

Women's empowerment through their participation in productive projects: unsuccessful experiences

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Abstract: The investigation is situated in the middle of the debate on the empowerment of women, and in the discussion on the importance to have an income and programs that promote micro-credits to reach gender equality. The investigation was carried out in the northern part of the State of Veracruz. Groups of women involved in three productive projects with animals, financed by different government agencies were analyzed. Twenty-three households in a rural community were investigated, in which 14 of them lived men and women who are or were part of a productive project. It was found that as a result of their participation women did not experienced processes towards their empowerment; besides, the productive projects generated sporadic and irregular income and few temporary jobs.

Key words: empowerment, rural women, women's groups, WID, micro credit programmes.

Resumen: La presente investigación se sitúa entre el debate sobre el empoderamiento de la mujer a través de la obtención de ingresos y la discusión de la importancia de los programas de microcrédito para alcanzar la equidad de género. El estudio analizó tres grupos de mujeres de una comunidad rural del norte del estado de Veracruz involucrados en proyectos productivos con animales y financiados por diferentes dependencias gubernamentales. Se trabajó con 23 grupos domésticos, en 14 de éstos había mujeres y hombres que pertenecían o pertenecieron a un proyecto productivo. Los hallazgos mostraron que como resultado de su participación en proyectos, las mujeres no desarrollaron procesos hacia su empoderamiento personal o colectivo ni en sus relaciones cercanas. Además, los proyectos generaron ingresos esporádicos e irregulares y sólo muy escasos empleos.

Palabras clave: empoderamiento, mujeres rurales, grupos de mujeres, MED, programas de microcrédito.

Introduction

The discussion on women's empowerment has been topic of debate for more than twenty years and it has been recently intensified by the worldwide commitment of fulfilling the Objectives of Development of the Millennium for 2015, the third of which is to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. The importance of this aspiration is not questioned, nevertheless, the interventions promoted as mechanisms to achieve so are debated (Buvinic, 1986; Enríquez *et al.*, 2003; Mingo, 1997). Even though, Guzmán (1990) discourses on the difficulties of defining a productive project; for this study's effects the proposal by that very authoress is considered, which defines as those, that group programs destined for increasing economic income or generate employment.

As a concept, empowerment is subject to debate in the academic sphere (Vernier, 1996), yet extensively used in different contexts, such as governmental institutions, feminist movements and non governmental organizations, among other; thus, in words by Santana *et al.* (2006: 71), it is an ambiguous concept as it is used by agents with significant differences. In this research the proposal by Rowlands (1997b: 230) is accepted; such proposal considers empowerment as "a set of processes [...] centered on the core of the development of confidence, self-esteem, sense of individual or group capability in order to perform actions of change and dignity". The study is articulated on the proposal by the same authoress who states three dimensions for the analysis of empowerment: personal, collective and close relations (Rowlands, 1995), and it is oriented toward the search for this dimensional triad in rural women, partakers of micro-credit programs.

This work aims to contribute to the debate of productive projects for rural women: their potential to be source of income as well as their reaches to be mechanism of empowerment. We focus our research on micro-credit programs for productive projects with animals promoted by three different governmental instances and that can illustrate what occurs in other regions of Mexico, what is more, in order to favor an integral vision of the projects, the experiences and results, in this case unsuccessful ones, the perspectives of the local, regional and national levels (micro, meso and macro, respectively) are included.

At micro-level, the study case was developed in the rural community of Sabaneta, Coxquihui, Veracruz, whose population is 1040 inhabitants, grouped in 302 households.¹ The population under study (n=95) is mostly comprised of Mestizo women and men, only a woman identified herself as indigenous Totonaca. Sabaneta is an ejido composed by two sections: La Planicie and La Loma where the ejido holders abide, 50 and 10 percent, respectively; whereas 40 percent abides outside the community. The ejido is integrated by 80 ejido holders, from which only seven women are land proprietors by inherited rights (five widows, a married woman and a single one), and has 600 ha destined for agricultural production of maize and at a lesser scale coffee, as well as dual-purpose livestock production. Families' incomes mainly come from these activities as they lack employment sources, save those related to land work. With the interest in obtaining arable land, 8 percent of the population (women and men) is affiliated to the Laboring Farming and Popular General Union (*Unión General Obrero Campesina y Popular*, UGOCEP) and is an active fraction. In the 1970's decade the establishment of the Agricultural Industrial Unit of the Woman (*Unidad Agrícola Industrial de la Mujer*, UAIM) was considered, however, there were no concrete actions headed to establish it. In the 1980's and 1990's, women from Sabaneta took part in social assistance and welfare programs promoted by the System of Integral Development of the Family (*Sistema del Desarrollo Integral de la Familia*, DIF); for instance, they received sewing courses or received fowl or seeds packages for familiar orchards.

Sabaneta population's experience with micro-credit programs oriented to productive projects started in 1999, when a group of women and men received a fund from the National Fund of Support to Enterprises in Solidarity (*Fondo Nacional de Apoyo a las Empresas en Solidaridad*, FONAES) to develop an ovine project; in 2001, a group of women obtained a credit from the Women in Rural Development Program (*Programa Mujeres en el Desarrollo Rural*, PMDR) of the Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fishing and Alimentation (*Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca y Alimentación*, SAGARPA) to establish the exploitation

¹ *Oportunidades* Program, Countryside phase, Sabaneta, Veracruz, 2003.

of pig breeding; and in 2003, another group of women received financing destined for a productive project of fowl fattening from the Brigades of Education for Rural Development Program (*Programa Brigadas de Educación para el Desarrollo Rural, PBEDR*), of the Secretariat of Education and Culture of Veracruz.

Let us present the methodology applied in this study; then, we will discuss on the groups of women, the programs of development for women in Mexico, the approach Women in Development, as well as on the economic income they receive and that constitute the theoretical approaches which support this research; and finally, the obtained evidence leads to reflections on the projects' reaches as economic income generators for women, of employment sources as well as potential mechanisms of empowerment.

Methodology

An objective of this research was to understand women and men's experiences related to productive projects financed by governmental instances, because of that we start from the analysis perspective centered on the actor, proposed by Long (1992). Under this approach, voices, experiences and perceptions of the actors are considered valuable, and the actors become subjects of research. The same author mentions that every State intervention is a series of negotiated, continuous and socially constructed processes that involve specific actors and which imply interaction competence, conflict and negotiation between people and groups with differenced origins, ideologies and resources.

Due to the necessity to focus on gender relations in the households in order to appreciate the implications of access and control of women on their income, as well as the transformations in empowerment processes, the unit of analysis was domestic group. Besides, we considered external factors that affect them, such as national and state policies of development that promote micro-credit programs to set productive projects. Because of that in the research design three levels were taken into account: micro, meso and macro. With this approach, giving voice to the partakers, we approach from qualitative referents, and value subjectivity and the meaning of their experiences; likewise, we add the experiences of the social actors

in the study case (micro level) the opinions, points of view and experiences of the promoters of the productive projects, the coordinators of micro-credits programs and some researchers who work in related aspects (meso and macro levels).

At micro level, we interviewed 95 informers in Sabaneta; by means of the Snowball technique, we worked with 23 domestic groups, from which 59 members accepted to voluntarily participate (34 women and 25 men). Out of these groups, 14 already had members who were participating or had participated in productive projects (14 women and 6 men). Moreover, we asked 23 women who were involved into diverse income generating activities and 13 key informers: two local authorities (municipal agent and ejido commissary), the Judge of Peace, a farmer leader, the only male teacher, a politically active women, two members of the community (a woman and a man) and five elderly people (four women and a man).

At meso level we conversed with nine informers from research institutions, governmental institutions and non-governmental institutions: a promoter of each financing source (PMDR, FONAES and PBEDR); the leader of UGOCEP; the regional responsible people for the PMDR and FONAES governmental programs; two other belonged to non governmental organizations, and a female researcher on gender studies.

At macro level, we talked to 10 informers from eight institutions, one from each of the following institutions: Faculty of Psychology, National Autonomous University of Mexico; Metropolitan Autonomous University, Xochimilco Unit; Center of Research on Agricultural Sciences; Autonomous University of the State of Mexico; Women in Rural Development Program; National Network of Rural Female Advisers and Promoters, Civil Association; Equity, Gender, Citizenship, Labor and Family, CA; and four researchers, two from el Colegio de México and two from the el Colegio de Postgraduados, Campus Puebla.

In order to gather information in Sabaneta, we used semi-structured and group interviews, participative techniques, participant observation as well as discussion groups. The end of the semi-structured interviews was: a) to obtain information on the domestic groups; b) to learn their individual and groups experiences and those of the project partakers, as well as their

perception of the micro-credit programs; and c) to learn the changes in the gender relations inside the households as a result of their participation in productive projects —considering the previous and resulting situations. We carried out group interviews with the directive boards of each project so as to identify and clarify the application, approval and implementation procedures of them, as well as the functioning in the exploitations of sheep, pigs and fowl. At meso and macro levels open interviews were the method that made it possible to learn the informers' experiences; at both levels we carried out the pertinent bibliographic revision.

On its own, participative techniques allowed a better approach to the productive groups as well as the exploration of their intra and inter group relations with the community, whereas participating observation enabled to learn better the female integrants and their domestic groups. The objective of the discussion groups was to learn and compare the experiences of the participating women —two with integrants of the pig productive project and one of the fowl one. This technique allowed inquiring into personal, collective and close relations' empowerment through verifying and contrasting the benefits, commitment degree, women's expectations on their incorporation, participation in projects, achievements and conflicts. We originally planned to organize discussion groups with men; nonetheless, as the research went on some men started to question the inquiry assuming it could put their obtaining of resources in risk, which linked to the women's constant asseveration that men would attend, forced us to put this technique aside.

The research attempted to integrally understand and interpret a specific situation for which, following Schwandt (2000: 193), we wanted to seize and analyze as a whole the institutional contexts, practices, intentions, beliefs and ways of life, among other factors. Bearing this in mind, we then classified the obtained information by topics and subtopics, which permitted a better analysis and understanding of the collected data (Pole and Lampard, 2002). This gave us the opportunity to integrate the voices of the social actors from Sabaneta and learn dependences and interdependences when assembling the view points, experiences and the perception of promoters, researchers and people responsible for the development programs destined for financing productive projects.

Development programs for women groups

For centuries women's labor has been considered as a mechanism to improve the families' conditions of life. In most of the colonized African and Latin American countries missionaries made groups of women so as to promote Christianity and education, as well as improving families' welfare, which became opportunities for women to approach health and nourishment knowledge. Later the Church continued promoting groups of women and, according to Bülow (1995), it was an important mechanism for them to obtain new knowledge, greater responsibilities and reach prestigious positions, even though mostly around the role of mother.

In the mid XX century, groups of women bloomed influenced by social assistance and welfare movements. In Latin America, as from the 1950's, said groups were the main objective of the welfare policies and social assistance channels; for instance in Peru, the Clubs of Mothers (Johnson, 1993). In the 1980's the economic crises in developing countries and the neoliberal economic models fostered an increment in women's participation in economic activities, being a milestone for the orientation of groups: from being channeling ways for resources to increment families' welfare became channels for economic development (Buvinic, 1986). Thus, the actions of welfare promotion and economic growth were draw near until they overlapped their limits.

According to Vizcarra (2002: 209), in the last decades the increment in the proportion of households living in poverty line in Mexico is related to the social effect of the structural adjustment policies of NAFTA, modifications to the 27th constitutional article in agrarian issues, as well as the neoliberal economic policies. As a strategy to reduce the consequences from these policies, the institutions in charge of promoting development have set several programs based upon the approach of Women in Development (*Mujeres en el Desarrollo, MED*). MED conceives as problem of development women's exclusion from productive resources and their related processes. Schmukler (1996) argues that MED has promoted three perspectives: welfare, antipoverity, and efficiency, which according to Zapata (2003: 51) become the transformation of the women's situation, yet they impose them heavier workloads. The programs with welfare approach are the oldest and were the first in identifying women as principal beneficiaries,

focusing on their reproductive role and considering them as the pillars of families' welfare improvement; nevertheless, they did not promote changes in women's position inside their households and communities. The antipoverty perspective argues that inequality between women and men is a consequence of the differences in incomes, disregarding cultural or social reasons, hence promoting women's incorporation into labor market in order to advance in economic development. finally, the approach of efficiency derives from the policies of structural adjustment that promote the State services' privatization (Schmukler, 1996)

Zapata (1994) mentions that as a result of the macroeconomic policies, the State's retirement and budgetary reductions, upon rural women has fallen the weight of the structural adjustments. The same authoress adds that in order to cover the absence of services, rural women took responsibility of many functions, extended and intensified their working days, and adopted strategies that allowed them to secure the survival of their domestic groups, for instance by means of their insertion into economic activities. Before such scenario and with the intention of improving their situation living in poverty conditions, development institutions considered to include productive projects for women in their antipoverty strategies. Hence, guided by the international discourse, their incursion as protagonists of development was forced, thus transforming them into the object of development programs basically with economic ends (Zapata, 1994: 138). Buvinic (1986: 653) indicates that this new perception of woman groups and their potential was translated into policies in the shape of productive projects that generated incomes for them.

In Mexico as from the 1970's there has been a large number of programs for feminine population, promoted and financed by different governmental instances (Meza *et al.*, 2002). In the rural sector, following MED's tendency, the Secretariats of the Agrarian Reform, Social Development and SAGARPA promoted programs for women, among them: UAIMs, Action for the Participation of Farmer Woman (*Acción para la Participación de la Mujer Campesina*), National of Integration of Women in Development (*Nacional de Integración de la Mujer en el Desarrollo*) and Women in Solidarity (*Mujeres en Solidaridad*) all of them valid for short time and with limited tangible results. (Kusnir *et al.*, 2000).

In 1996, SAGARPA boosted PMDR that boasted the use of a new approach of the women's role (SAGAR, 2000). The program was considered an innovating attempt to incorporate the perspective of gender headed to provide the groups of women with better institutional support. In 1999, due to the positive results, PMDR incremented its coverage, goals and reaches, becoming the Program for Organized Groups of Women in Rural Development (*Programa para Grupos Organizados de Mujeres en el Desarrollo Rural*, PGMDR), yet it was cancelled in 2002 due to budgetary shortage and the new public policies in favor of women and minority groups (Costa, 2004).

The objective of FONAES is to spur the populations' productive and enterprising labor and promote a more equitable participation of women, seeking to incorporate them into economic life in more balanced conditions. The program provides financial support to groups or social enterprises exclusively integrated by women. In the region of the study case, FONAES supports the development of farming enterprises; nonetheless, it finances different productive activities for groups of women and men projects. For the former, it finances projects of craft and textile production and, seldom small livestock projects; whereas for the latter, it offers credits for bovine, vanilla and citric exploitations mainly.

At national level, the secretariat of Public Education has 125 Brigades of Education for Rural development, whose objective is the training of people with scarce economic resources to develop micro-enterprises, as a way to increase their incomes. The programs head toward groups of women and men; it includes financing according to each projects and fosters saving. Being Sabaneta part of the municipality of Coxquihui, it is integrated into the Papantla region Brigade, in Veracruz.

For this research's case, as in many other with gender perspective, whose intention is to interpret women's activities inside and outside their households, and specially, to analyze the improvement in their position as a result of their income-generating activities, the proposal by Moser (1989, 1993) of the triple role of women was primordial. Moser emphasizes the distribution of time they make, especially at households with scarce resources fulfilling their reproductive, productive and communal management roles. The reproductive role is referred to the women's responsibilities, such

as gestation, upbringing and house chores to preserve and reproduce workforce; the reproductive role considers their labor in return for an economic retribution or even for goods; and the role of communal management involves unremunerated activities performed at community's level, so as to secure the provision and preservation of the scarce resources of collective consumption.

To discuss empowerment of women groups in this work, we will start from the concept of *power with*, which, according to Townsend *et al.* (2002: 51), "is the capacity to achieve altogether with the others that which would not be possible alone". For Rowlands (1997a: 17), collective empowerment takes place when a group approaches a problem as a set and acquires the meaning and becomes aware that the total capabilities are greater than those individually considered. Similarly, Martínez (2000: 65) mentions that *power with* is one of the strategies to women's empowerment by means of the construction of collective identities.

Women's economic incomes, a mechanism toward gender equity?

Women's economic incomes as a mechanism to reach gender equity have been the subject of debate (Brydon and Chant, 1989; Moser, 1993; Safilos, 1990; Young, 1993). The studies by Esther Boserup (1970) and Lourdes Benería (1987) on women's economic activities and the limits they face so that their incomes become mechanisms toward equity are a necessary reference in this field of knowledge. The notion that women's economic empowerment fosters gender equity has been support for development strategies promoted by diverse organisms, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and of non-governmental organizations, such as the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. This diversity of institutional contexts reflects the degree of its acceptance as a mechanism to advance toward gender equity. Separately, Sen (1990) mentions that as a derivation of women's incomes their position is fundamentally improved in two manners: firstly, it increases their welfare and self-esteem; and secondly, it increases the perception of other household members of their contributions' value. Notwithstanding, authors such as Brydon and Chant (1989), Moser (1993) and Young (1993) argue that structures of power, ideologies, the State and market must be considered as limits for the effect incomes have on women's

position change.

What is more, in the debate on the role of women's incomes as an empowering mechanism the questioning on the correlation with the income level is relevant; this is to say, if an income, low and insufficient to acquire goods, has the potential to become a mechanism of empowerment. Young (1993) proposes that said empowerment is possible even with low income levels, such as those obtained by the most of rural women, if a transforming potential is developed. For this authoress, it means that women value their incomes and recognize the importance of their contributions to the households, reaching the possibility to question, weaken or transform uneven gender relations and subordination structures. For Kabeer (1994), the concept of transforming potential is related with the idea of *power from within*, which is referred to an internal force of power that allows human beings to develop the ability to recognize and challenge gender inequalities. Young and Kabeer coincide on the fact that the process of woman's self-esteem increment should become aware that she has been the promoter of her own transformation and that has gained new spaces to act, which is the same as personal empowerment.

Women's empowerment: unsuccessful experiences

In Sabaneta women's participation in productive projects is concentrated in three actions related to sheep, pig and fowl production. Further on the text, by means of the groups' experiences, we witness the efficacy of these projects as potential mechanisms of personal, collective and close relations' empowerment, as well as their reaches as income and employment sources. Later on, we integrate the opinions and experiences of the promoters, researchers and people responsible for the microcredit programs.

Personal empowerment

The presentation of the results of personal empowerment is articulated in two sections: mechanisms and motives of access, and acquisition of abilities and learning.

Mechanisms and motives of access

In order to develop the sheep productive project via their affiliation to

UGOCEP, 31 people (15 women and 16 men) received a FONAES fund, which required at least 30 integrants. As there were not enough convinced men in the informative meeting, the wives, daughters and sons of the interested men were included. As a result, from the total of registered partakers, 15 were only “names in the list”, who did not take part actively. From the 15 female integrants, 12 never visited the sheep exploitation, two did it sporadically, and one frequently. The economic revenues they expected to obtain were the main motivation to become involved in the project.

A year later, a group of 17 women received a fund from PMDR to establish a pig productive project. The formation of this group, as in the case of the sheep, was promoted and supported by UGOCEP. PMDR stated that the group should be comprised of 20 people, so, similarly to the previous case, daughters, sisters-in-law and mothers-in-law were invited to take part, from which two lived outside the community; from the female partakers, ten were or had been part of the sheep project. The group was integrated in a day; the integrants mentioned that the reason to participate was the expectation of economic revenues.

On their own, a 12-woman group obtained a credit to develop the fowl productive project financed by PBEDR; it was formed by close relatives and kindred women, from which five had not been present at the group's formation in the informative meeting. The partakers perceived this sort of activity would generate economic incomes in short time, so this motivated them to take part.

Acquisition of abilities and learning

The female partakers in the sheep project attended a four-hour course related to technical aspects, which they were not interested in.

On the contrary, because of their integration to the pig project, the partakers identified as a benefit the technical training they received, as they have applied with their backyard animals specifically they talked about having learnt how to vaccinate, an activity traditionally carried out by men.

In a similar manner the integrants of the fowl project took a six-hour course on technical aspects; however, they received a workshop on personal development topics of four hours, from which six women commented they liked it. Apart from the secretary, the rest expressed this sort of work-

shop was their first experience. The PBEDR promoter planned to carry out a workshop with men of their domestic groups, yet this was not held due to time conflicts of the promoter.

Collective empowerment

We offer the evidence obtained on collective empowerment in four sections: decisions inside the project, participation in activities, actions as a collective and relations inside the group.

Internal decisions

The ovine project members agreed that each one of them should carry out a day-labor in the exploitation, however, due to the time they used they decided to pay them. Nonetheless, the female participants scarcely did said tasks and men performed women's labor obtaining the corresponding payment. When FONAES credit was depleted, the members stopped receiving the payment and the participation rapidly decreased. Therefore, due to the lack of interest to manage the exploitation, they hire a laborer, and afforded the payment and supplies. Facing this situation, 12 members, seven women and five men, most of them "names in the list" left the group.

Similarly, the female members of the pig project decided that the task should be done by two of them in periods of 24 hours; nevertheless, the pig farm was built on the summit of the hill and did not have energy or piped-water services, lacks which made it difficult for them to fulfill their tasks. As a result, only two members carried out their tasks and the rest had support from men from their domestic groups. In the meantime, four members quit as they did not have said support, and other four decided to pay a laborer to perform their farming duties. Men who supported their wives or mothers commented that work was hard for them to do, so men decided to do it.

On the contrary, the fowl project agreed that only the female members should work on the facilities and no other member from their domestic groups was able to take part into the tasks, as well as in the sale of the product.

Participation in activities

The female members of the ovine project took part in the meetings to exercise their participation, yet, as it was mentioned, they did not participated actively in its execution. Only a woman worked in the exploitation; another did for short time in administrative tasks, and the rest did not perform any activity.

In a similar manner, in the pig project women did not take part actively in the management of the exploitation, they only attended the meeting, which lasted between 2 and 3 hours, weekly at first and later fortnightly. At the time of the study, out of the 10 remaining, only three visited the farm regularly.

In relation to the fowl project, as six members quit the project during the first productive cycle, the president included, the workloads for the remainder women were heavier.

Actions as a collective

Apart from their participation in meetings, the members of the ovine project did not promote any other activity as a collective in favor of the members, groups or community.

Likewise, although on one occasion the group organized a fundraising traditional-food fair, the members of the pig project identified they had strength as a group to carry out other activities different from the project or communal management.

On their own, due to conflicts among the members of the fowl project, they recognized that in the group neither the problems were faced as a set nor activities were performed adding their capacities. The group was dissolved after seven months it started working.

Relations inside the group

The female members of the ovine project, with the exception of the attendance to the meeting, did not meet in different places to comment on the project or other possible actions to do, this situation seriously limited the establishment and strengthening of intergroup relations.

On its own, the pig project group limited their encounters to activities

specifically related to the projects with no evident arguments or conflicts. The president fulfilled and surpassed her functions so as to maintain the project working.

Conversely, former and active members of the fowl project expressed several opinions on their participation; however they agreed that the main reasons of the disintegration of the group were internal conflicts and personal problems. The former mentioned misunderstandings, conflicts and breach in relations. On the contrary, the members who tried to continue expressed having obtained other non-economic benefits, such as mutual help and learning acquired in the two courses they took.

Empowerment of close relations

The section to explore transformation in relations inside the domestic groups is focused on the changes in the organization of domestic activities.

Changes in the organization of domestic activities

As a consequence of their participation in the ovine project, women and men did not identified changes in their relations inside their households neither did in their accepted and established gender roles. As a result of their null participation in the development of this project, women continued developing their reproductive role in a quotidian manner.

On their own, given their little participation in the pig project's execution, women did not promoted the active participation of other members at their households in domestic activities; therefore, they did not identified changes in their daily activities' organization. Independently from their participation in the project, they went on with their workloads and fulfilled their chores at the household.

While in the fowl project, three former members mentioned that the main reason of their withdrawal from the project was the conflict of time between their domestic responsibilities and the project. The rest continued with their reproductive role without promoting changes in the organization of their domestic activities or the participation of other integrants. This is to say, regardless their beginning of a productive activity they carried out with their workloads at their households.

Economic revenues and employment generation

The ovine project faced serious technical problems, so it did not generated revenues for the partakers, except the salaries obtained in their tasks; it generated temporary employment for about a year and only one direct position. About the obtained revenue, men mentioned they used it for them, or in some cases gave it to their wives to afford household expenditures, and the wives did not have any direct benefit. Both women and men members mentioned that the incomes from their incorporation into the program did not have any significant effect on their household or relatives' welfare.

Similarly, the pig project had grave technical problems; because of this the exploitation gave a modest piglet production, and the female integrants had problems to sell them in the community. All of them expressed disillusion about the meager incomes (former and current members only received two piglets); moreover, said income were largely used to pay contributions. On employment generation only a worker obtained a job.

In a similar manner, the fowl group, in the first cycle achieved a production for sale that generated small revenue. This was not perceived as economic income with effects on personal or familial welfare. During this cycle, six women left the group and the other six decided to start a second cycle, which failed, this project did not generate employment.

Problems and limits of the productive projects

Through the opinions and experiences of the informers from the meso and macro levels, we achieved an integral analysis of the interventions of development in Sabaneta. The consensus is that the productive projects carry three transcendental problems: 1) they are promoted as micro-enterprises when they rarely use their potential to be a productive enterprise; 2) certain programs state they use gender perspective, however, when it is so, they do it in a mistaken manner and poorly instrumented for the countryside; and 3) the microcredit programs for productive projects are far from promoting changes in uneven gender relations. Said programs were observed in the three productive projects in Sabaneta.

Firstly, although technically viable, none of them achieved solidity as an income and employment generating enterprise. Secondly, despite PMDR stipulated to foster gender equity and carry out activities headed toward the empowerment of the female participants, in the study case the members of the projects did not take part in any activity, save those related to technical aspects; on its own, PBEDR implemented a brief human development workshop. Thus, in practice, none of the programs performed activities with the men close to the women of the groups, which questions their incorporation of gender perspective when including women, but not sensitizing men from their domestic units. Thirdly, in the study case women and men did not express any change in their gender relations inside their households or communities.

What is more, the informers agreed that there are three reasons why women become involved in the projects: the first and most important, obtaining incomes; second, acquiring a degree of autonomy and independence; and third, gain mobility. Women in the groups from Sabaneta mentioned that indubitably their main reason to become involved in productive projects was their interest in an income that allowed them to increase their children and households' welfare, and they did not perceive the possibility to increment their autonomy or mobility. It was also a consensus that due to the manner in which the programs for women groups are designed and implemented, mainly only offering technical training, their potential to promote process that make it easy a change in women's position by means of reflection and action is limited. The evidence from Sabaneta agrees with this vision; nonetheless, as for the training received the three groups faced serious technical problems, which forced the female partakers to mainly focus on productive aspects.

Finally, the interviewees perceived the projects as a temporary source of income and employment with no possibilities to offer the women who were involved a permanent income, as it occurred in the study case. The project for ovine production generated temporary employment for men for about a year; that of pigs generated meager incomes and the duration of the fowl project was too short to yield any significant economical benefit.

Conclusions

Research showed that three governmental promoting instances of microcredit programs for productive projects failed in their attempts to generate income for women and become sources of income. The incomes obtained by women were so low that they were not successful in beginning the transforming potential proposed by Young (1988), neither did they unleash the *power from within* in the female participants based on the valuing of their incomes. Hence, given the productive projects were unable to generate economic incomes, at the time capsized as empowerment mechanisms.

According to Rowlands (1997a), the processes of empowerment are framed by factors that boost or inhibit them. In this sense, the three researched groups had a conjunction of inhibiting factors that notoriously limited the processes of empowerment in the dimensional triad proposed by this authoress. Consequently, the women, integrants of the groups, did not unleash actions that fostered trust, self-esteem development, in the sense of group or individual capability. Moreover, the partakers did not add their individual capabilities to exercise *power with* and the women's collective force did not become conscious processes which lead them to a collective empowerment: therefore, the establishment of the projects did not help to promote that dimension of empowerment.

A inhibiting factor considers the motives of income and the way the participants become involved in the projects, for being unaware of their responsibilities in the group, not to say those enrolled as "names in the list", were not committed with the project's work, which prevents the appearance of processes that increase self-esteem and individual and group trust. Likewise, the scarce training, mainly in technical aspects, did not encourage the learning that becomes increment in self-confidence neither the acquisition of abilities to speak in public or to formulate and express ideas an opinions (Zapata 2004).

As a result of the participation of women in productive projects we did not find evidence of the unchaining of empowerment of close relations, as changes in gender relations headed toward the improvement of women's position in their domestic groups and the community were not manifested.

The findings agreed with those by Mingo (1997) and Enriquez (2003). Who report that in Mexico the groups of women who develop productive projects frequently fail in creating awareness among the participants on gender inequities. Women and men carried on developing their culturally established and accepted gender roles unchanged.

In Sabaneta, that can be representative of what occurs in other regions, productive projects were focused on boosting women's productive role disregarding their productive and communal management roles. The projects were directed to women in an isolated manner, not paying attention to them as subjects immersed in dynamics and varied responsibilities in their domestic groups and community. Evidence confirms that the contribution by Moser on the triple role of women is still ignored by the people in charge of designing strategies of development for women, in this case microcredit programs to establish productive projects.

As a closure, the reflection on whether the search for revenues as the group's main objective makes it easy for the female participants to conceive spaces to promote reflections, questionings, and action on uneven gender relations remains. Hence, this objective becomes an obstacle to make process of empowerment occur as it does not foment a development that propitiates transformation in the participants, which orients and mediates activities with the aim to improve their familial and social position.

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