

January 2010 Newsletter

Spotlight on Denitza Andjelic, ProMujer, La Paz, Bolivia

On December 6, the Bolivian people re-elected Evo Morales as president. The news wasn't surprising. Everyone had been expecting that Morales would win; the questions centered more on what percentage of the vote it would be exactly. More or less than the 53% he achieved in 2005? Support for him came in at 62% for the country as a whole, and in some areas it was as high as 78%! Although the outcome was not surprising, it has been exciting to be in Bolivia in the weeks leading up to the elections nonetheless, given how little coverage there was in the international media. Huge rallies for Morales and MAS (Morales's party) took place in La Paz and El Alto (La Paz's neighbor). You understand just how much support this man has, when you see hundreds and hundreds of people file through the streets – women with babies on their backs holding the hands of children, youths walking together in groups, older men limping along. Morales's support is highest among the indigenous population (which makes up around 65% of Bolivia's population). As the first indigenous president in Bolivia, he is seen as "one of the people", someone who will protect and fight for indigenous people's rights, inclusion, and improvements in their standard-of-living. Morales started several cash payment programs during his last term - to children in public schools, to the elderly, and to pregnant women, and promises more; in addition, his government claims to have made significant investments in public works - building health clinics, roads, and water connections.

What is the connection between Evo Morales and my fellowship at Pro Mujer you may ask? Well, for one Pro Mujer also serves Bolivia's under-privileged, poor, and indigenous population, its women more specifically – providing access to microloans, basic health services,

and business and health education at its myriad of focal centers around the country. Similarly to Morales's goal to empower the indigenous people and improve their economic and social well-being,...

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OF Nacional 2009
 Denitza with her colleagues at Pro Mujer Bolivia's national office in La Paz.

...so too Pro Mujer aims to empower Bolivia's women to achieve their potential as equal participants in the country's economy and society and in so doing help them improve their standard-of-living and those of their families. Lastly, Pro Mujer as an organization started out from El Alto, one of Morales's strongholds, and if you ever say anything disparaging about Morales, most Pro Mujer clients will scold you.

These are just some of the things I have learned so far from my 4.5-month stay in Bolivia and my work with Pro Mujer. While I have been working mostly in the office in La Paz, I had



La Granja: Team-work and rivalry during a team-building event that Denitza helped organize.

the opportunity to see Pro Mujer "in action" during my first weeks on the job. I visited a number of focal centers, where clients (mostly women) get together in groups, known as community associations, to receive microloans, make loan payments, access health care, and receive basic business and health training. The Pro Mujer microcredit methodology is based on the solidarity model – women choose to form a communal association with other women that they know well and trust because jointly they are responsible for the repayment of each member's loan. If one member can-

not make a given payment, the other members of the group pitch in to cover the amount. It was wonderful to observe these women in their meetings and during their training sessions, especially the groups that have been with Pro Mujer for over 10-15 years. I could immediately notice the difference; the veteran clients were more self-assured and outspoken; they managed bigger loans and discussed their businesses; they seemed truly empowered by the services that Pro Mujer had provided them. I hope to be able to return to the focal centers once I revert to working full-time in the area of Health at the start of January.

Since those first few weeks, I have been in charge of mapping out the organization's administrative and accounting processes in the national office in La Paz, identifying areas for improvement and efficiency gains, and revising/developing manuals to capture those processes to ensure standardization and efficiency across the board. Pro Mujer's two main product areas (if I can call them that) are 1) microcredit and 2) health care. The microcredit side of the organization is coming under regulation in 2010 and many i's need to be dotted and t's crossed before that transition happens. It has been eye-opening to be part of this process. And although I may not want to work full-time in Administration or Accounting, it has been invaluable to learn more about what happens behind the scenes at a microfinance organization. After all, this structure is the backbone that makes the provision of loans and health care possible to those disadvantaged women in El Alto and around the country. As I mentioned above, I am set to transition to the area of Health in January, and my work plan foresees one or two additional rotations after that. This way I get to experience and contribute to different facets of the organization – something I am grateful for, since I have wanted to explore the inner workings of a microfinance organization for a few years now.

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Outside of work, I have had the opportunity to travel every 2-3 weekends. Bolivia is a fascinating place to explore – so diverse and full of life. From 18,000ft mountain peaks to steamy tropical jungle and everything in between (except sea), Bolivia offers plenty of opportunities for exploration. My favorite location so far in Bolivia has to be the Salar de Uyuni – the vast expanse of white salt desert which makes you think that you have landed on a different planet.

I look forward to exploring more of Bolivia and the microfinance world at Pro Mujer in the months ahead!



Salar de Uyuni:
Goofing off in
the Salar de
Uyuni



Takesi: During a
two-day trek of
one of Bolivia's
Inca trails, Takesi.

Spotlight on Sasha Sadrai, Endeavor Chile, Puerto Varas, Chile

When I first broke the news to my family that I was going to be a PiLA Fellow for the coming year, they didn't exactly respond with the same screeching enthusiasm I experienced the day I found out. Family members who weren't frustrated with me for running off to another country instead of starting med school (and I'm not sure where they got that idea—I haven't take a biology class since 9th grade) were simply confused as to what I would be doing.

"So...you're going to build houses"

"No"

"Teach English?"

"No. I'm working for a non-profit called Endeavor that works with entrepreneurs."

"So what is Endeavor?"

"We are a non-profit organization that helps high-impact entrepreneurs reach their full potential by giving them access to a network of business leaders."

"Yes, but what does that mean?"

I realized I could continue relaying bits of information I learned from the Endeavor website or the annual impact report I swiped from Claire's office but, in all honesty, I wasn't exactly sure what the next year would have in store for me.

I had no idea, for example, that in coming to work for Endeavor Chile's first attempt at a regional satellite office in the Patagonian town of Puerto Varas that I would be swept into the familial, frenzied work environment which would have me trying my hand at just about everything. Since being here I have interviewed local entrepreneurs to see if they fit the Endeavor profile, begged resistant coworkers to adapt a new, web-based record-keeping system (sorry, but memories just don't cut it), and traveled to the end of the world to give a presentation to a group of skeptical entrepreneurs who inhabited Punta Arenas.

Still, I wasn't quite sure what exactly I was doing here. I felt as if Endeavor was doing something important in empowering the region's entrepreneurs and, yes, I believed that this was a powerful way to help convert a "developing" country into a "developed" one, but to be a true convert, I felt as though I needed proof.

At the beginning of December, in Middle-of-Nowhere, Chile, I got it!

For almost my entire first half of the year with Endeavor Chile, we had been working towards some mystical grand event in which entrepreneurs and Endeavor staff members from all over the world were invited to come to the Patagonia area for an International Selection Panel. Essentially, this panel was a 3-day culmination in our long search for the newest set of Endeavor Entrepreneurs. It is here where candidates would come to receive the final 'yes' or 'no' of whether or not they were 'high potential' enough to receive the help we could provide.

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A coaching session with one of Endeavor's advisors (2nd from left) coaching our candidates (far right and far left).



To me, the whole event sounded like a series of theses defenses: each candidate talked to a panel of 2 experts at a time, defending their business from the barrage of questions and critiques thrown at them from the heavy-hitting businessmen sitting across from them.

It's not surprising, then, that as an office, we were nervous. It felt like we were about to throw a bunch of country mice to the sharks. These were not the confident, networking salesman we may think of when we picture a business school graduate. They were hard-working, humble men whose first instinct was to *undersell* themselves and their business.

I spent so much time worrying about whether one candidate would sound too defensive or the whether the other would be able to answer to questions about his yearly income tax that I was not at all prepared for what those three days would actually hold. Everyone there, from the candidates to seasoned veterans, believed that they had the best job in the world. Everyone you sat next to at dinner or even out by the pool, was excited to be a part of this event and be surrounded by driven, passionate and prodigal self-starters. It was incredibly inspiring for me to be around such an energetic bunch, but more than myself, it was amazing to see the effect the panel had on our candidates. If they were, indeed, thrown to the sharks, they certainly didn't get eaten. After some initial nerves, they shook off their inhibitions and became swept away by the infectious entrepreneurial spirit buzzing around us. As I accompanied them through the different workshops, meals and interviews, I watched as their faces lit up while discussing best practices with a peer, or sat next to a heavy-hitting consultant from the States who ended up talking excitedly about how best to expand to foreign markets. Their worlds were being opened and the humble attitude that once prevented them from daring to think they could expand was shed as they realized that they were fully capable of competing with countries and companies they once thought too formidable to be challenged. Witnessing the light bulbs go off in their heads made all the frantic work beforehand completely worth it. Needless to say, when I went home for Christmas, I was able to proudly describe what exactly my organization did in Chile.

Afterword: In the end, the country mice we brought to the Panel passed with flying colors. One is now expanding to South Africa and Peru while the other plans on dominating Latin America. The following is the picture taken right after we told them that they passed the panel and were now Endeavor Entrepreneurs.



Letter from the Editor

Dear Friends of PiLA,

After interviewing almost 90 candidates, we have chosen 37 as Finalists and hope to place about 20 as Fellows, perhaps a few more. Interviewing these candidates was a rewarding experience, one which opened my eyes, and those of the rest of our interviewers, to the impressive passions, interests, and commitments to Latin America expressed by these young people at the start of their careers.

Many thanks to our interviewers—a great mix of past fellows and board members: Adam Abelson, Peter Johnson, Stanley Stein, Abby Williams, Jason Diggs, Elyse Kovalsky, Dan Pastor, Allen Taylor, Katrina Rogachevsky, Andy Brown, Chris Breen, David Atkinson, Nathan Fabian, Christina Lara, and Ann Davis. Thanks to all of them, we were able to have several interviewing hubs, in addition to those held here in Princeton—DC, San Francisco, Boston, San Diego, and Chicago. PiLA is lucky to have such staunch supporters!

Many of you have already received our yearly appeal and I hope that you will consider making a donation this year. We would like to offer fellowships opportunities to as many of the qualified candidates that we can and thank you, in advance, for whatever you do to help us achieve this goal. Our fellows bring a lot to the organizations with which they work and enable them to accomplish more with their resources than they would otherwise be able. As Alan Farcas, director of Endeavor Chile, told our Allen Taylor: "PiLA is the best program that Endeavor has!" We want to make sure that all of our partners can continue to host fellows.

I hope that when the February newsletter is ready for print, we will have a list for you of this year's fellows. I look forward to sharing that with you soon.

Best wishes,



Claire Brown '94
Executive Director

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