

My name is Julián Vargas Talavera and I'm the Innovation and Development Manager at Fundación IES in Bolivia. Thanks to the Ricardo Salinas Scholarship I was able to attend the 2015 ANDE Annual Conference.

IES Foundation is a development institution seeking to promote economic growth within Bolivia, through the generation of wealth and its proper distribution. We believe that the best way to do this is by supporting Bolivian companies that produce a high social impact and allow people to become the main actors of their own development. IES Foundation started in 2001, as project of PRODEM Foundation (one of the institutions that created BancoSOL, the first commercial micro-finance bank in the world) and became an independent Foundation in 2010. IES has been working in the impact investing space in Bolivia since 2001 (when we made our first equity investment).

Currently the Foundation has two main areas: the financial area manages our current portfolio and identifies new enterprises with high growing potential, carries on the due-diligence and recommends the investment to an independent committee. The second area works on capacity development projects for SGBs in Bolivia. We want to foster the creation of a business ecosystem that will allow Bolivia to have more and better enterprises. We also want to be a bridge that helps connect Bolivia (their entrepreneurs and local institutions) to the much bigger space of impact investing and SGB developing in the Latin American Region and the world.

This was the second time I could attend an ANDE Annual Conference (I was also there in 2014) and I'm very happy I could do it. Bolivia is a rather small country (we have a little more than 10 million inhabitants) and there are not many chances to talk with people working in the SGB Capacity Development sector. ANDE gives you the opportunity to connect with others and learn from them (both from their success and their mistakes) and, at the same time, share your experience. It also gives you a sense of belonging to a bigger community. It is a very inspirational place, it gives you a snapshot of what others are doing around the world and it allows seeing your own work from a different perspective. It is a place that allows you to think (and dream) about current (and future) projects and gives you an overview of where the sector is going and of what are the main challenges in it.

This year attending the conference was particularly important to me. We are in the middle of defining our strategy and objectives for the next five years and ANDE was the perfect place to get new ideas, feelings and contacts. I could talk to people doing things very similar from the ones we want to do in very different places (West Africa or India) and also to start a conversation with one of the managers of a global fund that is currently looking for investment opportunities in Bolivia. Also I was part of a very inspiring workshop about design thinking, which I plan to use now as a tool for designing our new projects.

It was a great experience and I'm thankful for the Scholarship that allowed me to be part of such a great conference.