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**Women as beneficiaries of Social Responsibility
projects in Azuay**

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Mujeres como población beneficiaria de proyectos de Responsabilidad Social en el Azuay

Resumen

El presente artículo sustenta la necesidad de conocer la importancia de la influencia que tiene la inserción de proyectos de responsabilidad social con enfoque de género dentro de distintas instituciones, fundaciones y empresas. Las mismas tienen la obligación de responder ante la sociedad y la situación de vulnerabilidad que viven las mujeres. Este estudio está realizado en la provincia de Azuay. La investigación se desarrolló desde el paradigma cualitativo utilizando la revisión documental, bibliográfica y teórica, sobre diversos proyectos de responsabilidad social realizados dentro de la región. De igual manera, se realizaron entrevistas a diferentes representantes tanto de instituciones públicas como privadas, fundaciones, así como a mujeres beneficiarias de dichos proyectos con las cuales se espera entender la importancia que tiene implementar estas prácticas de responsabilidad social con enfoque de género, mismo que ha influenciado en la población de mujeres en el Azuay.

Palabras clave: Empresas, género, mujeres, proyectos, responsabilidad social.

Women as beneficiaries of Social Responsibility projects in Azuay

Abstract

This article supports the need to understand the importance of the influence that the insertion of gender-focused social responsibility projects has among various institutions, foundations, and companies. These entities have the obligation to respond to society and the vulnerable situation experienced by women. This study was carried out in the province of Azuay. The research was conducted from a qualitative paradigm using documentary, bibliographic, and theoretical review, on various social responsibility projects carried out within the region. Likewise, interviews were conducted with different representatives of both public and private institutions, foundations, as well as with women beneficiaries of these projects, with the aim of understanding the importance of implementing these gender-focused social responsibility practices, which have influenced the female population in Azuay.

Key Words: Social responsibility, gender, companies, women, projects.

Women as beneficiaries of Social Responsibility projects in Azuay

1. Introduction

Social responsibility is the obligation to respond to society on issues of a common nature, either individually or as a group as members of that society. It is essential to know the impact of Social Responsibility projects on women considering the vulnerability of women in general. These projects can provide access to new opportunities, promoting greater inclusion, which favors community integration. It is very important to analyze the impact of these projects in order to understand the environment in which the women of Azuay live and thus know their different levels of development and, based on this, propose actions that contribute to improve the situation of this population group. The motivation for the development of this research work is based on the interest in contributing to the improvement of the quality of life and inclusion of the women population, since research in this area is still in gestation, so that by making known the contribution of socially responsible projects to the welfare of women, the population in general, and the various institutions in particular, could become involved with the subject.

According to the latest global index in relation to gender, Ecuador has 74.3% gender inequality (National Institute of Statistics and Census, 2019); with that percentage, the country ranks 41st in the gender gap ranking.

Nowadays in Azuay, gender differentiation is significant and one of the main reasons for this is poverty. This is a complex and multidimensional problem that manifests itself in various ways, such as: lack of sufficient income and productive resources, poor health, lack of access or limited access to education and other basic services. In addition, it should be noted that Azuay ranks first in the country in terms of prevalence of violence against women throughout their lives, with 79.2%, a figure higher than the national average. Azuay is also the province with the highest incidence of violence against women in the last year, with 46.2% of cases. In response to the problem of violence against women, the Municipality of Cuenca has been developing plans, programs, and initiatives in response to violence against women (Rodríguez et al., 2020). According to UN Women, in Ecuador there are important regulatory and public policy advances undertaken by the State to eliminate the gender gap, violence and discrimination against women. However, the situation of inequality of women compared to men in all spheres of life continues to persist, and this situation is aggravated by the economic slowdown (United Nations System in Ecuador, 2022). Based on this, the present research will answer the question: what has been the influence of social responsibility projects on women in Azuay?

Currently, social responsibility has become a relevant field of interest. As it evolves, many studies have been carried out with different objectives, some with the objective of measuring its impact on the performance of organizations, companies and institutions. Others have focused on establishing its links with organizational variables, reflecting on equal opportunity policies. On the other hand, it can be said that institutions carry out social responsibility projects under pressure from stakeholders, media, interest groups, as well as the local community. This infers that this participation in social responsibility projects is managed by an instrumental motivation (Acuña Ardila et al., 2015).

The Ecuadorian Consortium for Social Responsibility (CERES) works to involve, raise awareness and support companies and businesses in a socially responsible manner by implementing projects that promote labor insertion. It is considered the most important network of organizations committed to and promoting Social Responsibility in Ecuador since 2005. One of its most important proposals is the initiative of UNACEM Ecuador and Independiente del Valle./ They presented their project "A match for non-violence", which works to raise awareness about violence and discrimination against women and girls through sports, giving girls and women the opportunity to break gender stereotypes, and teaching them that women have the same opportunities (CERES, 2023).

On the other hand, the project "Brave" works for the empowerment of women. It is a project of great relevance since it has touched the lives of several women. It is about spaces focused on women, in which several of them have shared experiences in the context of an event that revolves around the theme of women's

empowerment. The renowned journalist Janeth Hinojosa, presented under this project, lectures in more than 15 provinces nationwide, with its own methodology designed in 2019. "Brave" is a compilation of stories that highlight the courage of women who have faced significant challenges in their lives. Through an emotional video, it narrates experiences of individuals who have managed to overcome obstacles such as lack of access to education, poverty, belonging to ethnic minority groups and violence. For two hours, participants have the opportunity to immerse themselves in these stories, connect with different realities, receive inspiring messages, share their own experiences, identify important values, and express emotions through music and dance. In this space, the feeling of empowerment is strengthened, leaving a deep impression on all those present (Villarreal, 2019).

Speaking of a much closer reality, in the city of Cuenca, the association Mujeres con éxito, of the "María Amor" Foundation, accompanies women in vulnerable conditions, to generate productive enterprises, a restaurant and a laundry, are part of the foundation. The women who come to the foundation lack economic autonomy, come from informal activities or household chores, and they have not had a formal job. The idea was conceived to establish a center to provide the women with training in business management and familiarization with technology, as well as customer service skills and efficient organization. This center is complemented with workshops dedicated to business management, thus strengthening its educational purpose and offering an enriching environment for the development of corporate skills. As Morán states "They then went on to participate in a small business with high quality service, after this process, the change and strengthening of the women who left violence and discrimination behind is noticeable." (Morán, 2018).

Another project promoted by the provincial government of Azuay, which stands out for having a gender-focus approach, significantly contributing to the province as a pioneering initiative. This project seeks to generate actions aimed at strengthening the care and self-care of female employees and workers, eliminating inequality gaps and promoting spaces that contribute to the physical and psychological integrity of women. A series of activities were implemented, including training on sexual and reproductive rights, women's circles, psychosocial care brigades at the work fronts, a protocol for prevention and attention in cases of harassment, discrimination and all forms of gender-based violence against women in the workplace. These actions aimed at both male and female employees of the Provincial Government of Azuay enabled the establishment of regulatory norms to address problems that harm the health and integrity of women in the workplace (Jimenez, 2022).

On the other hand, Grupo Industrial Graiman, a company from Cuenca dedicated to the production and sale of high quality ceramics and well known throughout the country, has implemented Social Responsibility projects. The main focus of CSR is to strengthen ties with the communities neighboring Grupo Industrial Graiman, promoting economic development through a savings and credit project aimed at improving living conditions and stimulating the local economy in a sustainable manner. Since 2019, with expert advice, savings banks and training programs have been established in two parishes: Santa Susana de Chiviáza in Limón and El Asentamiento in Gualaceo. The "Caja de Ahorro y Crédito Nueva Esperanza" in Santa Susana de Chiviáza has 40 women members, while the Caja de Ahorro y Crédito MESE in El Asentamiento has grown from 28 to 56 women members. These initiatives strengthen leadership, foster community relations, promote microenterprises, and provide financial management training for families (Grupo Industrial Graiman, 2024).

In addition, another project that stands out in the city of Cuenca is the Atelier Avanzar, which is part of the Avanzar Foundation, where handmade products are produced in crochet, loom and leather as a complement, 100% handmade. Atelier Avanzar works with 11 women weavers from the province of Azuay, who are in a vulnerable situation and are paid more than the market price for their weaving. The objective of Atelier Avanzar is to empower women to become economic support for themselves and their families. The Avanzar Foundation was created 20 years ago with the objective of teaching knitting to the people who accompany the patients of the Vicente Corral Moscoso Hospital in the city of Cuenca and in this way help them learn a trade. In the Ludoteca de Avanzar at the Hospital, therapy is given to children and support is given to women committed to their development (Fundación Avanzar. org, 2024).

1.1 Objectives

General Objective

Analyze the impact of accountability projects with a gender perspective, gender equity, equal opportunities and women's empowerment in the province of Azuay.

Objetivos Específicos

The proposal is to elaborate a conceptual framework that addresses Social Responsibility from a gender perspective, followed by the identification and analysis of Social Responsibility projects with this specific approach, evaluating their impact in the province of Azuay, especially on women.

1.2. Theoretical framework

In order to analyze the incidence of social responsibility in the women's group, first of all, it is essential to enter into the gender debate to understand how social structures influence our daily lives and how we can work towards equality and inclusion. When we talk about the gender debate, we are involved in a complex territory where opinions, experiences and struggles for equity and recognition of diversity converge. Therefore, it can be said that the gender debate invites us to question ingrained stereotypes, cultural norms and injustices that still persist in our institutions and communities. Also, the gender debate challenges us to reconsider our pre-established conceptions of what it means to be a man, a woman or to identify outside these categories, thus fostering greater understanding and acceptance.

According to Silvia Arribas (2021), a labor lawyer, "The concept of woman is not ahistorical and is not determined exclusively by the reproductive role; gender is not a set of socio-psychological or performative attributes, but is a real social relationship" (p. 55).

Reflecting on the definition of woman implies considering cultural aspects, gender roles, as well as biological and physiological aspects related to sexual identity, among others. However, it is interesting to note how through history, this concept, which includes a wide range of experiences and subjectivities, has been mostly associated with characteristics related to motherhood (Agudelo Londoño et al., 2016). What the authors mention, makes reference to the fact that being a woman means identifying with the female biological sex, but goes beyond that, being a woman means being aware that the conception of woman varies according to culture, historical context and individual perspectives, the same that implies navigating a variety of roles and social expectations, which may include family responsibilities, professional challenges and struggles for gender equality. In addition, being a woman involves facing unique experiences, such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood, which can shape a person's identity and life experiences.

Having said this, it is important to ask ourselves a question: *what is gender?* The doubt has always existed, from studies and debates of anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers and feminist activists since the 80's, who have been focused on studying and delimiting a concept of gender for decades, however, each of them are antagonistic positions. This means that there is no single definition of gender, but that it varies depending on who analyzes and studies it. Therefore, in this text you will not find a new definition of gender, but it is focused on talking about the different theoretical currents on gender, feminist movements, women's inequality, and the importance of supporting women for their social insertion.

Well into the 1980s, theoretical feminists constructed a definition of gender based on the differentiation of biological sex and social attributes or behaviors, framing gender in a historical process that is developed and established by the State itself, the market, the family, the school, the media and the legal system. Gender in the 1980s was defined in dualistic and opposing terms: what is feminine is because it is not masculine and vice versa. By the 1990's gender would be directly related to sexuality, it is defended that gender is an identity that is constructed through the reiteration of norms, social and sexual practices. Gender would not be a process that manages to fix identities, which are constantly monitored by social norms (Horna, 2021).

On the other hand, it is very important to recognize the existence of the multiplicity of genders, i.e. the existence of a variety of non-binary genders beyond male/female. Gender is neither stable nor homogeneous in time or place; in each society and culture it obeys an ideology and specific social relations determined by a mode of production.

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associated with characteristics related to motherhood (Agudelo Londoño et al., 2016). What the authors mention, makes reference to the fact that being a woman means identifying with the female biological sex, but goes beyond that, being a woman means being aware that the conception of woman varies according to culture, historical context and individual perspectives, the same that implies navigating a variety of roles and social expectations, which may include family responsibilities, professional challenges and struggles for gender equality. In addition, being a woman involves facing unique experiences, such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood, which can shape a person's identity and life experiences.

Therefore, the concept of gender emphasizes the cultural construction of sexual difference. This refers to the fact that the different cultures, activities, ways of living and developing with the rest of the individuals, both women and men, are constructed through the culture in which they develop more than for biological reasons. The term gender is used to describe the behaviors socially assigned to men and women (Carrillo, 2021). The psychologist Robert Stoller in 1968, after his studies on sexual identity disorders, mentions that gender is defined by the fact of having lived from birth the experiences and customs of a certain gender.

Understanding this allows understanding the inequality gap between men and women, which are socially constructed and due to these beliefs, the opportunities that can be accessed are defined based on valuations of what is considered feminine or masculine (Mantilla Falcon, 2016).

Another very particular topic that should be mentioned when talking about gender is the gender debate, which is nowadays one of the most popular terms and is discussed by several authors. The gender debate encompasses discussions and analyses related to the differences, roles, rights and expectations associated with gender, with a particular focus on equality and equity between men and women. This dialogue englobes a variety of topics, such as discrimination, violence, traditional roles, gender identity and sexuality, as well as representation in the media.

The gender debate works to question and challenge social and cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality, as well as to promote equal opportunities and rights for all people, regardless of gender. On the other hand, it addresses the diversity of experiences and perspectives within the different genders. It recognizes that gender experiences can vary according to social class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, seeking to question the social and cultural norms that maintain gender inequality, and to promote equal rights and opportunities for all people, regardless of their gender. In addition, it works to recognize the diversity of experiences and points of view within the different genders, understanding that gender experiences may differ according to factors such as social class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity (Carrillo, 2021).

A term that is not often talked about and has a strong impact on society is ageism. The term was coined by Robert Butler in the 1960s and is based on the assumption that older people are deficient because of their age, noting that ageism is a prejudice against everyone. While older persons represent one of the most heterogeneous segments of the world's population, ageism perceives them in a generalized manner based on assumptions and stereotypes (United Nations - Human Rights, 2021). According to the report of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, ageism promotes age discrimination and limits the enjoyment of human rights by older persons. This phenomenon negatively affects younger generations as well and fosters generational divide (United Nations - General Assembly, 2016).

In the case of older women old age is perceived with much more negative connotations marked by what it is supposed to be old in a macho society. In the daily life of society, women have always been linked to their beauty, their youth and the ability to be a mother and wife, which is why older women are underrepresented, assuming a secondary role and loaded with stereotypes where they are seen as weak women and their needs, thoughts or vital projects are ignored. Older women who are limited to lives that are still in relation to others and loaded with negative connotations so it can be said that both stereotypes, gender roles and age are directly related. Invisibility in women increases with age, generating that gender violence does not disappear with age, but older women face other types of discrimination that are related to their age and the fact of being a woman, with the physical changes implied by aging that affect the identity of women, which can generate great problems of self-esteem and imply new challenges for the person as an individual within society (Mora, 2021).

A definition that is important to take into consideration is patrimonial violence, in Ecuador there is 6.1% of women who suffer this type of violence (Ministry of Women and Human Rights, 2019). It is a type of violence that manifests itself through control and manipulation to the deprivation of economic resources or material goods

by one person towards another generally within a couple or family relationship. This type of violence can include actions such as the limitation of access to money, provision of studies, work, destruction of personal material goods among other forms of economic control. It is important to bear in mind that this type of violence is not only limited to the economic sphere, but also has serious repercussions and significant emotional, psychological and social consequences for the person to have a good performance within society and is one of the components of a broader pattern of abuse within the relationship. Economic or patrimonial violence is usually dismissed or accepted by the victim at the beginning, who does not give it importance, perhaps due to a lack of knowledge of what a type of abuse is and considers it as something normal due to the context in which the story develops, generating that women get used to depend on someone and do not learn to fend for themselves either out of habit, fear, ignorance, or lack of opportunities. However, this type of violence does not stop there when the woman refuses to continue enduring this abuse, which results in physical and psychological violence as consequences and that is when she decides to denounce the aggressor, that is when the woman realizes that she cannot stay like this and decides to undertake to get ahead on her own and empower herself as a woman (Córdova López, 2017).

All of the above leads us to feminism, understood as a social and political movement that works for gender equality in all spheres of life, becoming a transforming force in contemporary history. From its historical roots to its evolution today, feminism has challenged patriarchal structures that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and oppression. This movement has given voice to women's experiences and struggles, as well as promoted gender equality for all people, regardless of their gender identity. In this exploration of feminism, we will examine its foundations, historical achievements, diverse currents and contemporary challenges in order to understand its importance and impact on the quest for a more just and inclusive society.

Feminism is distinguished as an authentic social movement rather than an ideology, since it does not ascribe to a rigid system of values and beliefs, feminism is a movement of rebellion against an unnatural order, therefore, modifiable. In the social sciences, feminism stands out for making women's oppression visible, making the term "oppression" the central axis of analysis and transformation in these disciplines. Its purpose is to reveal the true structure of social relations, particularly those of gender, by addressing their historical nature and denouncing their oppressive character (Mill, 2014).

Feminism represents an intellectual breakthrough that impacts all aspects of reality and knowledge, both the theoretical construction of feminism and its practical activism are crucial and must converge towards a revolutionary transformation of knowledge.

Throughout history, feminism has gone through various stages and currents, first the feminism of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century that emerged during this period of history, with the impetus of thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft, who advocated equal education for women and men. The First Wave of Feminism, between the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, during this period the struggle was mainly for women's suffrage, with figures such as Emmeline Pankhurst and Susan B. Anthony standing out. The Second Wave of Feminism from the 1960s to the 1980s, focused on equal social, economic and political rights, as well as reproductive autonomy; at this stage, movements such as radical feminism and feminism of difference emerged. While the Third Wave of Feminism from the 1990s onwards, is characterized by a greater diversity of perspectives and the inclusion of issues such as intersectionality, which recognizes the intersection of different forms of oppression such as race, class and gender; in this stage emerged movements such as feminism want and cyberfeminism (De Miguel, 2011).

Finally, contemporary feminism continues to evolve with the incorporation of new technologies and globalization, addressing issues such as gender violence, sexual harassment, the wage gap and the representation of women in the media (De Miguel, 2011). It can be said that feminism has made significant advances in many aspects, although challenges persist and the movement remains relevant in the struggle for gender equality worldwide.

Despite historical advances in terms of recognition of women's rights and equal access to opportunities, the percentage in relation to the gender gap is significantly high in the country, with 74.3% according to INEC. Therefore, it is timely to strengthen responsible management as an alternative to strengthen the empowerment and development of women as individuals within society; thus, certain social responsibility projects take into account the specific needs of women, considering the benefit to the communities in which they operate, as well as promoting gender equity and contributing to the construction of a more inclusive and just world.

Thus, social responsibility is not a physical reality, but a social construct that depends on the knowledge, context and perception of the person analyzing it. The term social responsibility carries two connotations, the word responsibility refers to a content of obligation and commitment, while social also has an ethical character as it reflects a moral duty (Aizpirtarte Goikoetxea, 2019).

According to the Association for the United Nations in Spain, social responsibility refers to the commitment, obligation and duty that an individual, institution, company and organizations in general have to contribute in a voluntary manner in building a more just and sustainable society, this commitment is manifested in positive actions that promote social welfare (ANUE.ORG, 2019).

Now, when incorporating the gender perspective in social responsibility projects, it is essential to understand that it seeks to promote the empowerment of women and the inclusion of all gender identities. This contributes to gender equality and the sustainability of organizations. The inclusion of the gender perspective in social projects not only benefits women, but also contributes to the comprehensive development of society.

According to UN Women, gender equality is the overall development objective, while gender mainstreaming is a set of specific and strategic approaches, as well as technical and institutional processes. Gender mainstreaming integrates gender equality into a country's public and private organizations, central or local policies, and service and sectoral programs (UN WOMEN, 2022).

Women's labor empowerment refers to the strengthening of their position in the workplace, promoting equal opportunities, equal access to decent employment and the elimination of barriers that limit their professional progress. This involves ensuring fair and safe working conditions, as well as the elimination of gender discrimination in the workplace. In 2017, UN Women conducted a study on gender inequalities in the workplace, in Latin America and the Caribbean where men earn on average 19% more than women and 55% of women's jobs are in the informal economy. Thus, the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) placed gender equality and women's empowerment at the center of the 2030 Agenda. The fulfillment of these goals necessarily involves realizing the full potential of women in the economic and labor spheres (UN WOMEN, 2017).

2. Methods

The methodology applied in this study is qualitative, based on the logic and inductive process from the particular to the general, according to (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014). It seeks to actively interpret the perspectives of different actors and participants through a literature review that includes the detection and consultation of primary sources on the internet and digital libraries, repositories, publications of various agencies and scientific journals from which the categories of analysis were identified, which will allow establishing the relationship between social responsibility projects and the population of women in Azuay.

Once the references of interest were identified, we proceeded to make a documentary review matrix, which was very useful to generate summaries of the most relevant articles and documents, as well as the extraction of ideas and identification of the sources that were not used. These summaries and information are subsequently combined in the theoretical framework and state of the art, as well as being the basis for the discussion of results.

Regarding data collection, the semi-structured interview was used as a technical instrument, which allowed gathering first-hand information from people who have experience or knowledge in the area of study, in this case, semi-structured interviews were applied to different actors and/or people selected at convenience both from the public and private sectors and non-profit organizations. Specific questions were asked about social responsibility projects applied to women in the province of Azuay, which have been implemented by the institutions they represent, as well as to the women who have benefited from these projects, in order to obtain detailed and contextualized information on the subject.

The research was conducted through a case study, where the sample size included the participation of 6-10 individuals because, as mentioned, the participants of the study will be only women from Azuay who are beneficiaries of social responsibility projects and representatives of institutions belonging to the three sectors. Likewise, the population of men was excluded from the study, since they are not part of the analysis, as well as women who did not participate in these social responsibility projects.

In order to meet the objective of the research, the following matrix of categories was prepared, which constitutes the reference for the collection of information.

Table 1*Categories for data collection*

Categories	Subcategories
Social Responsibility	Gender focus, empowerment, inclusion.
Impact	Economic, political, social, emotional.
Gender	Women, feminism, women's roles, women's stereotypes, discrimination.

3. Results

In order to achieve the objective set out in this research, the interview technique was used, through a tool elaborated considering the categories of analysis selected for the study. A total of 10 people participated in the interview, between 40 and 60 years of age; 2 people in charge of leading Social Responsibility projects for women, and 8 women beneficiaries of these projects.

Table 2*Division of the interview guide for women in charge of Social Responsibility projects*

Categories	Subcategories
Social Responsibility	What is the main objective of your social responsibility project aimed at women? What kind of specific activities or programs are implemented to support women in your community?
Impact	What are some of the major achievements or impacts you have observed since you started your project? What plans do you have for the future of your social responsibility project for women?
Gender	How do you identify the specific needs and challenges faced by the women you want to help? What strategies do you use to ensure that your project is inclusive and addresses the diverse realities and contexts of the women it serves?

Table 3

Division of the interview guide to the women beneficiaries of Social Responsibility projects.

Categories	Subcategories
Social Responsibility	Do you know what SR is?
	What SR project do you participate in and are you a beneficiary of? What does it consist of?
	What motivated you to participate in the project despite the difficulties and challenges you face as a vulnerable woman?
Impact	How has the social project impacted your daily life and that of your family?
	What aspects of the project do you consider most beneficial or relevant to you and your community?
	What are the main challenges you have faced in participating in the project and how have you managed to overcome them?
	How have they seen your venture positively impact your life and the lives of those around you?
Gender	Describe what it means to you to be a woman?
	What are the roles of women?
	Have you noticed any significant changes in your personal empowerment and your ability to make decisions since joining the project?

The following is the information obtained from those leading social responsibility projects for women in the province of Azuay, as shown in Table 4 of the annexes section. The following participated in the interviews: Carla Pérez, head of corporate quality at Grupo Industrial Graiman / Design and project management on behalf of private enterprise; and Marcela Castillo, Director of Fundación Avanzar, on behalf of the third sector.

In terms of social responsibility, those who lead these projects consider that social responsibility projects focused on women develop skills, generate opportunities and resources for women to empower themselves and become autonomous. They recognize that these are projects that respond to women's challenges, as well as their needs. Their work is a manifestation of their belief in equal opportunities for all people, regardless of gender. In both cases, you are acutely aware of the many forms of injustice and inequality that women face in different contexts, whether in access to education, employment, health care, or participation in decision-making. Your work may be motivated by a desire to address these injustices.

In relation to the impact of these projects, those in charge state that they have had a significant impact on the economic empowerment of the women who benefited from them, which is effectively reflected in increased access to opportunities, skills development and improved capacity to earn their own income. Project managers can see an increase in women's participation as well as in their ability to contribute to the livelihoods of their families and communities. These social responsibility projects include training and skill-development programs and workshops designed to strengthen women's capacities in various areas such as education, leadership, business management, and technical skills. They have seen an increase in women's self-confidence, self-esteem and autonomy as they acquire new skills and knowledge that enable them to take a more active role in their lives and communities.

By talking about gender, it can be said that all the responsibility and hard work involved in being a woman is recognized. Likewise, talking about gender in a social responsibility project with a focus on women implies recognizing and addressing the social, economic and cultural differences between men and women, as well as the gender inequalities that exist in society. It involves responding to their needs and aspirations, and promoting awareness and changing attitudes towards gender equality. The women in charge have been able to demonstrate that teamwork among women makes them stronger and more capable; this is one of the most important aspects for the proper functioning of the project, since it generates a positive change in the beneficiary women.

In order to have a global vision, 8 women beneficiaries of the social responsibility projects were interviewed, between 40 and 60 years of age, from the province of Azuay. With respect to the concept of what social responsibility is, or if they know the term, none of them could answer; however, all of them are aware that they were part of a project which is aimed at women who meet the objective of improving their lifestyle and

contribute to their home and community. In terms of impact, these social responsibility projects with a gender focus have had a significant impact on the beneficiary women by providing them with access to opportunities that were previously denied to them due to social and economic barriers. These projects not only provide specific training and resources to address gender inequalities, but also empower women by promoting their active participation in decision-making and encouraging the development of skills that enable them to reach their full potential. Furthermore, by raising awareness of gender issues and promoting equal opportunities, these projects contribute to building a more inclusive and equitable society in which women can thrive and have a voice.

The results of the thesis indicate that social responsibility projects in Azuay have had a significant impact on the lives of women beneficiaries. The research highlights several cases in which women have been able to improve their economic autonomy and social participation through involvement in these projects. For example, the “Caja de Ahorro y Crédito Nueva Esperanza” project is mentioned, as well as the atelier project with women weavers, which has enabled many women to start and sustain their own businesses, thus improving their economic situation and their position within the community.

These results are discussed in the context of an empowerment that goes beyond the economic, touching on aspects of community participation, self-esteem and leadership. It is noted that although challenges remain, especially in terms of sustainability and scaling up of these projects, the positive impact is clear and tangible.

4. Discussion

Social responsibility with a gender perspective highlights how the implementation of such projects not only benefits individual women, but also contributes to broader social change. This impact has been corroborated in the field research, which analyzed some social responsibility projects with a gender perspective, which are being implemented or have been implemented in the province of Azuay. From the information gathered, it has been possible to confirm that these projects challenge pre-existing gender norms and structures and promote a more inclusive and equitable model of social and economic development. As a result, women have been able to form support networks among themselves, after being part of the projects, they have felt more valued, more useful and have been able to improve their economy.

Silvia Arribas (2021) states that gender “is a true social relationship” (p. 55). This means that gender must be understood as a social construct that emerges from interactions, norms and power structures within society. Gender is not simply about personal traits or individual behaviors, but about how societies structure relationships and expectations around these categories.

Likewise, authors such as Horna (2021) and Carrillo (2021) are cited to explain how gender norms and roles are socially constructed and how this affects women in their daily lives by defining expectations about how they should behave, what roles they should fulfill in society, and what opportunities they have access to. Most of the women interviewed stated that, for them, being a woman is being a mother, wife and that their life is conditioned to taking care of the home and their children. For this reason, women have, in a certain way, neglected their personal and professional development. On the other hand, the foundation's representative states that one of the greatest challenges in implementing these projects is overcoming the cultural and social barriers that have traditionally limited the role of women in society; many of them come from environments where economic and educational opportunities are scarce.

As can be seen in the results of this research, the representatives of both institutions that participated in the study are aware of what the implementation of social responsibility projects entails, specifically within the province of Azuay; perception that coincides with that expressed by Aizpitarre Goikoetxea (2019), who exposes that social responsibility with a gender approach is an approach to business and social practices that recognizes and addresses gender inequalities and injustices that exist in society, focusing on ensuring that companies, organizations, foundations, as well as social programs and projects, consider and respond to the specific needs of women in an equitable and fair manner.

For example, when talking about the project of the private company, Caja Solidaria de Ahorro y Crédito in Gualaceo, Carla, who is in charge of it, comments “We were moved by the fact that when we made the diagnosis, with the community, there were many single women who were heads of household who worked hard to support their families”. When the call was made, 80% were women, so we saw the need and interest of women to want to do something and want to get ahead, and that was what we were looking for. Let's see how we can

contribute from this company to grow together”. Following up on the project, Carla mentions that it has been successful. They have been able to form a compact and organized group of women, and although they are not a legally constituted cooperative, they have a solid structure and bylaws. Carla also stresses the importance of values and the ethic of care in working with these communities, ensuring that the project is not only inclusive, but that it also responds effectively to the needs and real contexts of the women involved. This is corroborated by the testimony of one of the beneficiary women: “I had a distorted life and the people in charge of this project were there for me, they helped me a lot because they worked on my personal life both morally and morally. They supported me in studying and getting ahead and bettering myself”. From this background, it can be said that the Caja Solidaria de Ahorro y Crédito has had a positive impact on the lives of the participating women, providing them with the tools and support necessary to move towards greater economic autonomy and personal empowerment.

For her part, Marcela recognizes that the Social Responsibility projects that were initially implemented in the foundation, were not free of error, it was “a trial and error test”. She tells us that initially they started from the perspective of those who planned the project, without considering the needs and points of view of the participants; and that this was what cost them the most, to be able to differentiate their needs and adapt them to the objective that they have as a foundation. Testimonies that coincide with the position of Aizpitarte Goikoetxea (2019), who emphasizes the need for projects to respond to the specific needs of women. Thus, Marcela highlights the importance of adapting the project to the real needs and interests of the women, which has allowed the project not only to be sustainable, but also to grow and have a significant impact on the lives of the participants.

Regarding gender, Horna (2021) mentions that it was delimited in dualistic and opposed terms. However, according to the context in which it is being analyzed, it varies according to cultural and social perspectives, behaviors and attributions. The women interviewed stated that each one interprets the term according to their experiences, being aware that they are women and identify with their gender. (2016) who mentions that being a woman is directly related to the characteristics of motherhood, which imply fulfilling a variety of roles and expectations of society. This is evident in the narrative of the women who were part of the study, as they expressed that being a woman is directly related to the characteristics of motherhood and associated roles and expectations of society.

Marcela stresses the importance of empowering women by developing skills and creating economic opportunities. The impact of Fundación Avanzar's projects is reflected in the tangible improvement of women's quality of life, and highlights the growth in women's confidence and ability to contribute economically. In this sense, a deep understanding of gender dynamics and a commitment to women's empowerment is evident. Her leadership at Fundación Avanzar shows how social responsibility projects can be effective tools to address gender inequality and foster sustainable development. Marcela also highlights the importance of tailoring the project to the real needs and interests of the women, which has allowed the project to not only be sustainable, but to grow and have a significant impact on the lives of the participants.

Consequently, it is necessary to mention the perspective of the eight women beneficiaries of the different projects. When asked what it means to them to be a woman, they all responded, as Agudelo Londoño et al. (2016) says, that being a woman is directly related to the characteristics of motherhood, which imply fulfilling a variety of roles and expectations of society. Likewise, when talking about gender according to Horna (2021), who mentions that it was delimited in dualistic and opposed terms and that according to the context in which it is being analyzed, it varies according to cultural and social perspectives, behaviors and attributions. This was evident in the interviews with the women, as each one interprets the term according to her experiences, while being aware that they are women, and identified with the gender.

Against this background, it is important to value the contribution of companies and institutions that contribute to social responsibility projects; thus, the beneficiaries of the “Caja Solidaria” project recognize that thanks to this project they have been empowered, have developed financial and business skills, and have improved their self-esteem and economic independence. These benefits are consistent with the project's objectives of providing women with the necessary tools to improve their economic autonomy and decision-making capacity. In addition, the community aspect and mutual support among the project partners strengthen the social safety net, which is crucial for the sustainable empowerment of women in vulnerable contexts. This project has not only positively affected women's economic lives, but has also impacted their social and family roles, promoting a social transformation towards gender equality. As mentioned in a study conducted by UN Women (2022), the inclusion

of a gender perspective in social projects not only benefits women, but also contributes to the integral development of society.

For example, one of the women interviewed, highlights that the project has taught her to be self-sufficient and to manage her finances without depending on her husband, which has increased her self-esteem and empowerment. She highlights the ease of accessing loans and how these have contributed to improving her economic situation and that of her family. Another woman beneficiary of the project comments that she has improved her leadership and business skills, mentioning that through the training received, she has learned to better manage her business and interact with other women in similar situations, which has fostered a sense of community and mutual support among the participants.

For their part, the women beneficiaries of Fundación Avanzar's Atelier project say that the project has not only provided the women with technical and professional skills, but has also played a crucial role in the personal empowerment and improved quality of life of the participants. All this refers to a bulletin published by UN Women in 2022, which mentions that women's empowerment in the workplace refers to strengthening their position in the workplace, promoting equal opportunities, equal access to decent employment and the elimination of barriers that limit their professional progress.

Among the testimonies, it is important to highlight the positive perception of the participating women, who state that thanks to the projects, a significant transformation has been possible in terms of their self-perception and their ability to positively influence their families. For example, one of the interviewees shares that before joining the El Atelier Foundation project, she had difficulty finding a stable job that would allow her to support her family. Through the project, she learned advanced knitting and crochet techniques, which not only improved her handicraft skills, but also allowed her to earn a steady income by selling her products at local fairs. She also highlights the importance of the sense of community and mutual support she found in the project, noting how this has raised her self-esteem and empowered her to make more independent decisions in her personal and professional life. In the same area, another of the study participants comments on the solidarity and support she has experienced at the Atelier, highlighting how teamwork and collaboration have been essential to overcome personal and professional challenges, she highly values the cooperative learning environment and how the project has facilitated a safe space for women to discuss their challenges and find solutions together, thus strengthening their leadership skills and self-confidence.

Considering that the situation of women requires recognizing various challenges to achieve equity. It is worth mentioning Mora (2021), who mentioned that as women age, their social visibility decreases, facing discrimination that is intertwined with gender and age. Not only do they continue to suffer gender-based violence, but they are also subjected to additional discrimination associated with the physical changes of aging. These factors affect their identity and self-esteem, presenting new challenges to their role and perception within society. This situation has been explained by one of the interviewees, who states that “the foundation is a social aid for women who do not have a job, either because of age or because they did not study; it is something that gives us the opportunity to feel useful, to work and help, feeling part of society and earning our own income”.

The results show a significant impact on the development of skills, self-esteem, and economic autonomy of women, which is discussed in the theoretical framework through gender theories that emphasize the need to combat structural inequalities and promote equality.

The discussion also addresses how these projects have been able to create safe spaces for women to develop new skills and participate more actively in their communities. This aspect is vital, as it reflects a tangible change in the perception and role of women within their social environment, which is a key objective outlined in the theoretical framework. Finally, the importance of continuing and expanding these projects is highlighted, not only as a corporate social responsibility tool, but also as an integral strategy to promote gender equity and social development.

5. Conclusion

After the work carried out, it can be concluded that the Social Responsibility projects with a gender approach implemented in the province of Azuay, led by private and third sector institutions, have shown a significant impact on the lives of women beneficiaries. Thus, it has been possible to corroborate that the impact has been positive in terms of equity, equal opportunities and female empowerment. Projects such as the “Caja de

Ahorro y Crédito Nueva Esperanza” and the “Atelier de la Fundación Avanzar” have shown improvements in the economic and social autonomy of women, highlighting the importance of confronting structural inequalities to promote equality, in accordance with the gender theories integrated in the theoretical framework of the study.

Some limitations of the study are recognized, such as the limited geographic range and the need for a longitudinal analysis to assess the sustainability of the observed impacts. However, these projects are valued as crucial tools that not only benefit women economically, but also promote a significant change in the social and cultural structure of Azuay, challenging traditional gender roles and norms.

It is very important to mention that in the province of Azuay, there is great progress in terms of eliminating inequalities in gender issues. Increasingly both the population and companies, institutions and organizations, are aware of the importance of implementing Social Responsibility projects with a gender approach and the benefits they bring both for the organization that imparts them and externally for the beneficiary women and society in general. However, in order to strengthen and expand the benefits of these projects, it is recommended: to give continuity and expansion to the projects, it is crucial that both the private and public sectors continue to support and expand this type of initiative. Long-term commitment and geographic expansion of projects can ensure a broader and more sustainable impact. Implement monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to adjust and improve projects based on results and real-time feedback. Also advocacy and collaboration between companies, NGOs, government and beneficiary communities to create a holistic and multi-faceted approach that addresses the specific needs of women from various angles. Finally gender education and awareness are key, in addition these province-wide education and awareness efforts help combat lingering gender biases and stereotypes, fostering a culture of equality and respect.

This study has not only made visible the positive impact of gender-focused social responsibility projects in Azuay, but also highlighted the need to continue and deepen these efforts. By focusing on women's empowerment and inclusion, these projects are not only improving individual lives, but are contributing to broader and lasting social change, aligning with the global goals of gender equality and sustainable development. With the right support and a well-structured strategy, the potential for transforming society in Azuay is immense and fundamental to progress towards a more equitable and just society.

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7. Appendices

Appendix 1

Interview in charge of the Graiman Social responsibility project

Interview # 1

Interviewee profile: Carla Perez, in charge of Social Responsibility projects at Grupo Industrial Graiman.

Institution she represents (with option to remain anonymous): Grupo Industrial Graiman.

Type of Institution: It is a private institution dedicated to the production of ceramics.

Date: 05 April 2024

Time duration: 36 minutes

Camila:

Greetings and thanks for the support for the collection of the requested information, regarding the topic to be addressed in the degree thesis and the objective of this interview.

- Dear Carla, could you put in context the social responsibility project with a gender approach that is being carried out in the company Graiman.

Carla:

We are from corporate social responsibility, from the Graiman Industrial Group, and work on several projects and programs. One of our lines of action is the communities. We work with the communities neighboring our area of influence, as a ceramic company, our raw materials are clays that come from the east coast and from right here in the province of Azuay, so we focus on working in those areas because the main objective is to create shared value, it is the philosophy with which we manage, with which the shareholders, the owner family, wants to do business in a different way.

Mainly in the area of women, we work in a project called Cajas Solidarias de Ahorro y Crédito in the communities of Santa Susana de Chiviza in Morona Santiago and in the area of Azuay, Gualaceo. In this settlement area, we have a storage yard where raw materials arrive, so we are really surrounded by a very important community. We have focused on this project, because we believe that it reaches a minority group and often disadvantaged, which are the women of the communities. In Gualaceo, we formed this solidarity savings and credit fund, approximately in 2020, in the middle of the pandemic we were starting with the fund, despite the pandemic, we were working with the people, and then we reactivated fully in 2021. It is a fund made up of 50 people, all of them women. The main objective of the savings bank is to help to dynamize, through the loans that the savings bank generates, projects so that women can set up their own businesses and thus dynamize the economy of their families. We have relied heavily on an expert foundation, the Waaponi Foundation, with whom we have formed the saving bank Cajas that is working in Gualaceo.

We are doing very well, the process of forming these funds, we first made a participatory diagnosis with the community, we developed socioeconomic and environmental sheets of the sector, that was our baseline. We as the Graiman Industrial Group provide seed capital and start the fund, and we contribute with professionals from different areas, such as technical issues, accounting, fund formation, workshops on personal relationships so that they learn to work as a team, generate self-confidence in women, form leaders, and increase their self-esteem, they are very enriching spaces. It is a very compact group that knows how to excel, the statutes are very well defined, although it is true that they are not part of the cooperative movement, but the idea is that they continue to grow and someday form a cooperative, their statutes are based on the Superintendency of Banks even though they do not depend on them, they set their own rules, they have a well-structured board that they choose among themselves, consisting of a president, secretary, treasurer and two supervisors. They have been trained in all the topics they need to carry out these projects.

In the Settlement, we have a fairly good level of education, most of them have finished high school, so they flow quickly, they have conversations with very good criteria and analysis, which has allowed us to keep the level from dropping. But also, there are many single mothers and others who live in a common-law relationship, and we always try to make them feel important and useful for this society and that they do not look for a partner because they think they cannot do things by themselves. The savings bank itself has very good solvency and very little delinquency, and they know each other very well.

One of the differences with a cooperative is that the money they contribute, everything that enters the fund, has the slogan that it goes out on credit and is mainly for food, education and health projects. At the moment, we are adapting an office for them inside the community house in Gualaceo. It is really an intervention of the whole community that helps them to support each other, the idea is also that the women grow and feel supported.

Camila:

Could you tell us about the ages of the women who work in the cashier's office, if they are young adults.

Carla:

It is a group that is between 23 and 40 years old, there are few women over 45 years old and there are two elderly women. Young women with innovative ideas.

Camila:

Can you tell us what was the objective of the Graiman Group in implementing this project specifically with women, what was their vision?

Carla:

We have three lines of action, the first is the employees and their families, environmental and communities. Then, in terms of communities, as in the case of Gualaceo, we were moved by the fact that when we made the diagnosis, with the community, there were many single women who were heads of households who worked hard to maintain their families. When the call was made, 80% were women, then we saw that the need and interest of women to want to do something and want to get ahead and that was what we were looking for, let's see how we contribute to them from this company to grow together.

Camila:

How do you identify the specific needs and challenges faced by the women you want to help?

Carla:

We had some challenges, first that working with communities is not easy, on the one hand they may be thinking that we are going to give them doing everything that salvation came for them and that they are going to ask us for everything, on the other hand some people because of their culture, since in these communities there are many migrants, all that was complex the diversity of culture that becomes a challenge. Religion has a lot of strength, so it is also how to work with women who are strongly attached to religion, where it has prohibitions. It was very difficult for them to know that they do not have to endure mistreatment because a book says it is so or because the pastor says so. So the cultural and religious issue has cost us until they have confidence in us and know that they are not really doing wrong and that they have to give themselves the opportunity. It was quite a challenge for them to open up to us, we did not influence them to do something that could harm them, but rather they know that we support them.

Camila:

What strategies do you use to make sure your project is inclusive and addresses the diverse realities and contexts of the women it serves?

Carla:

We always start our work from a diagnosis, it is key, we do not invent anything, we do not do things isolated from the needs of the people, we start from a diagnosis of needs and based on it, we work and analyze what is best for them and have strong roots so that what we have built does not crumble. In the workshops we always ask them how they feel, we work with the methodology of the ethics of care, the same that teaches us that we must take care of ourselves, strangers, friends and the planet, under that philosophy we are always aware of them. We never try to lose objectivity through diagnoses and see how we have progressed.

Camila:

What are some of the biggest achievements or impacts you have observed since you started your project?

Carla:

What I have liked most about forming this project of a solidarity savings and credit cooperative with women is that we can see a before and after, perhaps not as quantitatively as we would like, but also the qualitative evaluations are important, through surveys we have seen the results of the workshops, of the cooperative itself. They have told us through testimonies how their enterprises have grown and we can see the development. It is

evident the change of the women from how we found them to how they are now, that is why they are able to maintain their businesses and their homes.

Appendix 2

Interviews with women beneficiaries of the Graiman Social Responsibility Project

Interview # 2

Interviewee profile: Female beneficiary of the Social Responsibility Project.

Institution represented (with option to remain anonymous): Caja Solidaria de Ahorro y Crédito de Gualaceo.

Date: April 19, 2024

Time: 5:08 minutes

Describe what it means to you to be a woman?

For me being a woman is, for example as a mother, I like to play a role with my children and as a wife. I think that a woman should be responsible as a mother, wife, daughter and also in the workplace, that will make us describe what kind of people we are as women.

What are the roles of women?

I think that as a family, a mother has the role of taking care of her children, in the spiritual and emotional education so that our children will be good children in the future.

Do you know what SR is?

No, I don't.

What SR project do you participate in and are you a beneficiary of? What does it consist of?

I think it has brought us great benefits because when we formed the solidarity fund, it was first a small group and we have been increasing more and more until now we are 53 members, so it is important because it helps us to undertake any business, any venture we want to do helps us, then we can apply for a loan or a credit and it is not difficult at all, we present a guarantor and we have to be punctual with our payments. This benefits us, little by little it teaches us to be responsible as women.

What motivated you to be part of the project despite the difficulties and challenges you face as a vulnerable woman?

Something that motivated me is that I can be an independent woman, not depend on anyone, because if you depend a lot on your husband it is like they tend to trample on you, but as a woman, being part of this project, you know how to play your role, the role you have within the solidarity fund.

How has the social project impacted your daily life and that of your family?

I would say that it has taught me to be more responsible and to continue learning more every day and everything I learn, I pass on to my children, I try to be a person here in the solidarity fund, I have learned to be more patient and more supportive as well.

What aspects of the project do you consider the most beneficial or relevant for you and your community?

The workshops they give us on personal development and interaction with other women.

What are the main challenges you have faced in participating in the project and how have you managed to overcome them?

For me it has been punctuality, I was not punctual before, but this has taught me that I must be punctual and learn.

How have you seen that your business has a positive impact on your life and the lives of those around you?

Yes, I have a business, we have a business with my daughter, where we sell tortillas, corn, wheat, corn, then this has helped me because I have asked for credit to be able to make a capital.

Have you noticed any significant change in your personal empowerment and your ability to make decisions since you joined the project?

Yes I think so because it has taught me to show empathy to other people, and also to feel confident as a woman.

Interview # 3

Interviewee profile: Female beneficiary of the Social Responsibility Project.

Institution represented (with option to remain anonymous): Caja Solidaria de Ahorro y Crédito de Gualaceo.

Date: April 19, 2024

Time: 6:52 minutes

Describe a woman in one word?

I think about everything, because we are the basis of life.

What are the roles of women?

All of them, because I believe that we can play with learning, we play everything.

Do you know what SR is?

I do not know

What SR project do you participate in and are you a beneficiary of? What does it consist of?

We are a group of women entrepreneurs, we are 53 women, and we started working with a seed capital that Graiman gave us. From that we give credits, we call it solidarity fund for entrepreneurship, it helps any need that the women of the fund may have. It helps us to continue growing in knowledge.

What motivated you to take part in the project despite the difficulties and challenges you faced as a vulnerable woman?

They give us workshops on how to relate to each other, on how to develop ourselves, because we are not open to talk, to think, to give our opinion, so we always keep to ourselves, because of fear. That is how the invitation to women who want to be part of the Fund was born, thanks to Graiman who allowed us to be part of this and at the same time we are developing, we have been given a great opportunity because we help many of our colleagues in their daily development.

How has the social project impacted your daily life and that of your family?

In developing myself, thinking about how to speak and finding the words but not hurting someone else.

What aspects of the project do you consider the most beneficial or relevant for you and your community?

The credits and the training that they are able to give us and the invitations to get to know other solidarity funds.

What are the main challenges you have faced in participating in the project and how have you managed to overcome them?

Inconveniences always arise along the way, but we have to try to solve them, not with outbursts of anger or anger, because acting like that, we can make the fund break.

How have you seen that your entrepreneurship has a positive impact on your life and those around you?

Yes, I have learned techniques for making yogurt, jam, bread and food. I am just starting to work on that, and the box has helped me a lot to get rid of my embarrassment and now I'm doing entrepreneurship.

Have you noticed any significant changes in your personal empowerment and decision-making skills since you joined the project?

Yes, because I have learned valuable things like integrating with other people and knowing how to function. Learning from the lives of my colleagues. Where some are good and others are bad, you have to learn to cope with that, from those situations we learn to develop ourselves more. Before I was afraid, and I said I couldn't, but now I believe that I can get ahead.

Interview # 4

Interviewee profile: Female beneficiary of the Social Responsibility Project.

Institution represented (with option to remain anonymous): Caja Solidaria de Ahorro y Crédito de Gualaceo.

Date: April 19, 2024

Time: 7:33 minutes

Describe what being a woman means to you?

For me, being a woman means a lot. Being a woman is not easy, but we try and I try to be something good for society with the fact of studying, being a mother and head of household since I am a father and mother for my children. Being a woman is very valuable.

What are the roles of women?

Women must fulfill the role of being an exceptional woman in every sense.

Do you know what RS is?

I do not know

What SR project do you participate in and are you a beneficiary of? What does it consist of?

Who else but me can say and give a version of how all this started, because I am the person who was here from the beginning. My role is to be an accountant and if I am doing well, this needs time and training and we go hand in hand with our colleagues.

What motivated you to become an entrepreneur despite the difficulties and challenges you face as a vulnerable woman?

I was very motivated by this project, because they focused on life, because I had a distorted life and the people in charge of this project were there for me, they helped me a lot because they worked on my personal life both morally and morally, they supported me to study and get ahead and improve myself and I thank them for that, they worked on my empowerment as a woman.

How has the social project impacted your daily life and that of your family?

The fund helped me open my business and with that I was able to get ahead and I am still there. If I need anything, they are ready to help me. My life has changed a lot because I was able to start a business and help my children.

What aspects of the project do you consider the most beneficial or relevant for you and your community?

Having visibility into a future that is going to be good. We are women who think big and we are going to be a fund founded by women who will move forward. I see it as a magnificent project.

What are the main challenges you have faced in participating in the project and how have you managed to overcome them?

For me the most complicated thing has been to be able to combine my personal life as a mother of two small children with my work here at the Caja. Both things are very demanding and the most important thing for me is my children.

How have you seen that your business has a positive impact on your life and those around you?

Yes, I have my own business, I sell tortillas in Cabo and we make orders. That's what I opened with my first cash loan.

Have you noticed any significant changes in your personal empowerment and decision-making ability since joining the project?

Yes, I have, actually. I know that women, no matter how old we are, if we want to, we can achieve what we set out to do. Through the training I know that I can have something that is mine.

Interview #5**Interviewee profile:** Female beneficiary of the Social Responsibility Project.**Institution represented (with option to remain anonymous):** Caja Solidaria de Ahorro y Crédito de Gualaceo.**Date:** April 19, 2024**Time:** 5:30 minutes**What does it mean to you to be a woman?**

Being a woman is something so great, after a woman comes mother, then grandmother. To be a woman is to be everything because we are worth so much.

What are the roles of women?

According to the ancients, it was only to spend time at home, now you have to work, to get ahead, you have to make an effort in what you know and can do.

Do you know what SR is?

I do not know

What SR project do you participate in and are you a beneficiary of? What does it consist of?

Within this fund, I am an overseer to lend a loan. I have to see the profile of the person to be sure that he/she will be able to pay the loan he/she asks for.

What motivated you to take part in the project despite the difficulties and challenges you faced as a vulnerable woman?

It is a help that Graiman gave us to get ahead, because as I said, we women are worth a lot.

How has the social project impacted your daily life and that of your family?

It is a great help because of the credits they give us. Economically, we have been able to get ahead with a small business or enterprise.

What aspects of the project do you consider most beneficial or relevant for you and your community?

They help us with the credits and to be able to start a business.

What are the main challenges you have faced in participating in the project and how have you managed to overcome them?

At the beginning it was a bit hard until we got along in the group because we didn't all think alike, but even integrating ourselves was a bit complicated. We managed to overcome these challenges through communication and not listening to outside chatter, but focusing on the group that we are.

How have you seen your business have a positive impact on your life and those around you?

I am a craftswoman in embroidery, it is my job that I did before and I still do it and they have helped me with credits to buy the raw materials I need.

Have you noticed any significant change in your personal empowerment and your ability to make decisions since you joined the project?

I would say that it is a great responsibility, but on the other hand, you de-stress because you live with the group and it is a joy to distract yourself and open your mind.

Appendix 3

Interview with the person in charge of the Social Responsibility Project Foundation Avanzar

Interview # 6

Interviewee's profile: Marcela Castillo person in charge of the Avanzar Foundation in Cuenca

Institution she represents (with the option of anonymity): Fundación Avanzar

Date: April 23, 2024

Duration: 8:00 minutes

Greetings and thanks for the support for the collection of the requested information, informs about the topic to be addressed in the thesis and the purpose of this interview.

- Dear Marcela, could you put in context the social responsibility project with a gender approach that is being carried out in the company Graiman.

Marcela:

Fundacion Avanzar, exists 24 years ago in the city of Cuenca, born from the idea of Margarita Heredia, who is from Cuenca, who went to live in Switzerland, but seeing the needs of women here in the city decides to found the organization. She is the one who does the fundraising through donations and the sale of products and portfolios of the social enterprise. All of that returns here in the form of donations and with that we can fulfill our main objective which is to provide education to women who are in vulnerable situations.

Camila:

What is the main objective of your social responsibility project aimed at women?

Marcela:

We think that historically there has been a lack of educational opportunities for women, especially for women who are in situations of poverty and vulnerability, so the objective is to provide opportunities for these women so that they can resume their studies, since the profile of our women are women who did not finish their studies or retired or did not have the money or started organizing their families very early and could not continue. We support them so that they can monetize their skills in four main areas: cooking, sewing, health, and beauty. What the women do is that they learn courses that are practical but that are also accompanied by financial education, business development that allows them to move forward with their entrepreneurship.

Camila:

What kind of activities or specific programs are implemented to support women in your community?

Marcela:

In the foundation, we have three main projects, we have a toy library in the Vicente Corral Moscoso Hospital on the pediatric floor, where we give 9,600 breakfasts a year, we accompany and lend toys to hospitalized children seeking the restitution of the right to play even in the worst circumstances, and we also give psychoeducation to the children's companions. The other is the atelier or social enterprise that is dedicated to the production and sale of handmade handbags with leather finishes, we have 17 women weavers who live from their work in the atelier. Finally we have the training, we train 400 women a year, in the four areas mentioned above.

Camila:

How do you identify the specific needs and challenges faced by the women you want to help?

Marcela:

The truth is that it has been trial and error because at the beginning we organized the training based on what we thought could help them, then we realized that the needs had to come from them and little by little we were gathering information to organize the courses and training according to what they needed. Because the truth is that we wanted to break the scheme the roles and try to venture into other areas such as carpentry and electricity that is earned more than in the subject of care, cooking and all that, however, it was quite difficult because our society still does not give openness for women to perform these types of trades.

Camila:

What strategies do you use to ensure that your project is inclusive and addresses the diverse realities and contexts of the women it serves?

Marcela:

What we do is an open call and then we segment the ladies according to an interview, in the interview we make them fill out a social card and the personalized interview, we measure their interests, if they are really situations in which they cannot pay for their studies, if they are committed to entrepreneurship and generate resources to improve the quality of life for them and their children. Later, when they are already involved in the course, if we charge a fee to enter the course that includes all the materials with the objective of guaranteeing their commitment and if we do it for free, we have seen that it does not work and people do not value it. With this symbolic fee, what we do is that they can get involved and commit to their training and feel that this way there is a real exchange.

Another is the follow-up, we have someone who helps us week by week to make calls to each one and see if someone is missing and their reason, that is our way of organizing the existence.

Camila:

What are some of the biggest achievements or impacts you have observed since you started your project?

Marcela:

What we have been achieving is that they can make their entrepreneurship not a day-to-day expense, but that it really represents in their lives and can divide a part for savings, a part for daily expenses and another part for deeper needs, then with this, we make them able to bank their money, this makes them generate a history and later make a credit.

Camila:

What plans do you have for the future of your social responsibility project aimed at women?

Marcela:

Currently, the part we are missing is marketing, which generally, is the most difficult thing because they bring out excellent products and learn to move in social networks, but we are missing that. This year we are organizing the first fair of the foundation that will be on Saturday, May 11, so that people can support them by buying the products of the atelier. Our plan is to organize spaces for commercialization and we are also creating a virtual store where they will upload their products and catalogs and where they can make direct purchases of the ladies' products. This page is called Eva Market and is in the testing period, we hope that by the end of this year we will be able to launch it.

Appendix 4

Interviews with women beneficiaries of the Social Responsibility project Fundación Avanzar

Interview # 7

Interviewee profile: Female beneficiary of the Social Responsibility Project.

Institution she represents (with option to remain anonymous): Fundación Avanzar

Date: April 19, 2024

Time duration: 5:33 minutes

Describe for you what it means to be a woman?

To be a mother, responsible and full of love.

What are the roles of women?

Many, the responsibility as a woman is first to think of oneself, in case of being a mother, for the children.

Do you know what SR is?

No, you don't.

What SR project do you participate in and are you a beneficiary of ? What does it consist of?

Here we women have the opportunity to work, those of us who do not have studies, those of us who have not been able to achieve our studies because we had a family when we were young. In my case, because I am divorced and cannot have access to a stable job, because I do not have my studies, and because I have a child with a disability. The foundation gives me a lot of help. My work consists of knitting, most of which I do at home, which gives me time to take care of my family.

What motivated you to be part of this project despite the difficulties and challenges you faced as a vulnerable woman?

Especially the time it gives me to be able to take my work home and at the same time take care of my son at home.

How has the social project impacted your daily life and that of your family?

Quite well because as I said, it is time, and time is what cannot be recovered.

What aspects of the project do you consider the most beneficial or relevant for you and your community?

The economy and time.

What are the main challenges you have faced in participating in the project and how have you managed to overcome them?

Even though there is a guide for the fabrics, it is difficult to get the exact measurements of the bags because sometimes the material comes very thick, sometimes very thin, so even getting it out is difficult.

How have you seen that your business has a positive impact on your life and the life around you?

Yes, in my house I have my garden, so when I have enough, I sell it to my colleagues here at the foundation and they help me.

Have you noticed any significant change in your personal empowerment and in your ability to make decisions since you joined the project?

Yes, a lot because if I were at home, I would not have had this economic opportunity to get ahead, I have also been able to receive other courses that the foundation has given me.

Interview # 8

Interviewee profile: Female beneficiary of the Social Responsibility Project.

Institution she represents (with option to remain anonymous): Fundación Avanzar

Date: April 19, 2024

Time duration: 4:12 minutes

Describe for you what it means to be a woman?

It is to be love, joy, mothers, responsible.

What are the roles of women?

I believe that what we come to fulfill is to be happy.

Do you know what SR is?

No, you don't.

What SR project do you participate in and are you a beneficiary of? What does it consist of?

We come here to knit, the foundation is a social aid for women who do not have jobs either because of age or because they did not study. It is something that gives us the opportunity to feel useful, to work and help, feeling part of society and earning our own income.

What motivated you to be part of this project despite the difficulties and challenges you faced as a vulnerable woman?

The need to subsist economically, to feel useful since I was always a person who worked and contributed to the household and because of my age I no longer had the opportunity. And now it is really a companionship, one more family.

How has the social project impacted your daily life and that of your family?

It makes me much happier, it makes me feel that I still have value as a person and that I can do something and not just sit at home waiting for old age to come to me.

What aspects of the project do you consider the most beneficial or relevant for you and your community?

Apart from learning and training ourselves internally, the financial support helps us with the insurance, it is an all-encompassing one.

What are the main challenges you have faced in participating in the project and how have you managed to overcome them?

That the fabrics are a perfect product to be able to export to Switzerland so everything must be perfect.

How have you seen your venture positively impact your life and the lives around you?

I don't have any particular project of mine. I am studying reiki and in the future I want to help heal people, that is my plan.

Have you noticed any significant changes in your personal empowerment and your ability to make decisions since you joined the project?

I feel more useful, more joyful, then not only me but all of us feel full and content.

Interview # 9

Interviewee profile: Female beneficiary of the Social Responsibility Project.

Institution you represent (with option to remain anonymous): Fundación Avanzar

Date: April 19, 2024

Time: 5:30 minutes

What does it mean to you to be a woman?

To be a woman means to be brave, to be a fighter, and to be willing to serve and love.

What are the roles of women?

A woman must fulfill her personal life purpose, live day by day and give love to her family and children.

Do you know what SR is?

You do not know

What SR project are you participating in and benefiting from? What does it consist of?

My job is to weave, monitor the courses that the foundation gives here.

What motivated you to take part in this project despite the difficulties and challenges you faced as a vulnerable woman?

I have been with the foundation for 13 years. I used to work in a company, but because of my age I was retired, and it was very difficult to find something else to do, so the foundation opened its doors to me, it is a family in which we share everything.

How has the social project impacted your daily life and that of your family?

Positively because I feel like an active and capable person and my family has noticed that.

What aspects of the project do you consider the most beneficial or relevant for you and your community?

In advancing more, feeling useful and that I am good for more things, I encourage myself.

What are the main challenges you have faced in participating in the project and how have you managed to overcome them?

From my point of view, I have not seen any problems here within the foundation. We always work as a family and we understand each other well. The foundation has always supported us either financially or psychologically.

How have you seen that your business has a positive impact on your life and the lives of those around you?

What I have is selling desserts on demand, but I work more here at the foundation.

Have you noticed any significant changes in your personal empowerment and ability to make decisions since you joined the project?

In that I can now be of more use to my family and be useful to them financially, and that I can move forward and continue to be interested in learning more about weaving.

Interview # 10

Interviewee Profile: Female beneficiary of the Social Responsibility Project

Institution she represents (with option to remain anonymous): Fundación Avanzar

Date: April 19, 2024

Time: 5:30 minutes

What does it mean to you to be a woman?

For me, being a woman is the most beautiful thing, whether at home or at work, which is what I like.

What are the roles of women?

Apart from being a housewife and working, it is to love oneself as a woman who deserves a lot.

Do you know what RS is?

No, I don't.

What SR project do you participate in and are you a beneficiary of? What does it consist of?

Here I weave the purses and work as a workshop assistant. I keep track of the purses, the threads, the measurements and materials.

What motivated you to be part of this project despite the difficulties and challenges you faced as a vulnerable woman?

I have been working here for 13 years and for the last 4 years I have been working in the office. What motivated me is that I like working and being in contact with the other women and supporting them.

How has the social project impacted your daily life and that of your family?

It has had a significant impact because the fact that I work here and knit the fabrics helps me to feel useful and to be busy doing something that I like and enjoy, and that in the end is an economic contribution to my family.

What aspects of the project do you consider the most beneficial or relevant for you and your community?

The biggest benefit is the schedule, since you can take the weaving to your homes and be with your family and children.

What are the main challenges you have faced in participating in the project and how have you managed to overcome them?

At the beginning it was complicated to consolidate the group and in a certain way there were some frictions, but it was nothing serious and we managed to solve them.

How have you seen that your business has had a positive impact on your life and the life around you?

If I go out to the fairs I also do weaving and I complement it with what I do here in the atelier, it goes hand in hand because the workshops that the foundation gives us here are very useful to me.

Have you noticed any significant change in your personal empowerment and in your ability to make decisions since you joined the project?

Yes, I have seen a great change since I got along with all the women here, the work is equal and that encourages us to work and come.

Appendix 5

Responses from interviews with women in charge of Social Responsibility projects

Categories	Interview 1: Graiman	Interview 2: Fundación Avanzar
Social Responsibility	Views women-focused social responsibility projects as an opportunity to empower women by providing them with resources, skills and opportunities to take control of their lives.	Recognizes the importance of being able to identify the specific challenges and needs that women in the community have. Based on this information, they have decided to develop projects that respond to these concerns and challenges by empowering women to improve their capabilities.
Impact	Deeply values the positive impact that social responsibility projects can have on local communities. Believes it is an innovative way to address social problems and improve people's quality of life.	Committed to the economic and social empowerment of women, seeking to create opportunities for them to actively participate in decision making and access resources and services that allow them to reach their full potential.
Gender	Values collaboration and solidarity among women as a fundamental aspect of women-centered social responsibility projects, recognizing the power of mutual support and collective action to generate positive change in communities.	It recognizes the existence of systemic gender-based inequalities in various areas, such as access to education, health care, employment. These inequalities can influence how women experience poverty, social exclusion and violence.

Appendix 6

Responses of women beneficiaries of the Social Responsibility projects

Categories of analysis	Social Responsibility	Impact	Gender
Interview 1	Does not know what Social Responsibility is.	Considers that it is an opportunity to access economic resources.	Being a woman for her means being a mother, daughter and wife and playing each role well. She feels that the project has helped her to have empathy and to feel confident as a woman.
Interview 2	Does not know what Social Responsibility is.	It has taught him to be more responsible and to continue learning more every day.	She believes that being a woman is the basis of life and that after this project she understood that she can make it on her own as a woman.
Interview 3	Does not know what Social Responsibility is.	Positive impact on her personal development, more independent.	She believes that being a woman is not easy and that it is something powerful and valuable. After her participation in the project, she is aware that women can achieve whatever they set their minds to.
Interview 4	Does not know what Social Responsibility is.	Her life changed a lot because she was able to start a business and help her children.	She says that being a woman is everything and that it is a great responsibility, she has learned to value herself as a person and everything that comes with being a woman.
Interview 5	Does not know what Social Responsibility is.	Positive because it made her realize that she is still an active and useful woman for society.	To be a woman is to be full of love to give to her children. She thinks that as a woman she has a great opportunity after being part of the CSR project.
Interview 6	Does not know what Social Responsibility is.	It makes her feel much happier and fulfilled. She feels that she can still do something for herself.	To be a woman is to be love, mother and joy for the home. And that as a woman she feels fulfilled.
Interview 7	Does not know what Social Responsibility is.	She feels that she is an active and capable person and that has impacted her family as they have noticed the change she has had.	To be a woman means to be brave, to be a fighter, and to be willing to serve and love. She understands that she can be useful and a support for her family.

Interview 8	Does not know what Social Responsibility is.	Great impact as it helps her to be engaged in something she enjoys and adds to her development.	She considers that being a woman is something beautiful and that every day she has a boost in her life because she can work and do something she likes.
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