

## Silver without a silver lining

Gold and silver have been desired for ages. And that desire has come at a huge price. Here's just one number: an estimated 8 million (!) people have died in the Potosi silver mines in present-day Bolivia since Spanish colonialists started mining silver there in 1546. That would come to 46 deaths per day every day for over four centuries.

These are appalling unimaginable figures and it should make us drastically rethink wearing or using anything silver. The problem is that this is not just a painful part of history. Today, silver mining is still a source of immense human suffering. Twenty years ago, Marianne Sebastien visited Potosi and she was shocked to find 12 children inhumanly enslaved at the bottom of the Cerro Rico mines in Potosi. She witnessed the death of a 14 years old child crushed under a tunnel that caved. She decided that she would dedicate her life energy to eradicating child labor in the mines of Potosi. As a result, *Voix Libres* was born as an international humanitarian association to offer alternatives to child labor in the mines.

In the past 20 years, *Voix Libres* has contributed a lot to ending human suffering in Potosi. The organization has reached one million beneficiaries covering a third of Bolivia. *Voix Libres* has contributed to the building of 18 villages for mistreated children of the mines. The organization has provided microcredit loans to 120,000 Bolivians and has helped grow some 20 businesses finding access for their products in overseas markets. Moreover, the organization is run by 400 Bolivian employees who are for the most part ex-beneficiaries of the program to help people escape extreme poverty and suffering.

The story of *Voix Libres* shows one very important fact: everyone can decide to change the world—and act and do so. Marianne Sebastien was not trained to do what she did. She saw what many of us see. She listened to her heart and she stepped in. Many lives go more wasted than necessary because people wait for the perfect moment to make the perfect contribution. And the reality is that the perfect moment may never come. But there is also suffering around the corner. There's always something anyone can do to make live better for someone. Ultimately, there is even a silver lining for the painful process of mining silver. *Jurriaan Kamp*

*More information: [www.voixlibres.org](http://www.voixlibres.org)*