

Case Peru (by FOS, member of Be-cause Health)

Introduction on the case:

In Peru, abortion is only legal in case of a threat to the life or health of the woman. Abortion for any other reason, including rape or serious fetal abnormalities, is penalized with prison terms anywhere from three months to two years. Nevertheless, it is estimated that around 352000 unsafe abortions take place every year in Peru. An estimated 17,600 of them wanted to abort because their pregnancies were the product of rape.

Promsex, a feminist NGO and partner of FOS (member of Be-cause Health), is one of Peru's leading organizations in the debate on legalization of abortion. The slogan "She Decides" didn't sound new to them, since they're one of the coalition partners of the *Déjala Decidir* (Spanish for "Let her Decide") campaign, that pleads for decriminalization of abortion in case of rape, for several years now.

The campaign had two sub-goals:

- 1) increase public awareness and stimulate public debate on the topic
- 2) Collect at least 60,000 signatures to put a law proposal in parliamentary commissions, and get them voted.

The campaign succeeded in different ways:

- In one year, they raised more than 100,000 signatures
- Law proposal has been discussed in two parliamentary commissions
- Facebook: campaign page with over 64,000 likes
- Widespread support for the campaign has moved public opinion in favor of greater rights for women and increased public awareness of sexual violence.
- More than 35 organizations (also trade unions, student organizations, LGBTI organizations, ...) joined the campaign.

BUT...

- The law proposal was filed in two commissions, so never got voted in plenary. At the political level, they feel there's little progress possible.
- Strong opposition of the anti-choice movements and the Catholic Church. An anti-campaign "*déjalo vivir*" (Spanish for "let him live") was launched, "*Marchas por la vida*" were held.
- The anti-choice movement has strong incidence within Fuerza Popular (fujimoristas), the conservative party with a majority in parliament.
- A law proposal called "Cunas Salvadoras" did pass parliamentary commissions and will be voted in plenary soon. The idea is that mothers can leave their unwanted babies for adoption. Proponents of this proposal link it directly to abortion, calling it a proposal "against abortion".

Women's rights organizations in Peru are looking for new strategies to continue their fight for the right to safe abortion. Should they try to progress in steps, for example by campaigning for decriminalization of abortion in case of incest?

Conclusions of the discussion

- Strategies: try to find support from as many organizations and groups as possible. Try to get doctors, social workers etc. on board. Also religious organizations that are more progressive
- Stay activist and optimist. Believe in change is key.
- Connection to She Decides: at the national level, try to connect to She Decides and make sure that the topic "abortion" isn't put aside.
- In general, there's a strong need for a mentality shift. Even in countries where abortion laws are more progressive, like in Bolivia, a lot of problems with the implementation remain. So even if progress at the political level goes very slow or seems to be unlikely in the short run, awareness raising campaigns should never stop, if you can achieve a shift in the public opinion, politicians will eventually follow.
- Learn from experiences in other countries, for example where abortion and adoption debates were linked to each other.