

Women's Rights to Land and Housing in Peru

by Luz Maria Sanchez, ARC•PEACE Gender Affairs Officer, Member of the Huairou Commission

When the 1993 Peruvian Constitution was abolished formulations about the right to housing women demanded an amendment in order to strengthen their right to access land and housing. They wanted to be involved in programs for local economic development.

Adequate housing means more than acquiring land tenure. It should include right to water and sewerage, access to a safe housing, recreation areas and to live without pollution.

Change of law not enough

In March 2003 a special rapporteur from the UN visited Peru. After that the law was changed to include formulations about equal opportunities for women and men. A National Plan was worked out to increase the share of women with land tenancy to 20 per cent in 2010. The law is of general character. Therefore it needs to be concretized into specific laws and rules that can be implemented in practice.

Statistics show that more than 20 percent of the Peruvian households are female-headed. They live in absolute poverty (less than 1 USD per day) twice as often as other households. Because of their duties to take care of children they are forced to accept low salaries. They often have lower education and less qualified jobs than men. Almost half of these households have earth floors and lack water supply and sewerage.



Luz Maria Sanchez of ARC•PEACE Peru addressing a meeting of women.

A promising program was stopped

The municipality of Ventanilla wanted to take the new laws seriously. The municipality decided to support a program for incomes generation among unemployed people (women and men). The program included construction of prefabricated concrete elements and training in seismic constructions. It also included training in housing rights.

The municipality allocated USD 200,000 for the housing program, being the result of the participatory budget process of Ventanilla. The program was also supposed to

receive subsidies from the State. This did not materialize, however. The state required a bank guarantee, which was unrealistic. Therefore the program was stopped before start.

This example shows that the Peruvian change of law has not solved the problem of housing rights. Women continue to be discriminated.



Community mapping in Chocos, Peru.

Women learn to defend their rights

During the last years women have learnt how to adopt strategies to mobilise themselves and to negotiate with the authorities to solve their land and housing problems. Through training programs they can learn how to carry out community mapping and to execute house construction. Thanks to the support of the Huairou Commission they have learnt how to defend their rights.

Women from different communities in Lima are carrying out concrete actions. They have also learnt how to use the media in order to make themselves visible. Our experience shows that the men have understood that they benefit from the women being organised, for instance to stop evictions and to organise demonstrations for modification of the laws.

Internationally women need to take part of exchange programs in order to share experiences and learn from each other. Coordinated strategies are needed to bring women's concerns into planning and management of cities. Such strategies must address issue of violence and the provision of infrastructure and services within slum upgrading programmes. They should also promote their capacity to mitigate natural disasters and to be more efficient in post disaster reconstruction.

According to international laws adequate housing is a human right. All states should ensure that women have equal rights to land, housing, property and secure tenure.

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