



IPEDEHP of Peru holds first National **Project Citizen Showcase**

On March 15, 2008, students gathered in Lima to propose changes in public policy to improve their communities. The event called La Feria Nacional de Proyecto Ciudadano (National **Project Citizen Showcase**), was organized by Civitas partners, Instituto Peruano para Educacion en Derechos y la Paz and held at the Colegio Abraham Lincoln, with the support of Civitas Latin America and the United States Embassy in Lima. In addition, a delegation of Civitas Latin America partners from Florida and Panama attended the showcase.

The National Showcase highlighted fifteen student teams working to impact their communities with public policy proposals and represented elementary, secondary and vocational schools, public and private schools, and rural and urban areas. At the showcase, over sixty students offered their work with the passion and eloquence of veteran representatives. The variety of their projects highlighted the changing landscape of Peruvian life. Some group projects proposed changes in environmental, health, and school policies. Other tackled controversial issues like gangs, bullying, and sexual violence, surprisingly relevant issues for youth, even in rural parts of the country.



One of the most memorable presentations came from a team of all-female students proposing to put an end to sexual violence against minors at Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes in Ayacucho. When asked if anyone opposed their proposal against sexual violence, one earnest member said, "Some teachers at our schools were against us doing this project. They feared they would be exposed by our work." Fortunately, they succeeded and several teachers were reprimanded for their abuses. The girls attribute their

project's success to their own teacher's confidence and support. Their teacher could not attend the event, but they thanked her for sharing the program with them at the end of their presentation.

From Lima, a group of students challenged private food vendors at their school with more healthy choices for lunch. Students found support in local ordinances, Supreme Court decisions, the Peruvian Constitution, and even international declarations. The administration supported the students' positions and even adopted their action plan, which at the time of the showcase had already begun to make an impact.

“We want our voice to be heard and we want our actions to be seen,” said one of the youngest participants, a ten-year old fourth grader from Colegio San Francisco in Cajamarca.

At the closing ceremony, Civitas Panama Vice President, Carmen de Carcamo offered her congratulations to the students and teachers. “You have the future of our nations in your hands,” she told the teachers, “and the future looks much brighter today.” Other speakers were “moved and inspired” by the students and said they were “celebrating a historic day in Peruvian democracy.”

Peru’s first National Project Citizen Showcase demonstrated considerable growth of the program and commitment from local organizations. Since initiation of the Civitas partnership in 2004, the Project Citizen program has expanded to include seven regions and one province. This expansion has been possible with the commitment of IPEDEHP, and other local partners, to the program and the support of the Civitas partners in Florida.



In July of 2007, Florida partners from FLREA and MDCPS trained a group of twenty four teachers at the first Project Citizen Training of Trainers. Of those participating teachers, six brought student teams to the first National Project Citizen Showcase. The showcase also demonstrated the growing commitment from the US Embassy in Lima. The Embassy has historically supported implementation of Project Citizen in the private Bi-national Schools, but offered a private grant to IPEDEHP for the showcase. Embassy officials indicated the support was made possible by the growing visibility of the program and Undersecretary Hughes’ visit in August. IPEDEHP will continue to build on the US Embassy’s financial and diplomatic support, establishing a base for sustainable and lasting impact of the Project Citizen program, even after the Civitas Latin America funds conclude.



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