

Enabling communication

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Most disabled people in Nicaragua are poor, but because of gender discrimination life presents even more problems for the country's 200,000 disabled women. Felicity Manson, OWA's Central America Programme Officer, reports on the work of an organisation using the media to change perceptions.

Until recently, the Nicaraguan Government's health programmes addressing disabilities tended to focus on clinical matters. Then OWA partner Solidez set up a new project working with disabled women to address the social aspects of their disabilities. In a country where discrimination against women is a particular problem, the projects seeks to end disabled women's isolation with a strategy based on organisation and empowerment.

One of Solidez's main objectives is awareness raising among the Nicaraguan public. The awareness raising programme is designed to address negative attitudes towards people with disabilities, and to improve people's knowledge about the current situation and disabled people's rights. Solidez does this through local, regional and national media and by distributing its own bulletin.

Solidez found radio particularly effective for raising awareness about women with disabilities because it is a very accessible medium - and one that does not require literacy. Solidez has trained women from its various self-help groups in radio production, transmission, interviewing techniques and script writing, and they are now producing their own radio programmes.

The radio coordinators work closely with the other self-help groups members to define the content of the programmes.

The programmes are mostly magazine shows and phone-ins covering topics such as disabled people's rights, the work of other organisation addressing disabilities, and health issues. They have been used to rally support for the specific needs of the different groups, as well as for highlighting the groups' achievements and activities.

Solidez has broadcast its message through daily radio slots on two national radio programmes, "Radio Informaciones" and "Radio Sucesos". It has also produced a five-minute video that has be transmitted 30 times on national TV. Several local self-help groups have

arranged for local cable channels to show the video on a regular basis. Solidez has not carried out formal monitoring to measure the impact of the programmes, but many women report changes in attitudes in members of the local population and within local organisations.

Solidez is a great example of a civil organisation harnessing the local media to further its aims. However, awareness raising is only one aspect of its work. The organisation has also set up 14 local self-help groups in Managua, provincial capitals and rural areas around the country, and has more than 1350 members. For the future, its ongoing aims include strengthening the organisation capacity of its self-help groups and providing credit for women to set up small business ventures.