



Rural indigenous women in Bolivia: A development proposal based on cooperativism



Fuensanta C. Galindo-Reyes^a, Antonio M. Ciruela-Lorenzo^a, Salvador Pérez-Moreno^{b,*}, Salvador Pérez-Canto^a

^a Department of Economics and Business Administration, University of Malaga, Campus of Teatinos, 29071 Malaga, Spain

^b Department of Applied Economics (Economic Policy), University of Malaga, Campus El Ejido, 29071 Malaga, Spain

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ABSTRACT

Current economic and social conditions in rural Bolivia have relegated some women to a secondary role. The values and principles of the cooperative movement are presented in this paper as an alternative to deal with gender inequality both in family and community contexts. A participatory and comprehensive development proposal based on cooperativism has been designed to cope with problems of structural discrimination. This proposal is an innovative adaptation of traditional strategy maps, introducing cooperative values in order to interconnect and enable the achievement of the varied objectives planned in favor of Bolivian rural indigenous women living in a disadvantaged situation.

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1. Introduction

Latin America is going through a unique period of socio-economic development and democratic consolidation, coinciding with women holding the office of president in some countries. This is an unequivocal sign of change in political structures traditionally dominated by male figures and marked by the exclusion of women. However, while women are on the path to gender equality in public life, and despite the relative progress they have achieved, they are still not sufficiently represented at levels where national, regional and community policy is shaped. On this topic, Díaz, Ortiz, Mellado, and Santana (2006) and Gallardo (2006), among others, stress that one of the ways of achieving gender equality is to guarantee women's full participation in representational and decision-making structures, with community and production contexts offering significant options. With a view to making advances in the empowerment of indigenous women suffering from discrimination, one important factor is to strengthen their participation and leadership in community life and in production activities, both of which are fundamental aspects in many rural indigenous areas.

The United Nations (2008) has acknowledged the critical role played by women in the growth of farming economies in developing countries. Along this line, Esteban, Gargallo, and Pérez (2012) highlight their contribution to the family economy, the production of quality goods,

organic livestock and agriculture, as well as the development of new production activities linked to rural tourism. For many local communities, tourism provides the chance to improve and diversify their potential, involving a number of stakeholders and adding services to their traditional production segments (Cawley & Gillmor, 2008; Panyik, Costa, & Rätz, 2011). Moreover, in rural areas tourism may be a source of social revitalization that can contribute to territorial equity in regions with socio-economic imbalances (Deller, 2010). Nevertheless, experiences are diverse. While there are some examples of solidarity tourism in which the local population controls the activities reducing social inequality (Hjalager, 1996; Bessière, 1998; Binns & Nel, 2002; Garrod, Wornell, & Youell, 2006), in other cases tourism may worsen social inequality and ecological balance (Urry, 1996; Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Blackstock, 2005; Oliva, 2010).

In this context, rural tourism has long been considered a means of achieving economic and social development and regeneration, as well as being an effective source of income and employment (Notzke, 1999; Sharpley, 2002). Nevertheless, a variety of circumstances is required for that to happen, including long-term financial and technical support; sometimes understanding how these benefits can occur is slow in coming.

A key issue for the appropriate development of sustainable rural tourism in a local community is the existence of some shared principles and values that create mechanisms of engagement and ownership for the population, so that all stakeholders feel part of the development project. Hence, cooperative principles and values can be essential elements in certain indigenous communities in terms of development of the community, and in particular for women's economic and social

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: fcgr@uma.es (F.C. Galindo-Reyes), acl@uma.es

(A.M. Ciruela-Lorenzo), sperezmoreno@uma.es (S. Pérez-Moreno), spc@uma.es (S. Pérez-Canto).

empowerment (Osti, 1997; García-Gutiérrez, 1999; Mozas & Bernal, 2006; Revuelto, Balbastre, & Redondo, 2012; Gardner-Huggett, 2012). As Friedmann (1992) and Ronneby (1994) argue, development based on cooperative principles occurs in areas organized as a local society. People feel involved, they have mutual knowledge, live together and share the community's problems. This is, therefore, a major factor in economic and social democratization, and is the basis for local development and social cohesion. In this sense, Juliá and Marí (2002) and Divar and Gadea (2007) emphasize that forming cooperatives enables combining community and stakeholders' interests. The process of economic and social democratization also responds to the legitimate right of the people involved in development to have their say, thereby contributing towards reducing gender discrimination.

This paper sets out a proposal for local development potentially applicable to rural areas in Latin America with an indigenous population and gender inequality. It consists essentially of diversifying farming activities by promoting cooperative-based rural tourism with the intention of strengthening the economic and social role of indigenous women in their community. The scope of the study is the rural community of Tapacarí, in the department of Cochabamba (Bolivia), and it was conducted using qualitative techniques based on personal observation and in-depth interviews. This development proposal is implemented with the participation of the community, using a strategy map with a systems model that graphically describes a multilevel diagram. The concept of strategy map emerged in order to graphically show the critical objectives that had to be met to reach the organization's vision. Thus, specific objectives and the cause-effect relationships between them are established, and interrelation and complementarity are strived for to achieve the overall aim (Kaplan & Norton, 1996a, 1996b). The application of this methodology is not usual in the rural development field; the multilevel analysis on which it is based is more common in human geography or political ecology approaches (Zolnik, 2009; Peet, Robbins, & Watts, 2011).

Given the idiosyncrasy and the ever-changing context of Tapacarí, any development proposal is challenging to adapt. Circumstances of rural indigenous women are complex and continually shifting which may way hinder the implementation of the strategy map.

The paper is structured in six parts. After the introduction, Section 2 presents the theoretical framework. The third section sets out the scope of application of the development proposal located in Tapacarí (Bolivia), highlighting some problems of indigenous women involved in our study. Section 4 specifies the methodology, and Section 5 describes the construction of the development strategy following the strategy map's guidelines. The study ends with some conclusions.

2. Theoretical framework

The design of our development proposal requires a review of some fundamental notions. First, the term development, regarding which a variety of approaches has emerged since the 1950s. Unlike the orthodox paradigm of development that focuses on economic growth as the goal and measure of progress, other paradigms are concerned with the nature of the process and the impact of development on the environment and human beings, particularly on women, indigenous or colonized people. In some cases, they put forward not only alternative ways of reaching development, but also alternatives to the Eurocentric development discourse in the context of the post-development school (Ziai, 2007) and post-colonial and feminist theories (McEwan, 2001).

Today, one of the most widely accepted paradigms is the human development approach, whose starting point is Sen's theory of development as an expansion of capabilities (Sen, 1985), thereby allowing the improvement of human lives by expanding the range of things that a person can be and do, such as being healthy and well nourished, being knowledgeable, and participating in community life (UNDP, 1990, 2010). From this perspective, development is about removing the obstacles to what a person can do in life (illiteracy, ill health, lack of access to

resources, or lack of civil and political freedoms). In this context, Fukuda-Parr (2003) highlights that gender equity is a core concern of the human development approach, providing a more gender sensitive agenda to public policy than other alternatives. Since discrimination remains widespread, the human development approach is sensitive to aspects of discrimination that are particularly important in women's lives and goes beyond income-related factors, such as lack of autonomy and lack of ability to influence decision-making within the family, community and nation.

Another key concept connected to the human development approach is empowerment. Women's empowerment is the process by which those who have been denied the possibility of making strategic life choices acquire that ability. Thus, empowerment entails a process of change. According to Kabeer (1999), this process incorporates three interrelated dimensions: resources, material and various human and social resources that serve to enhance the ability to exercise choice; agency, the ability to define one's goals and act upon them (resources and agency together constitute what Sen (1985) refers to as capabilities); and achievements, in terms of well-being outcomes.

In the field of gender studies, several development approaches to gender evolved at the end of the twentieth century (Razavi & Miller, 1995; Roy, Tisdell, & Blomqvist, 1999; Parpart, Connelly, & Barriteau, 2000; Momsen, 2010). In the early 1970s, the Women in Development (WID) approach. This term came into use after the seminal work of Boserup (1970), focused on women's secondary socio-economic status, with interventions aimed at reducing discrimination. This approach, which represents a merger of modernization and liberal-feminist theories, mainly focused on women's productive work, frequently adding actions targeted only at women rather than integrating them fully into the intervention activities. WID was severely criticized for regarding women as passive recipients, not participants, and gave way to the Women and Development (WAD) perspective in the late 1970s. Neomarxist and dependence theorists such as Beneria and Sen (1981) are usually grouped under this label. This approach looked at women as essential actors of the economic systems and analyzed the condition of women in the context of international and class inequalities. However, like WID, the WAD initiatives focused mainly on income generating activities, and little attention was paid to other needs of women and to the fundamental factors that structure and maintain gender inequalities. Thus, in the 1980s and 1990s the Gender and Development (GAD) movement brought a remarkable change of perspective (Young, 1997). Drawing on the socialist-feminist perspective, this approach sought to correct mechanisms that produce gender inequality not only by focusing on women, but also by assessing the social status of both women and men. GAD adopted a two-pronged approach to the study of women and development, researching women's material conditions and class position. Through gender mainstreaming, GAD attempted to promote gender equality and integrate gender awareness in all fields of society.

Although the GAD framework actually goes further than WID, at times policies and programs that clearly continued to work within the WID paradigm, as defined above, adopted GAD as their newer label. Connelly, Murray Li, MacDonald, and Parpart (2000) recall that labels no longer provide a clear guide to identifying the approach and it is necessary to examine its content. Moreover, authors such as Cornwall and Rivas (2015) have recently highlighted that if the promise of the post-2015 agenda is to deliver on gender equity, new frameworks are needed that can connect with and contribute to a broader movement for global justice.

In our approach the values and principles of the cooperative movement play a central role. In line with the International Co-operative Alliance (International Cooperative Alliance, 1996) and Singer (2001, 2007), Cooperativism is a movement within the solidarity-based economy which can be defined as an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically

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