to deeply-rooted structures in the construction of gender and culture in Bolivia, and is present in the daily lives of women in the city of El Alto, hindering the integral development of their potential, and infringing on their human rights.

It has been demonstrated that the home is the primary scenario for this mistreatment:

**NATIONAL REPORT ON GENDER VIOLENCE**  
**Cases reported 1994-1998<sup>1</sup>**



Due to insufficient politicization of the problem of violence in the home—which culturally is considered to be normal—violent behaviors persist within relationships between men and women in their first-level social network, the family.

Although the Law against Domestic Violence went into effect five years ago, it is still in a phase of relative implementation. The delay in establishing its respective regulations (three years after it was enacted) has undoubtedly had an impact on its partial implementation by the government personnel involved: administrators of

<sup>1</sup> Coordinating Office on Women (Coordinadora de la Mujer). Informe Nal. Sobre violencia de género contra las mujeres (National Report on gender violence against women), 1999, La Paz, Bolivia.

justice, the public prosecutor's office, police and other sectors such as health and legal-psychological services, and also community actors. Efforts have been made to overcome this problem through sector-based norms, but resistance to the law's implementation continues to be evident.

## 2. Importance and implications

Despite advances in social policies for women, we continue to witness the persistence of discrimination and inequality, the limited exercise of their rights, and cases of domestic violence, the latter of which are being denounced more frequently.

The home is the primary scenario of mistreatment toward women. In 2,493 complaints filed between July 1992 and June 1993 (before the Law against Domestic Violence was enacted), 92.5% of the acts of aggression were committed by men.<sup>2</sup>

The results from a study on the perceptions of the El Alto population point to the insufficient visibility of the different forms of domestic violence; the lack of awareness of the law punishing such violence; and the need for the following actions: to contribute toward improving couple relationships and dialogue in the family, to promote timely denouncing of violence and comprehensive, adequate implementation of Law 1674 and its respective regulations by all the operational sectors in their corresponding roles; to provide integrated, high-quality services to victims; and to promote the community's participation through cooperative networks. An important element that emerges is communication in line with sociocultural reality, to facilitate dissemination of information and enhance the service provider-receiver relationship.

The limited vision of the causes of domestic violence and the need for an integrated approach to services, added to the limited efforts in prevention, are all factors impeding an attack on its structural causes and the definition of integral solutions in which the various sectors contribute their particular functions, acknowledging the complementary nature among their various functions. It is evident that although these elements are included in the norms, there is a difference between what is stated in norms and the reality at the local level. This is intensified by the fact that municipal authorities do not have precise information nor an awareness of the problem, and they do not have adequate operational capacity to assume their responsibilities stipulated in public policies for preventing and addressing this problem—which include providing direct services through Integral Legal Services established by law. And thus up to now, attention to the area of legal and psychological services has remained in the sphere of activity of other groups (nongovernmental organizations).

The lack of consistency in the way information is registered and managed by the various sectors providing services makes it impossible to have a clear picture of the problem at the local level and a more integral vision.

## 3. Causes

- Because of the persistence of cultural patterns—both traditional and urban—that reinforce gender relationships in which women are subordinated to men, women living in the city of El Alto experience inequality and violence on an everyday basis in all their social networks, and primarily in the family.
- There is progress in terms of the establishment of legal norms with reference to domestic violence. However, the delay in the implementation of regulations for these norms, plus the limited knowledge of those responsible for carrying them out and the insufficient allocation of budgetary resources all lead to problems in the implementation of these norms.

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<sup>2</sup> Office of Gender Concerns (Subsecretaría de Asuntos de Género). Las cifras de la violencia: violencia doméstica registrada en El Alto (Statistics of violence: domestic violence registered in El Alto), 1994, La Paz, Bolivia.

- As illustrated by the community's lack of knowledge for taking effective actions in detecting and preventing domestic violence, and women's lack of information on the laws and rights protecting them and their inability to access the mechanisms and procedures that would allow them to exercise and demand respect for their rights, social participation in evaluating and monitoring policies is nonexistent or at best, weak.
- The progress represented by the declaration of domestic violence as a public health problem and the establishment of norms for the health sector clarifies the responsibilities assigned to this sector by Law 1674. However, in practice—just as in the case of other sectors involved in implementing norms and providing services—incompatible criteria are used in interpreting the norms and there is discomfort in being linked to judicial actions, hindering effective implementation of norms in terms of detection, registering and certification of cases of domestic violence (the latter is an extremely important achievement granting legal validity without the need for a forensic certificate in the case of less severe injuries).

#### 4. Alternatives

##### 4.1 The experience of the "Gregoria Apaza" Women's Center (*Centro de Promoción de la Mujer Gregoria Apaza*)

###### 4.1.1 INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK:

The "Gregoria Apaza" Women's Center is a nonprofit institution created in 1983 and operating in the city of El Alto. Its mission is centered on seeking a transformation in power relationships that are unfair, unequal and based on subordination of women, and on empowering women within their political and economic organizations and their social networks, in the framework of local and national development based on equal opportunities for women and men.

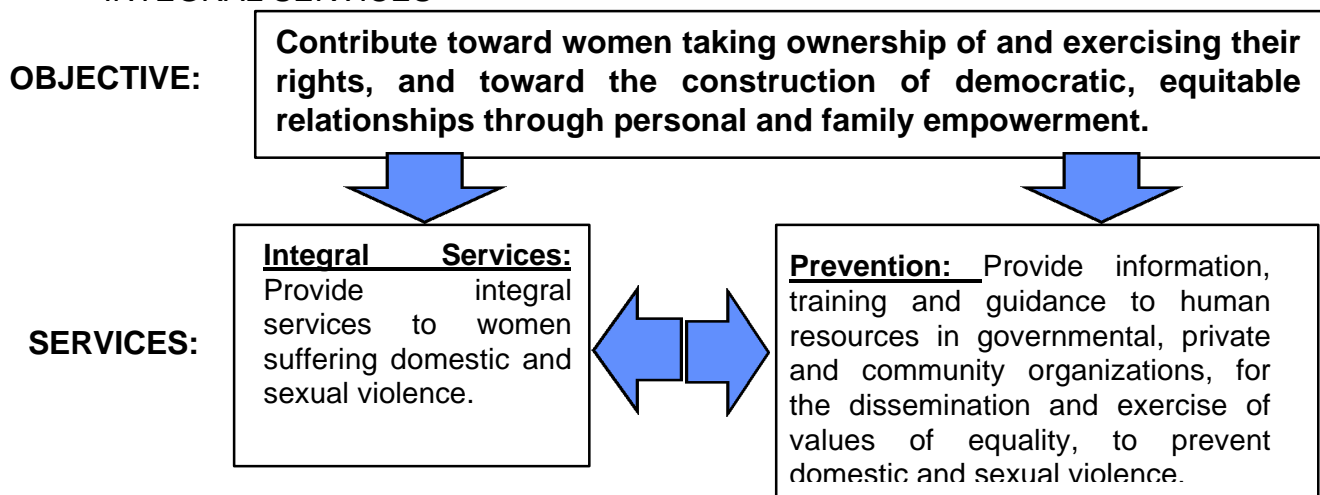
###### 4.1.2 FOCUS OF APPROACH:

Integral intervention is carried out within a framework of human rights and an intercultural focus, through three programs, each aimed at an area for empowering women:

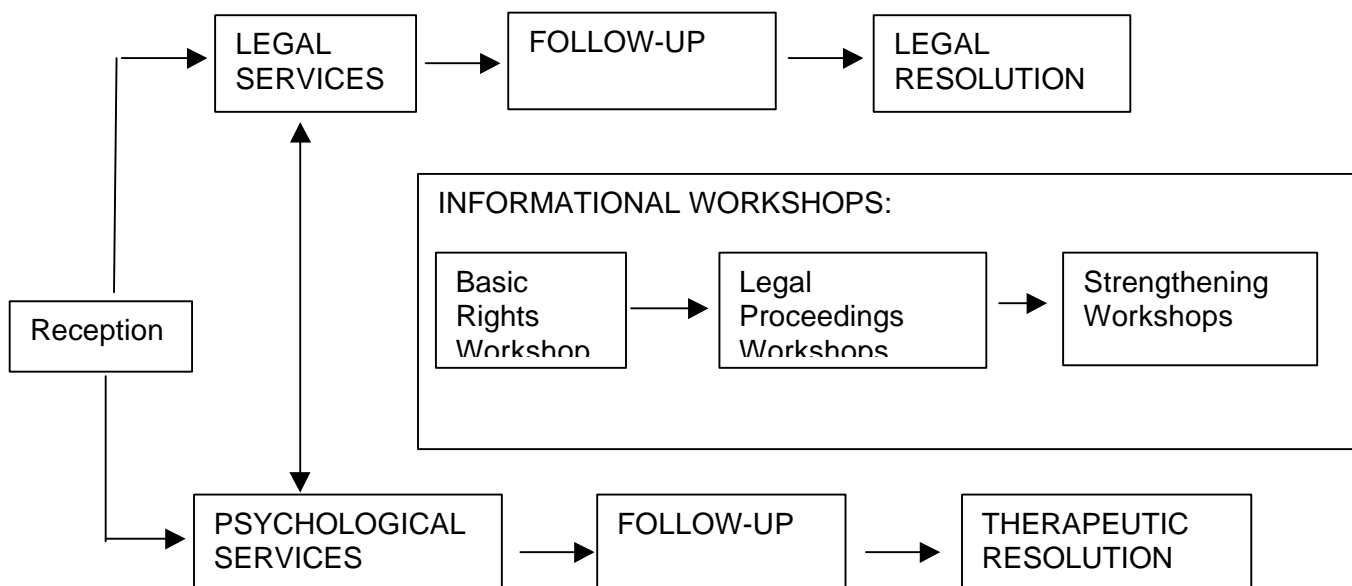
- Local Advocacy → sociopolitical empowerment → training and guidance for women's leadership.
- Technical Business Training → economic empowerment → training and consultation for women to become small business owners.
- Personal-Family Enhancement → personal-family empowerment addressing and preventing domestic violence

#### PERSONAL AND FAMILY EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM

##### INTEGRAL SERVICES

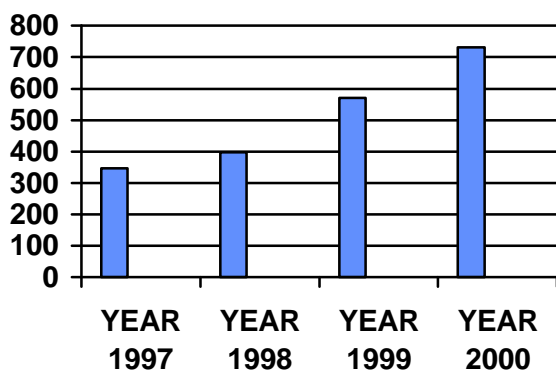


**FLOW OF SERVICES:**



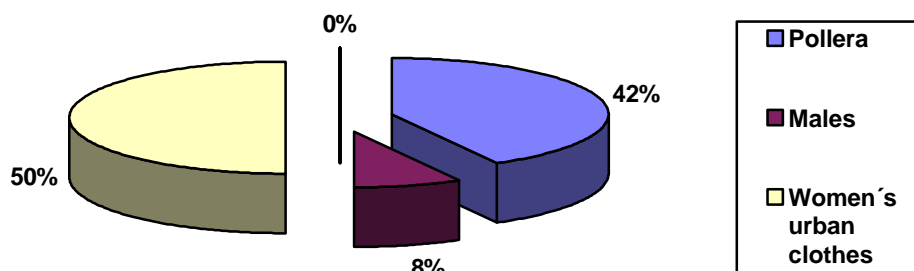
We provide integrated services within a framework of human rights and an intercultural focus, and based on personal-family empowerment of young and adult women, promoting their self-determination through processes of taking ownership of their rights, beginning with information on their basic rights, on legal proceedings (legal literacy), and on enhancing their self-esteem, with information on alternatives they can choose in order to resolve their current or potential situation of violence. In this way women can take control of their own lives and their family relationships, within their cultural identity and assuming elements linked to their current urban reality.

➤ **NEW CASES FOR WHICH SERVICES WERE PROVIDED:**



This graph illustrates the growth in the demand for services, primarily beginning with the forming of the Interinstitutional Network (at the end of 1998).

➤ **POPULATION SERVED, ACCORDING TO ETHNIC-CULTURAL ORIGIN (as indicated by clothes worn):**



\* "Pollera" refers to the traditional garment worn by women of Aymara and Quechua origin.

It is worth mentioning here that many women have adopted urban wear as part of their adaptation to urban, modern customs, seeking to overcome discrimination against persons of Aymara and Quechua origin, primarily visible in the providing of services.

#### 4.1.2.1 PREVENTION:

##### ➤ STRATEGIES:

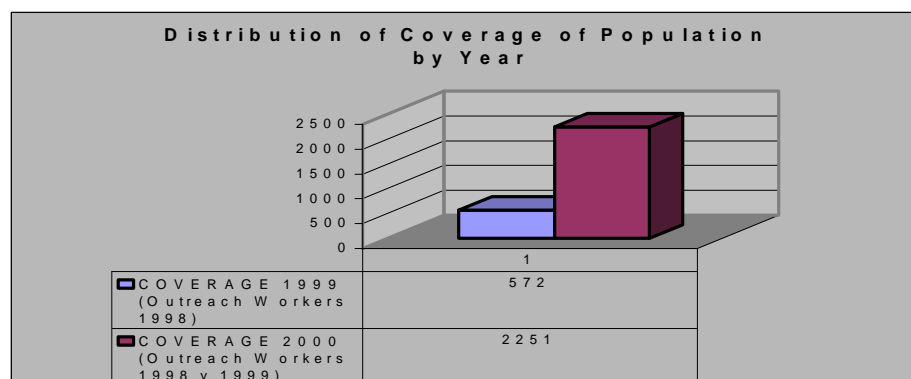
- Literacy education for women, with contents developed around human rights and sexual and reproductive rights.
- Training and Guidance for service-providers: in health, police, judicial, and legal psychological sectors.
- Training of Outreach Workers in the areas of laws and rights: community agents, community leaders, community workers, and facilitators linked to women's and men's groups.

This last strategy is the primary strategy for prevention, aimed at developing abilities and tools for providing information and guidance and preventing violence against women, leading to a more extensive impact through a cascade effect.

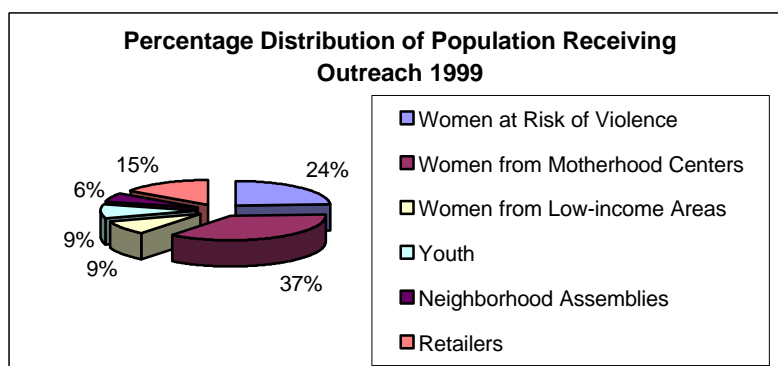
This training involves 72 theoretical-practical hours, with educational methodology and support developed according to the sociocultural characteristics of the population, on which Outreach Workers in the areas of Laws and Rights will base their process of replicating this training.

##### □ EFFECTS ACHIEVED:

The number of people benefiting from the efforts of Outreach Workers in Laws and Rights during 1998 and 1999 reveals the validity of this strategy of providing information as the basis for prevention.



The following graph illustrates the characteristics of the population benefiting from Outreach efforts:

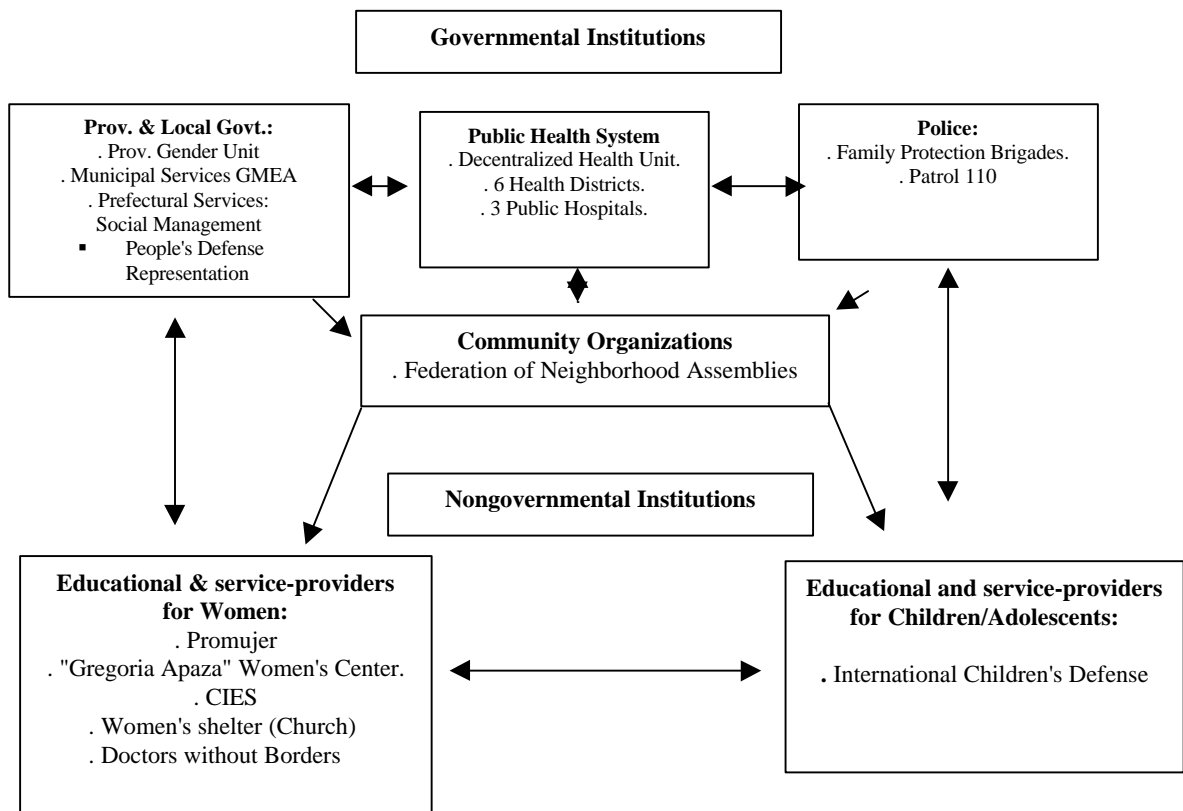


Using the language corresponding to each group, 30% of the replicated workshops were conducted in indigenous languages, 46% in only Spanish, and 24% bilingual.

## 4.2 The experience of the Network for the Prevention of and Services for Domestic Violence (*Red de Prevención y Atención de la Violencia Intrafamiliar*)

### 4.2.1 BACKGROUND / FORMING OF THE NETWORK:

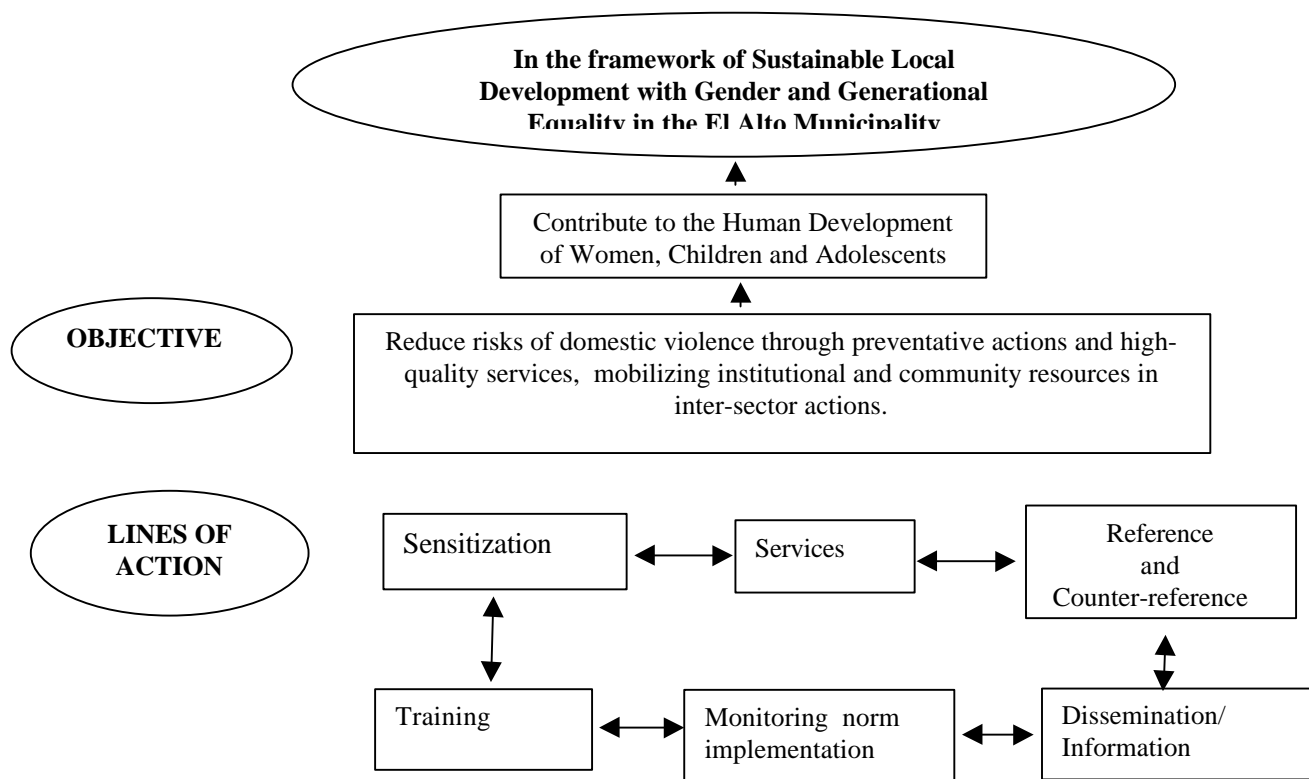
In September of 1998, a number of public and private institutions in the city of El Alto were convoked by the Office of Gender, Generational and Family Concerns and the Department of Health which urged the forming and coordination of a Network (similar to three pilot experiences carried out in other smaller municipalities). As an expression of the interest in joining efforts, the Network for the Prevention of and Services for Domestic Violence was formed in the city of El Alto, composed of governmental, nongovernmental and community institutions:



### 4.2.2 STRUCTURE / OBJECTIVES / LINES OF ACTION:

The Network's leadership is elected on a biennial basis among member institutions. It was presided over by the NGO "Gregoria Apaza" Women's Center during the first two years. It is currently presided over by the Municipal Health Department which is facilitating its institutionalization within the municipal government. The Network is organized operationally by commissions that develop and carry out annual operational plans through specified lines of actions, mobilizing the technical, financial and human resources of the member organizations/institutions.

Joint efforts are carried out to study the number of persons benefiting from the work of member institutions. Results are consolidated and more information is obtained in relation to the cases of domestic violence reported.



#### 4.2.3 RESULTS:

After nearly two years of functioning, the Network has demonstrated that it is possible to develop synergy among governmental, nongovernmental and community institutions.

ACTS OF VIOLENCE KNOWN TO INSTITUTIONS FORMING THE NETWORK YEAR 1999	
	15,371
❖ WOMEN	10,128 / 98,670 population of women over 19 years
❖ CHILDREN / ADOLESCENTS	3,023 / 211,800 population under 19 years
❖ MEN	74 / 95,022 population of men
❖ NOT IDENTIFIED	2,146 (data absent in records)

The health sector registered 297 acts of violence, 36% of which were channeled to other sectors (police, legal, judicial) after free medical services were provided (these figures correspond to those registered in the National System of Health Information).

The reference and counter-reference system is functioning on a partial basis, and a study is currently underway to identify the problems impeding better functioning of this system, with the aim of overcoming these difficulties.

#### 4.2.4 ACHIEVEMENTS:

- The Network's high degree of consolidation; identification of the intervention by each member institution.
- Municipal Ordinance declaring 1999 as the year of the fight against domestic violence; recognition of the Network as an instrument in the fight against domestic violence, and the recommendation to Neighborhood Assemblies to incorporate the fight against domestic violence in their plan of activities.

- Incorporation of training for community leaders as prevention (detection and denouncement) agents in "POA Municipal 99."
- Publishing of training material for Neighborhood Assemblies and health personnel.
- Agreement with the Federation of Neighborhood Assemblies to work on operational aspects of the Municipal Ordinance.
- Systematization of the Network's 1999 cases, and development of the Directory of member institutions.
- Massive mobilizations of women, youth, men and representatives of community organizations for No Violence day (November 25).
- Development and financing of training projects for the health sector: neighborhood leaders, health defenders and local decision-makers.
- Incorporation of the topic in training for community agents in other health strategies (Maternal-child health promotional neighborhood project).
- Greater commitment from health decision-makers.
- Constituted as the operational support entity for the Municipal Program for the Prevention of and Services for Domestic Violence.

#### 4.2.5 DIFFICULTIES:

- Persistence of cultural patterns in government personnel and in the overall community in which domestic violence is considered to be something natural.
- Inadequate quality of services. One of the problems identified is communication, in relation to the use of language to permit the population to obtain a greater amount of information, in accordance with their sociocultural reality.
- Subjectivity of government personnel that interferes with their performance in the framework of nondiscrimination and gender equality.
- Registering of information that is not uniform in general nor specific aspects.
- Lack of continuity by participants in self-help groups.
- Rotation of personnel in the health sector, the Municipal Government, and police units (Family Protection Brigades).
- Weak and/or nonexistent follow-up to processes and resolution of cases attended to.

#### 5. Conclusions and recommendations:

- The existence of norms in Bolivia is a great step forward in viewing domestic violence as part of gender and health public policies. Nevertheless, the functioning of norms is subject to local conditions, and to institutional and subjective limitations of the actors involved, and this leads to a relative implementation of the norms. We can therefore conclude that norms alone are not enough, that local policies are determinant in their implementation, and that strategies for overcoming these limitations impeding appropriate implementation must be contemplated.
- Domestic violence requires an integrated approach, and therefore health, judicial, police and other service sectors (legal-psychological) should find points of coincidence to facilitate providing integral treatment.
- Information, in terms of its registry, processing and circulation, is an important element for adequate decision-making, for recognition of the scope of the problem at the local level, for distinguishing complementary aspects, and for learning about the victim's "critical route." Integrated information on domestic violence with regard to services provided helps us to improve the flow of services and recognize when cases have been effectively resolved.
- It is important to create links among governmental, nongovernmental and community organizations, obtaining commitments from each one of them, systematizing experiences, and accepting the challenge of providing integrated, high-quality services.
- Preventing domestic violence constitutes an important focus of action that directly involves the community.

- Recognition of the population's cultural identity is a condition for proposing strategies that will not inhibit cultural expression, but will rather permit questioning and reflection regarding certain patterns that impede equality and the full exercise of rights.
- A determining factor in service-providing is communication—the use of appropriate language to approach migrant populations. It is the element that establishes the link between what is modern and what is traditional.
- The subjectivity of actors involved in providing services constantly intervenes in their performance. Medical personnel play a role in the social definition of being a woman, and this conception orients his/her relationship with women in situations of violence who are seeking assistance.
- The integrated service model of the "Gregoria Apaza" Women's Center—which includes, as an important element, assisting women in taking ownership of their own rights, while cultural particularities of the population are also considered—can be replicated in other settings, taking specific sociocultural characteristics into account.
- The El Alto Network for the Prevention of and Services for Domestic Violence is an experience that concretely implements inter-sector coordination in participation, information and attention.