

Economic Empowerment for Ecuadorian Women

Kalamazoo College

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July 1st, 2019-August 31st, 2019

Quito, Ecuador

Context

Women's empowerment is closely linked to peace. In October 2018 the United Nations released a study that claims that "meaningful economic participation by women significantly increases the success of peacebuilding initiatives".¹ Our goal is to promote peace by providing economic empowerment to Ecuadorian women living in the Sierra region. In Ecuador, Indigenous women face higher rates of poverty: 89% compared to 55% for non-indigenous women.² This disparity is propagated through challenges that are unique to indigenous communities. The communities are spread throughout the mountainous geography of the Sierra region, this combined with the lack of access to transportation leaves the communities at risk of social exclusion.

This social exclusion means that there are not many avenues of communication or great visibility within the communities. Therefore, many women do not have examples of other indigenous people who have used their cultural skillsets to be economically successful. Having those examples are important because they demonstrate the possibility of being economically prosperous while still preserving one's culture. The Ecuadorian economic structure is comprised of bureaucratic processes that alienate indigenous women. These processes are difficult to navigate if you do not have a thorough understanding of the intricacies of the system. These activities are centered in Quito which poses a challenge because it is expensive to get there, and little public transportation exists from indigenous communities to the city.

By helping to foster an economic and communal network, our hope is that we will mitigate their vulnerability to social exclusion. By investing in women's economic empowerment, we are helping to create a path towards gender equality, income stability, inclusive economic growth, and peace.

Through the process of developing this proposal, we collaborated extensively with local organizations that work with these issues, Ecumenical Church Loan Fund (ECLOF- a non-profit micro-financing foundation that provides low-income families with economic opportunities through micro-loans and financial training) and Fundación Desafío (a foundation that focuses on reproductive rights and furthering of gender equity for women in Ecuador). We worked with them in order to pinpoint what issues are most important for our program to address. It was imperative to us that we consulted with experts who have experience in these areas, as they have important contextual knowledge we do not possess. Their expertise will greatly increase the effectiveness of this Davis Project for Peace. While we are grateful for the help from our partnering foundations, the people who are best qualified to deal with issues that face indigenous women face are indigenous women themselves. Our project aims to act as a bridge between these women and the resources needed to catalyze economic change in their communities.

Objectives and Timeline

Our objective is to engage women in the Sierra region of Ecuador (a region with a high concentration of indigenous communities) in the Economic Empowerment for Ecuadorian Women project. We will partner with local foundations and experts to create a series of 6 empowerment seminars for 20-30 indigenous women recruited through ECLOF and Fundación Desafío's established client base.

For these same participants, our program will provide 6 tours of businesses that incorporate indigenous entrepreneurship in order to foster a women's economic and communal network. The project will take place in the Chimborazo and Cotopaxi provinces from July 1st, 2019 – August 31st, 2019.

As indigenous women, these individuals face challenges when engaging with the economy that other (male and non-indigenous) citizens do not; ethnic-racial discriminations are intertwined with male-female hierarchies. With poverty and rurality culminating in the lack of security of women's resources, this makes them even more invisible in the sphere of public policy.³ Therefore, their rights within the Ecuadorian system are consistently denied by the current economic structure. Through the series of seminars, we will support women's economic empowerment by providing them with the tools and resources necessary to overcome these barriers to access. The guest speakers selected (listed in the timeline) are experts in fields that address the aforementioned challenges program participants face when engaging with the economy. Two of the seminars will be based in Quito, as it is a city that hosts enormous indigenous economic activity. The entrepreneurship in Quito engages with the communities' specific cultural skill sets, customs, and resources. The other four seminars will be held in community centers throughout the regions where the program participants live.

We will tour 6 businesses centered around indigenous communities (listed below in timeline). We have carefully chosen businesses where indigenous women from the Sierra are finding great economic success. By touring

¹Facts and Figures: Peace and Security (n.d.) Retrieved January 12, 2019, from <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures>

² Gender and Ethnicity as Barriers for Development: Indigenous Women, Access to Resources in Ecuador with a Latin American Perspective (2014) Retrieved January 12, 2019, from <http://repositorio.flacsoandes.edu.ec/bitstream/10469/6542/1/RFLACSO-Eu5-01-Radcliffe.pdf>

³ Facts and Figures: Peace and Security (n.d.) Retrieved January 12, 2019, from <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures>

established organizations, the program will foster an economic chain of connections; our program participants will be able to engage with economically successful women who share their culture. These operations are proving that women from the Sierra region can utilize their specific cultural knowledge to their advantage while simultaneously being able to remain in their communities.

We will hold weekly community reflections with the women from the program. During these meetings, program participants will be able to talk about issues that are unique to their community. By providing spaces, meals, childcare, and transportation, we will help participants have access not only to the program, but also one another. These actions are designed to make community meetings as accessible as possible while promoting a peer support system.

Phase 1.	Recruit 20-30 indigenous women from the Sierra region (Cotopaxi and Chimborazo provinces) through ECLOF's established clients.
Phase 2.	Provide 6 educational seminars (Topic, Speaker, Location) 1. 'Tourism and Indigenous Communities'- David Lansdale: Quito 2. 'Women's Entrepreneurship'- Giselle Greene: Quito 3. 'Indigenous Communities and Agriculture'- Natalia Greene: Communities 4. 'Legal Advice for Bureaucratic Processes'- Karina Gabela: Communities 5. 'Microfinance and Agricultural Market Outreach'- ECLOF Representative: Communities 6. 'Women's Rights'- Virginia Gomez De la Torre: Communities
Phase 3.	Tour 6 established indigenous community-centered businesses 1. Superfoods: a local food movement sourcing agriculture from indigenous communities 2. IMPAQTO: workshops for entrepreneurs focused on social, and environmental impacts 3. Gatazo Zambrano: the community with the most micro-finance agricultural operations 4. Salinerito: Artisanal cheeses, and dry goods produced by an indigenous community 5. Otavalo Markets: Artisanal markets for primarily indigenous products 6. REMU Apparel: Upcycled apparel made by indigenous women

Impacts and Sustainability

By establishing connections and a curriculum, the Economic Empowerment for Ecuadorian Women project creates a sustainable structure that will allow partnering foundations to continue this work. Additionally, our partnering Ecuadorian foundations can use this program as a framework for future initiatives in their other locations.

We will evaluate the success of this project in two ways. First, 'empowerment surveys' will be conducted with participants before and after the program. The survey will gauge the women's confidence in their abilities, their sense of community support, and their interest in entrepreneurship. We expect to see growth in these areas. The increased interest and confidence of these women will have ripple effects through their communities as they integrate the program experiences into their daily lives. Second, the project will be evaluated by ECLOF's economic indicators using a system called Social Performance Management (SPM). SPM is a set of guidelines used to monitor social and financial change. It applies "30 quantitative and qualitative metrics to measure the degree of success of network members in reaching ECLOF's social mission".⁴ It is difficult to credit improvements in clients' lives due to a short-term intervention, therefore they implement a "graduation" system where they evaluate the changing poverty level of participants. The poverty level will be measured with the Poverty Probability Index (PPI), which measures participants' graduation through time. Using these statistics ECLOF will be able to monitor changes between participants in the Economic Empowerment for Ecuadorian Women program and compare them to clients who are not a part of the project. Women from our program will be provided with tools that help them overcome barriers, thereby expediting their economic success. ECLOF's data will serve as a measure of the effectiveness of this work and provide an empirical standing to continue the program.

About the Project Directors

Isabella Haney is a senior at Kalamazoo College, double majoring in Economics and Political Science. During her Junior year, she studied abroad in Quito, Ecuador. Isabella is passionate about gender equality and has dedicated her time to women's empowerment through programs such as K Team; a body-positive student organization that focuses on promoting positive self-image. Through this program, she has coordinated workshops with experts on positive psychology, embodied consent, and self-defense.

Gabriel Gabela is a visiting international student from Quito, Ecuador. He studies Business and Music Production and is currently a teaching assistant in the Spanish department at Kalamazoo College. Gabriel is interested in social entrepreneurship and is invested in the conservation of traditions and cultural identity through entrepreneurial incentives. As an active community member in Quito, he has many connections with business owners, guest speakers, and legal advisors, particularly with connections made through Universidad San Francisco de Quito.

⁴ User, S. (n.d.). What is SPM? Retrieved from <https://sptf.info/get-started/what-is-spm>