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## Studies confirm Chemonics' role in empowering Bolivian citizens



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La Paz, Bolivia — Two independent studies confirm that Chemonics International's work in Bolivia has had positive effects on participatory democracy and local governance, and suggest that the firm's approach has significant potential for nationwide application.

The studies, by the University of Pittsburgh and a Swiss nongovernmental organization (NGO), found that local citizen participation in municipalities where Chemonics is working is higher than it is nationally. They found that residents in those municipalities believe that they have greater influence on government decision-making and prefer community-based problem solving to solutions that are handed down by the central government. The studies also show that women are more active in the municipalities where Chemonics is working than elsewhere in Bolivia.

These are the results of the Democratic Decentralization and Citizen Participation project, an activity funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development and led by Chemonics since 1995. The project supports Bolivia's Popular Participation Law, a new framework for municipal empowerment in which 20 percent of national tax revenues is targeted for activities at the local level.

With municipalities now able to implement public projects and services for the first time, Chemonics has been able to help build better communication between the National Congress and citizens, promote civic education, create voter leagues, and sponsor debate among national and municipal candidates, said Ivo Kraljevic, Chemonics' project supervisor for the program.

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The studies suggest this work has paid off. The more rigorous of the two, conducted by Dr. **Mitch Seligson** of the University of Pittsburgh, is based on a 1998 national sample of 2,877 respondents and two smaller surveys of nine municipalities in which Chemonics works. The study shows that Bolivians in those municipalities, including women, attend local meetings and participate in community-development activities more often than the national average. It also indicates that these citizens feel they have more influence over community decisionmaking, and have greater confidence in the judicial system.

The findings of the Swiss NGO survey mirror the University of Pittsburgh findings. Both are "an exciting validation of the project's democracy-building model and methodologies, and clearly show an impact on the way Bolivians view their own roles in building a more democratic society," Kraljevic said.