

► Fighting Violence against Women in Latin America



Letters from Women

Healing words that also become political statements

«He would insult me, saying, “You’re old, don’t put on those clothes” He said that I was ugly, that I was too skinny, that he was sick of me and would never marry me – horrible things that ruined my self-confidence – so that at age 33 I felt old and ugly.»

(Anonymous)

► Counterparts

Launched in Quito (Ecuador) and extended to Guayaquil (Ecuador) and Peru, “Letters of Women” is an awareness campaign to prevent gender-based violence. The campaign was developed as part of the UN Secretary-General’s global campaign “UNETE para poner fin a la violencia contra la mujer” - “UNITE to end violence against women”.

The effort involved a number of partners: in Quito, the campaign was a joint effort between UN Women, the City of Quito and the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) in Ecuador. In Peru, GIZ partnered again with UN Women as well as with the UN Population Fund and the Peruvian Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations. The project in Peru has also formed strategic alliances with an additional 40 government, civil society, and private sector actors. Finally, in Guayaquil, GIZ partnered with the City government and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

► Cooperation

The campaign has an innovative approach. It breaks through the silence surrounding gender violence, pushing the topic into public awareness, highlighting the myriad ways that women must endure violence every day.

“Cartas de Mujeres” has a simple strategy: mostly women and children, but also men, tell their stories by writing letters in workshops and in public spaces where mailboxes and writing desks have been set up: in shopping plazas, museums, schools, universities, business, parks and women’s organizations. The diverse locations are intended to attract the largest possible number of people to write, draw, and make videos and ‘virtual’ letters to call for an end to violence against women.

The letters represent the voices of women, men and children calling on public officials to tackle the issue of violence against women and to increase funding for its prevention and treatment. At the end of the campaign, the letters are organized and delivered to the relevant authorities.

The campaign started in Quito on November 25, 2011, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Because of the outstanding success in Quito, the campaign was launched in Lima and Guayaquil exactly one year later.

► Lessons Learned and Impact

An important part of the campaign was that it was not limited to written letters: drawings



and “spoken letters” were also encouraged to illicit participation of those not familiar with writing and of those who simply felt more comfortable expressing themselves drawing or speaking.

The letters serve two main purposes, contributing both to a change in socio-cultural behavior patterns based on gender violence and also to a collective condemnation of this violence. The media campaigns on radio and television, coupled with digital media such as art exhibitions, are crucial in changing public opinion.

The campaign was remarkable for the diverse actors it brought together— for the first time, all sectors of society were engaged in fighting violence against women: government, civil society, the private sector, academia, the media and international agencies. The wide array of participants allowed the campaign to target different audiences with different formats.

Although the campaign focuses on a social evil, it is extremely important to convey a positive and encouraging message, noting the potential for the community to get involved and to provide support for affected women. As a result, fun events are also used to reinforce positive messages and to raise the self-esteem of affected women while reminding the public that only the aggressors – not the victims – are responsible.

The launch events at the three sites involved national and international stars, generating huge crowds to write the first letters of the campaigns.

The campaign also involves museum exhibits that document the letters, videos and photographs in an innovative, novel and artistic way. This format allows a more intimate and profound experience, physically connecting the viewer to violence against women, an issue – even though disturb-

ingly close and common – we often refuse to acknowledge.

The impacts of the campaign have been large: in Quito, 11,000 letters were collected from 146 workshops, 178 mailboxes, and through a website. Meanwhile, in Lima and elsewhere in Peru, well over 10,000 letters have been collected from more than 330 activities, including workshops, public writing booths, urban public actions, lectures and other events. In Peru 265 mailboxes were placed in strategic public areas and at allied organizations.

Beyond the numbers, the letter writing itself has become a liberating and therapeutic for hundreds of women, and may even signify a turning point for breaking the cycle of violence.

Furthermore, in Quito, the letters led city officials to issue a new municipal ordinance to eliminate domestic violence. Compared to the previous regulations, the new ordinance includes more precise definitions and has a stronger focus on the security of women in public spaces. Organizers hope that the campaigns in Peru and Guayaquil similarly lead to new regulations or to improving those already in effect.

Additional Note: Plan International was inspired by the campaign and will implement a similar campaign - “Letters of Girls” - beginning on the International Day of the Girl.

In Bolivia, the town of Bermejo will also replicate the campaign.

► Sources

- Database of Letters from Women in the city of Quito, Ecuador
- Database of Letters from Women, Peru
- Database of Letters from Women, Guayaquil



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