



**Gender equality and cultural knowledge:
A vision of the value of the Bolivian contribution to the EU-LAC cooperation**
*by Patricia Bustamante**

The Training and Service Centre for the Integration of Women (CECASEM) is an organisation for rural development and gender equality. It works in a rural area where no other NGOs operate because it is remote and not easily accessible. These villages do not have many resources in the way of educating people about the rights of women and about where machismo is still prevalent. There is much work to be done regarding gender equality and the leadership and empowerment of women, in order to help them achieve this equality. The help and cooperation of the European Union would be very important, because without resources, support and an exchange of knowledge, it is not possible to carry out this work. The CECASEM is committed to helping as many people as possible, in places where there is no current support, therefore a collaboration would be important in order to be able to succeed in the work that we undertake. There also exist many other Bolivian NGOs that work in the same field and we agree to work together towards gender equality in Bolivia. The existing support still does not extend much to the remote villages far from the city, and the support that does extend there is not always adapted. Consequently, there is a considerable lack of assistance in the development of indigenous villages and their inhabitants. An important step towards equality is the strengthening of groups of women who have political influence.

I firmly believe that in Latin America and the Caribbean, we must work according to four important points:

- Political participation of women
- Sexual and reproductive health
- The economical empowerment of women
- The eradication of all kinds of violence against women

This cooperation could come to fruition in two ways. The first way would be to provide funds to support projects that we currently have in our organisation, in order to help them advance, and to ensure their continuation. The second way would involve providing support through human resources, in order to carry out an exchange of knowledge and to support the projects and mission of the organisation. Timely support could also be given for activities and to help with the collaborations, for example. From my perspective as Director, I believe that in the open calls for projects, the funds would have to be channelled towards the NGOs that are truly dedicated to and passionate about their



mission and the topic of gender equality. I also think that it is very important to really get to know the NGOs that apply for funds, in order to familiarise ourselves with their work and better understand their situation. A written project could be good but concretely speaking, when we realise the reality on the ground, there is still work to be done but which cannot be undertaken, given the limited funds with which NGOs operate.

Bolivia can contribute to this cooperation between the two regions with the experience that it possesses of working with many different indigenous groups and knowing how to adapt to and respect the culture of each group in question. This ability to adapt to and respect the culture of each group is fundamental in every part of the world. I believe that this could be beneficial for the European Union, which has a great cultural diversity. The resilience in Bolivia is strong; they can learn from their experiences and their self-reconstruction. The indigenous villages know this well. The mutual learning is also strong; in Bolivia, there are 37 indigenous villages, all possessing different skills, cultures and lifestyles.

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