

## Teresa Calderón's story

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From this office we support the National Zero Malnutrition Programme, which is currently a priority for the Bolivian Government. We work on the promotion of health, empowering people and strengthening the relationship of the local governments and health services with the communities. We also develop tools and provide technical assistance to our partners to implement methods and initiatives aiming to improve the quality of health care for Bolivian families, especially mothers and children.

One day I traveled to visit a health centre in the remote community of Ucumaci, where vicuñas\* wander free in the lonely arid countryside, there is no public transport and nothing green for miles.

Their health centre, however, seems like something from another world. One enters through a solarium; several bottles of water on the rooftop reveal the SODIS method to obtain safe drinking water. The hall is warm and bright. It has two large aquariums, happy little goldfish in one, and water turtles in the other. And even more... an interior garden with blooming red roses!

The health team is led by a young doctor. "This destination seemed like a punishment; my first months here I was completely discouraged, but one day I realized this was not only my job, but also my life so I'd better make the best of it," he said when I first met him.

This health centre in the middle of the desert doesn't even have a speck of dust or a pack of pills out of place. A true intercultural health service is provided here. At the delivery room an awayo\*\* sits next to the cold delivery table. The bathrooms have whiter than white latrines. Women are allowed to

decide the position in which they want to give birth, and whether they wish to do it in their husbands' presence or with their clothes on. "Because multiculturalism means not accepting constraints, but giving each other the best of each of us instead," the doctor says.

On the walls there are huge hand-crafted pictures with key information about the community and the services offered by the centre. "We adapted our working hours to people's schedules, so they trust and accept us. So does the municipal government," he says. "A few days after my arrival, they sent me to secure the centre's budget at a municipal meeting: 'We have important items, doctor, go defend them', a nurse told me... 'A dozen cutlery and a door knob!'. Now it's different, people recognize the centre's needs and each year we are entrusted with an increasing budget."

My visit ended with a shared lunch with the staff. We ate vegetables and eggs from their backyards. To finish the picture of this oasis, two guardian Chapis\*\*\* greeted me at the door with the same loving care that is perceived inside, and I left convinced that willpower can make roses grow in the desert.

UNICEF provided technical assistance, equipment and training to this centre's staff, as to many others. For my part, I was able to include them in the National Meeting on Local Health Management, which I organize every year, and to share this successful example with many Bolivian communities.

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\*The vicuña is a mammal close to the llama, rather shy, with fine beautiful fur, that lives untamed in small numbers for it was almost extinguished some years ago.

\*\*Awayo is the name of a very traditional textile. A square of colourful thick and resistant fabric used for many tasks, such as carrying babies on mother's backs, sitting, bedding, transporting personal belongings, and even giving birth.

\*\*\*Chapi or Chappy is the given name to a local kind of dog, no breed or pedigree; they are small, hairy and cute.



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