



SUCCESS STORY

Citizens Track Electoral Process

Bolivians monitor electoral process, increase transparency



Photo: Fernando Rollano

Anastasio Achacollo, right, a local leader from Lagunillas, acted as a citizen observer in Bolivia's recent elections.

In partnership with local civil society organizations, USAID promotes participation and information-sharing in democratic processes in Bolivia.

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Lagunillas, an Aymara community located 180 miles from Oruro in the middle of Bolivia's Altiplano plateau, is home to a rural population whose main business is farming, including growing beans and potatoes and raising llama and sheep. In recent years, migration to other regions because of the area's poor economy has reduced Lagunillas' population from 5,000 to 1,300. The Achacollo family remained in Lagunillas. Anastasio, the head of the household, is a well-respected Mallku, or local leader. He and his wife, Josefina, have raised a family of nine children.

Anastasio was chosen by his community to act as an observer in the December 2005 elections. He is one of 2,700 Bolivian citizens trained to observe and monitor the election process by a USAID-supported initiative led by a network of civil society organizations. Together with other men and women from urban and rural areas, Anastasio participated to ensure the transparency and validity of the election process, which occurred in 1,400 voting sites throughout the country.

Citizens were trained to observe and monitor the process on election day, from polling station opening to closing. They watched as voters cast ballots and observed reporting procedures. At the end of the day, observers submitted their reports on the process to the headquarters of the civil society network, where they were reviewed and consolidated. The project garnered praise from national and international organizations, including the Organization of American States. This organization, which coordinated a simultaneous monitoring process by international observers, labeled the project a "best practice" that could be used as a model for other countries.

Conscientious citizens like Anastasio Achacollo worked hard on election day to ensure fair, transparent elections and broader participation. USAID continues to help Bolivians in their efforts to strengthen civil society, and future plans include assisting the civil society network in monitoring the upcoming Constituent Assembly and national vote on regional autonomy. With help from USAID, Anastasio Achacollo, the Mallku of Lagunillas, may have yet another opportunity to demonstrate the importance of citizen participation in consolidating Bolivia's democracy.