GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2013

Women's rights, gender and ICTs

Global Information Society Watch

2013

APC   *Hivos*

Global Information Society Watch 2013

Red Científica Peruana
and Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú
Jorge Bossio and Juan Fernando Bossio
www.rcp.net.pe and www.pucp.edu.pe

Introduction

Violence against women is a violation of human rights, and an expression of power, domination and control over their bodies and lives. Such violence restricts the enjoyment of rights such as equality, freedom, autonomy and integrity. This violence includes rape and abduction, femicide, domestic violence, gendered bullying and sexual harassment in the street, and can be physical and psychological. The internet, as a social phenomenon, has been an arena for violence against women. This includes psychological violence (such as cyber bullying) or the active encouragement of physical violence (with hate pages, for example). But the internet is also being used to combat violence against women by different actors, such as civil society organisations (CSOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), governments and academics. This report presents experiences of using the internet to combat violence against women in Peru.

Policy and political background

According to Lisbeth Guillén, from the organisation Manuela Ramos and an expert on political and civic participation, in recent years Peru has made many advances in formal aspects related with the recognition of the rights of women. One example is the approval of the National Plan for Gender Equality 2012-2017. Recent developments in this plan include the recognition of the right of inheritance for unmarried couples and the announcement that political candidates will be alternated by gender when represented on the candidates list. However, she said, it is necessary to see if these provisions become national government policies and whether or not institutions actually implement the policies, especially in rural areas where the state has no presence and where inequality and exclusion are most often seen.

In addition to the abovementioned policy, there is the law dealing with equal opportunity between men and women passed in 2007, which is showing significant progress in its recent implementation, and the recognition of the crime of femicide and the current debate over hate crimes. However, according to PROMSEX lawyer Brenda Alvarez, the government is ignoring setting targets related to sexual and reproductive rights, which is one of the main concerns about the implementation of gender equality policies.

While the use of ICTs has grown amongst young women in recent years, reaching 35% of the female population over six years of age,[1] its potential for changes related to new opportunities for women in society is not yet clear, especially in rural areas. According to Andrea García from the project Nuevas Trenzas ("New Braids"),[2] mobile phones are presented as a tool that provides an opportunity to help young women break their isolation – but the evidence for this is not yet sufficient.

Getting support through using social networks

Colectivo P.U.T.A.S. was formed in June 2011 to organise the Marcha de las Putas de Lima (Lima's "SlutWalk"),[3] maybe the first Peruvian demonstration against sexual harassment in the street. One of the members of the group was informed about the SlutWalk movement by a friend in Buenos Aires. She then created a Facebook page[4] and invited several friends; soon the word of mouth (through email and Facebook chat) took effect and approximately 20 women met. They constituted themselves as a collective with responsibilities for communication, logistics and finance, in order to organise the Lima SlutWalk. A Facebook event page[5] was used to call for participation in the SlutWalk (in November 2011) and their Twitter account was a trending topic two days before the demonstration. Around 500 people marched for more than 50 blocks in the demonstration. After that, activity slowed down for a while and some members left the group, but four months later they started to work again. They asked for

---

1   www.inei.gob.pe
2   www.nuevastrenzas.org/es
3   en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SlutWalk
4   www.facebook.com/Colectivo.PUTAS
5   www.facebook.com/events/191506574254232

volunteers on Facebook and used a Google form to get their information. With new volunteers they organised the second SlutWalk.

After this they formed Apala,[6] a CSO which aims to work on issues to do with violence against women. This initiative appears to be needed because they received lots of complaints from women. Now they are looking to be able to provide psychological, social and/or legal support. They also use Twitter for sharing information.[7] Their main achievement is that they allow women's issues to be heard – not only through demonstrations but also at media and academic meetings. This includes the problem of being harassed by men in public places. They have met with some resistance from Lima's local government and from the Women's Secretariat, which tracks what happens on social networks. They have also been criticised because of their name ("puta" means prostitute or slut, but the acronym P.U.T.A.S. also stands for the Spanish phrase "for an authentic transformation of society"). They are subject to the negative comments of trolls and several aggressive debates have taken place on Facebook.

Paremos el Acoso Callejero (Stop Street Sexual Harassment) is an action-research project funded by the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP) and directed by lecturer Elizabeth Vallejo. The issue of sexual harassment in the street had not been addressed by either academics or political groups before the project concept was presented in 2011. It had not even been considered a problem by most of society or the media, except when violent harassment occurred. The project started in February 2012 as a virtual observatory drawing on the participation of several volunteers who are students in different departments at PUCP. Their objective was to expose the problem. In order to do this they set up a blog[8] to explain issues around sexual harassment in the street, and a Facebook page[9] which they use as a communication platform.

The Facebook page has proven to be their most useful tool; according to Vallejo, "Everything goes on Facebook." They also use Twitter,[10] mostly to let followers know what is going on during events, and a mapping tool[11] which allows people to record incidents of harassment. This mapping tool – which was launched in February 2013 – has been successful in getting hundreds of posts.

However, the initiative has faced two major problems: the first is trolling on its Facebook page, and the other is that they cannot do anything more with reports of harassment than provide some psychological support and recommend passing on the report to a limited number of institutions, such as the women's police, DEMUNAS[12] or Warmi Wasi.[13]

They have still achieved a lot in just over a year, however. The issue is now reported on by the media, and Vallejo and other project members have participated in several TV and radio shows. One of the objectives is to raise awareness in the academic community, and several students are writing their dissertations about the issue. Now there is statistical data on sexual harassment in the street,[14] and this is having some political impact on Lima's local government. The project has also achieved some results by using social networks to criticise the actions of private companies that implicitly justify or promote sexual harassment. For example, they forced a retraction from TV Channel 2 for a show on "flirtatious remarks"[15] and changes to the design of a men's toilet in a restaurant.[16] Given that this successful project is now coming to its end, they are also considering building a civil society organisation in order to continue to pursue the issue.

Justicia para Jhinna (Justice for Jhinna) is a campaign by CHS Alternativa,[17] an NGO that works against human trafficking. It has been using the internet for dissemination since 2009, first through a website and then a YouTube channel.[18] In 2007, Jhinna Pinchi was lured into working at a men's club (the nightclub *La Noche*) in Piura, where she was forced to stay and work, letting clients buy her beer and acting as a prostitute. She was able to escape and report the business and its owner for her abduction in September 2009. During the two years that she was held in captivity, she was drugged and raped. She also fell pregnant and gave birth there. Most victims of human trafficking cannot escape and those who escape do not report the crime. This makes Jhinna's case unique – and was the reason she has been supported by CHS since they learned about her plight in November 2009. There had

---

6 www.facebook.com/AsociacionApala

7 twitter.com/ApalaPeru

8 paremoselacosocallejero.wordpress.com

9 www.facebook.com/paremoselacosocallejero

10 twitter.com/noacosocalles

11 datea.pe/#/mapeo/49

12 Municipal Ombudsman for Children and Adolescents

13 A municipal programme that helps women, children and older adults affected by domestic, sexual and/or gender-based violence. Warmi Wasi means "Women's House" in Quechua.

14 puntoedu.pucp.edu.pe/noticias/encuesta-acoso-sexual-callejero

15 paremoselacosocallejero.wordpress.com/nosotros/que-estamos-haciendo

16 www.facebook.com/paremoselacosocallejero/posts/271659566277859

17 www.chsalternativo.org

18 www.youtube.com/user/tratadepersonas

been delays in the judicial response to the case, which motivated CHS to work on a campaign to get public attention. The campaign started with a documentary called *La Noche de Jhinna* (Jhinna's Night),[19] first shown in September 2011. Through this they received media attention which helped to secure protection for Jhinna through a programme run by the Public Prosecutor's Office. In April 2012, CHS started the second phase of the campaign by opening a Facebook page[20] and getting the support of personalities such as politicians, journalists and artists. They use Facebook as their main platform for sharing information, which also serves as a gateway to access other campaign content, such as newspaper articles, photos of famous supporters (in meme style) or news of the case.

The first-level courts declared the bar owner not guilty. Because of this the campaign is looking for social, media and political support to continue fighting in the higher courts. CHS considers the media attention, the public demonstrations in Piura, and the fact that the case was covered by international channels such as CNN as their main achievements. Jhinna continues living under protection – meaning that she is not free – while she waits for justice to be served.

Another organisation, PROMSEX, has relied mainly on social networks and web platforms for campaigns and political action and to disseminate research and publications on women's sexual rights. Social media is considered very important for them to join forces with other groups. For example, advocacy for the approval of a therapeutic abortion protocol was carried out with a Facebook fan page called PATA (Therapeutic Abortion Protocol Now)[21] that was developed with other feminist organisations. It attracted more than 20,000 fans in a month of campaigning. In the same vein, they are developing another initiative called "Let Her Decide",[22] a campaign aimed at the decriminalisation of abortion in cases of rape, and seeking signatures to put a bill before Congress. In this case two additional tools have also been used: Twitter and YouTube. However, Facebook is the most effective channel so far. This campaign requires the collection of signatures from the public in the street. Social networking is helping PROMSEX to join forces with different activist groups and students who come into contact with the initiative and offer their support.

Conclusions

These experiences show that the internet – especially internet-based social networking applications – have been a useful tool to raise awareness and achieve visibility for women's rights campaigns, and also express the voices of different groups against violence against women. These tools have proven to be useful when promoting participation in street demonstrations or other kinds of events; it is obvious that clicking on the "Going" button on a Facebook event page does not mean that the person will actually attend, and organisers of events should be aware of this, but social networks help with providing information about events and motivating people to attend them.

The internet and social networks have been the main tools used in positioning sexual harassment in the street as an issue in the media and in academia in Peru. The problem of this form of harassment is now known, thanks to the many testimonies, videos, opinions and discussions launched through social networks.

Online geographic data on crimes is shared through social networks and is useful to prevent people from going to unsafe places. Mobile phones have been used as a tool for defence when used with an internet-connected camera to publicly expose the faces and behaviour of the aggressors.

Now the public, politicians, media and public servants, among others, can easily get information on cases of violence against women, not because of the number of cases but because they are available on the internet. The information is created by interested actors and shared through social networks. This helps to increase consciousness about the problem, but does not necessarily help to avoid the problem.

Changing public policy is far more difficult than getting support through social media. For this to happen, more media support – including social media support – is necessary. Accurate statistical data and contacts with policy makers are also needed. Problems should be heard in the traditional media and policy makers should receive the right information at the right moment.

The recent commitment made by the president of the Council of Ministers to initiate actions to combat street harassment is proof of how this campaign

---

19   www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_
     embedded&v=1b_29QohSbg

20   www.facebook.com/JusticiaparaJhinna

21   www.facebook.com/protocoloabortoterapeutico.peru

22   www.facebook.com/dejaladecidir

and the issues raised have come to be taken into account by the government.

Action steps

- Track the actions that the government plans to implement to combat sexual harassment in the street.

- Complement virtual campaigns with actions in public spaces where incidents occur more frequently. For example, there is an initiative to place banners pointing to buildings under construction saying "Here We Respect Women".

- It is necessary to develop the capacity to connect to the web regardless of the access tools available to the public. Access-friendly forms used to register complaints should be developed. But it is also necessary to develop the capacity to register cases using electronic tools – and *ad hoc* legislation reforms to support this should be made.

- Relevant public institutions such as the Women's Ministry, local governments and the police should take into consideration the information collected through social networks or GIS tools to inform their policies and actions. ▪