

Economic Empowerment For Ecuadorian Women  
Ecuador  
Kalamazoo College  
Isabella Haney and Gabriel Gabela

## Section I.

- Two-sentence summary of the goals of the project
  - The goal of this project was to promote peace by aiding Ecuadorian women in achieving economic independence. This was done through a series of empowerment seminars led by a local expert, and by helping to fund some of the women's business initiatives.
  
- Did you do any fundraising for the project
  - No additional funds were used or procured for this project.
  
- How did you come up with the idea for the project
  - Both project directors have a connection to Ecuador. Gabriel is from Quito, and Isabella studied abroad in Quito her Junior year of college. Collectively they believed that the number of funds and time this project provides could go further in Ecuador (versus the United States). The communities of women surrounding Quito had demonstrated higher levels of need, and Gabriel had numerous contacts that could aid the project.
  - Topically, Isabella has always been very passionate about feminism and believes that there is a strong connection between women's empowerment and peace. Further research on this topic gave us empirical evidence to support this claim, and the project was born.
  
- Why do you think the issue your project is responding to exists
  - The patriarchal nature of the Ecuadorian society, specifically within indigenous communities. Much of it rises from cultural, economic, and social circumstances which not only has isolated much of the indigenous communities but has left women within these spheres affected by the lack of fulfillment of their rights and the little freedom they have within their families, as well as their social and political circles.
  
- Why did you choose your host site to work in

- One of our local partners recommended Guangaje as a community that had previously reached out to her. Furthermore, the community is the poorest community in Ecuador and the 5th poorest community in all of Latin America so we thought that our efforts could have a larger impact.
- What was it like to work in your host site
  - Working in our host site we had beautiful, frustrating, difficult, and inspiring moments. We had very long days where sometimes it felt like we would never progress. We also had wonderful moments of connection, moments where we got to witness the beauty of a truly unbreakable human spirit. Rooms were filled with a mix of three languages, stories, laughter, and lessons.
- Did you feel at any point that the project was not going to work? in what ways
  - Yes, it was very hard to communicate with the community members in Guangaje. There were numerous instances when work, or attendance was promised and then simply would not be done. It was a balancing act trying to remind ourselves that there are cultural differences/ reasons for these delays while also not getting frustrated and worried by our limited time.
- What were the challenges you encountered in communicating with people?
  - The community we were working with was rural, spread out, and the people did not have a lot of access to methods of communication (ex. phones). This made contacting the larger community very difficult (though we did have success working with a smaller subgroup).
- How do you define peace
  - For us peace is a state of harmony. A state where there is tolerance and prosperity. A state of equality where identities or social standing do not determine one's quality of life.
- How does or will your project contribute to peace in the short/ long term
  - In the short term our empowerment seminars helped to increase women's sense of self-confidence, their belief in themselves and their greater community. In the long term by helping financially support women's businesses (helping buy equipment aiding in various other start-up costs) the women maintain a

sustainable source of future income, and the economic freedom that financial security provides.

- How has your project changed the way you look at the world? How has it changed you?
  - We have become more realistic about how hard it is to create real change. We did not anticipate the amount of bureaucracy or general difficulties in doing this kind of social work. It has made us more humble, more realistic, and more passionate that this work is needed.
  
- Please provide 1-2 personal statements. Suitable for use as a quotation, addressing how and why this project was valuable and what was the most important thing you learned as a result. Include the name of the speaker by quotation.
  - “ This project was an intense experience of personal, and professional growth. Everything was new to me and challenging; the application, the planning, the execution, everything. It was one of the most difficult things I have ever done but also by far the most rewarding. I am so incredibly proud of the women we got to work with, my grant partner, and all of our local experts for what we were able to accomplish in two short months.”- Isabella Haney
  - “I believe that these kinds of projects can be very advantageous, especially considering that we found out that local governments don't really tend to basic needs and services people desperately need. It was a very stressful and challenging experience, providing us with a glance of what it actually means to direct a project of this nature. We have learned much about my country, the situation people in these kinds of communities are in, gaining a deeper understanding of how to manage these types of situations, even if it was through trial and error.”-Gabriel Gabela

