

Female leadership in rural areas: a social innovation review

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Abstract This paper aims to study the active role of women in initiatives that favour the socioeconomic development in rural area. It identifies ventures and different economic dynamics led by women that have prospered worldwide, beyond the support to the family and the reproductive sphere. It focuses on the dynamics that can respond to different needs within a framework of social innovation and are related, for example, to farmer markets, small-scale economy, civil society organizations, community management, and small and medium enterprises that respond to rural community needs.

It is noteworthy that women lead in a democratic way and based on concepts such as cooperation and partnership. In this sense, the paper reviews the main theoretical postulates and experiences led by rural women regarding socio-economic development, then it intends to establish relations of these with social innovation.

The results demonstrate that entrepreneurship related to tourism was identified as the main activity led by rural women, with relevance for the conservation of traditions and culture. This can be considered social innovation, representing an opportunity to create social value, as well as being an economic support for their families, generating development of local economies. In this sense, rural women can be recognized as leaders, agents of change and entrepreneurs in their communities.

1 Introduction

Currently, the analysis of female leadership in the rural areas and their role in solving local problems is of a great interest (Calatrava 2002). A review of previous studies shows the interests in identifying and disseminating those ventures and initiatives for the development of their area of influence beyond their participation in the reproductive sphere (Zabala 1999). Other studies take into account the fact that women participation in the socio-economic scope or productive sphere differs according to culture (Parella 2003). However, it is shown that this is done not from the role of employees or subordinates but from a leader role as agents of development. This is the main objective of the research and in this way to present successful experiences led by rural women that facilitate their replicability and improvement in the future.

With regard to the above, four of the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations 2015) and their respective targets related to the leadership of rural women in the productive sphere stand out, objectives that also combine the dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental, to know:

- The second goal about hunger, food security, nutrition and promotion of sustainable agriculture, in its target 2.3 proposes "doubling the agricultural productivity and the income of small-scale food producers, particularly women";
- For its part, the fifth goal regarding gender equality and empowering all women and girls, in itself encompasses the relevance of this research but it is worth noting the target 5.5 that establishes the importance of "ensuring full and effective participation of women and equal opportunities for leadership at all decision-making levels in political, economic and public life";
- The eighth goal related to the promotion of sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full employment and decent work, in the target 8.5 highlights that this goal is achieved for all women and men, as well as equal pay for work of equal value;
- Finally, the thirteenth goal about climate change and its effects is identified, which in target 13.b talks about the capacity for effective planning and management in relation to climate change in developing countries, with particular emphasis on women .

These, among other aspects, were prioritized as relevant in the 2030 agenda approved by world leaders, as an ambitious vision of the future, focused on human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

On the other hand, it is argued that entrepreneurship and socio-economic dynamics developed by women are generally related to social innovation, understood as the "*generation of value for society*" (Gatica et al. 2012), highlighting that almost 40% of social entrepreneurs are women (Cukier et al. 2011). Alonso et al. (2015, p. 6), who summarizes different concepts of social innovation, among which is the one provided by the LEED Program (Local Economic and Employment Development) in 2014, related to working on answers to difficulties that contribute their individual and community benefit, "*identifying and implementing new labour integration processes in the market, new skills, new jobs, and new forms of participation*" (Alonso et al. 2015, p. 6). In this sense, the concepts of social innovation are related to female leadership, different authors conclude that women, unlike men, direct or lead in a democratically way through cooperation and based on association (Smolarek et al. 2019; Eagly and Carli 2007; Dunker 2002). This can be considered that women work in alternative economies; likewise Smolarek et al. (2019) highlight Leavitt (1987) who refers to the leaders as pioneers indicating that they are the "*managers who show imagination, creativity and ability to propose new organizations*", a concept related to social entrepreneurs.

For this study, it is necessary to make a review of remarkable authors in the theme of women's contribution to socioeconomic development in the rural area oriented to the analysis of their role as a leader, this with the main theoretical postulates to then present different experiences around the world, given that "the comparison between cultures would also help to better understand the phenomenon, given its impact on the concept of leadership" (Contreras et al. 2012), identifying the developed economic dynamics. Therefore, it is hypothesized that most of the activities led by rural women are related to social innovation, hypothesis oriented to know what women leaders are dedicated to and how they do it.

2 Theoretical analysis

The term Women in Development (WID) stands out, with Boserup (1993) as a pioneer, who postulates the marginalization of women in development processes, based on the sexual division of labour, placing them mainly in the informal sector. In this model, Calatrava (2002) considers women as bearers of poorly used human resources, which can generate efficient development contributions; similarly, within this model, the Anti-Poverty Approach (Moser 1993) stands out, about the productive role of women, through small-scale production projects, or the Efficiency Approach that highlights the importance of the economic contribution of women in the development of the local economy (Calatrava 2002), however, Schmukler (1998) emphasizes that the model does not have gender objectives as such; in this same sense Parella (2003) indicates that the WID approach defines the women problems focused on the basic needs of the family, so the programs or strategies derived from it seek for example the productivism of poor women in the domestic field.

On the other hand, with the Gender in Development approach, Parella (2003, p.43) emphasizes that "*the focus shifts from woman to gender*", meaning that the social construction of gender is accentuated, and based on Luna, Parella (2003) emphasizes that the awareness of women regarding their subordination is essential, as well as the autonomous organization to make decisions about their lives and the development wanted.

Hernández et al. (2015) conduct a study of civil society organizations in rural areas of Mexico, highlighting that all the organizations investigated are led by women as founders and directors, being an important space for their participation, in terms of leadership characteristics they highlight a "*combination between personal commitment and social awareness about the need to act in a certain area of public life*", in this sense they find that the motivation of these women to "participate actively in development actions" was the search for personal, family and community wellness, conclusions that are directly related to the description of Griffin (2013) about leadership, indicating that it conveys a "sense of mission" and tends towards learning and innovative thinking.

3 Research in the context of Latin America

The Secretariat of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC (2019), periodically convenes the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, which advocates for gender equality and the guarantee of rights for Latin women, with more than forty years of this process (ECLAC 2019). It is stressed that, during the Quito consensus in 2007, it is recognized that the sexual division of labor is maintained, as a "structural factor of the economic inequalities and injustices that affect women in the family, work, political and community spheres" (ECLAC 2019).

Taking into account the above, after 12 years since the Quito consensus, a study conducted on gender equality plans by the Gender Equality Observatory of Latin America and the Caribbean (2019), allows analyzing aspects such as the need for overcoming discrimination and subordination, that affect women and gender mainstreaming in public policies, as an unavoidable element. This shows that gender inequalities are currently very large in Latin America, partly hindering initiatives that women can lead in rural areas, so pending work in this regard remains a priority. Planning instruments are fundamental, since it is established as a premise that "*without gender equality, there can be no human development*" (United Nations Development Program 2009).

4 Results of the study

In order to make a social innovation review, it was taken as sample 10 studies around the world in different continents, related to experiences led by rural women, presented in Table 1 which highlights two aspects that can indicate how women are organized, and what is the objective or mission of those organizations. It was also intended to observe in a comparative way at the cultural level, what initiatives are presented in different countries included in the sample.

Table 1. Experiences led by rural women worldwide

No.	Country	Organization type	Objective of the organization	Study
1	Indonesia	Informal entrepreneurship	Tourism: food stalls, small restaurants.	Female tourism entrepreneurs in Bali, Indonesia (Tajeddini et al. 2017)
2	Bolivia	Indigenous movement; Cooperative community	Organize and fight for their rights; Reclaiming their voice and autonomy. Tourism activities.	Rural indigenous women in Bolivia: A development proposal based on cooperativism (Galindo et al. 2016)
3	Mexico	Cooperatives and family organization	Ecological economy and ecotourism Tourism: Handicrafts	Participación de las mujeres en las prácticas socioeconómicas del proyecto de ecoturismo de la reserva de la biosfera ría Celestún (Casais et al. 2015).
4	Uganda	Entrepreneurship; Small scale informal sector	Hairdressing and tailoring	Business as family, family as business: Female entrepreneurship in Kampala, Uganda (Monteith and Camfield 2019).
5	Portugal	Entrepreneurship; Cooperation networks	Rural tourism	Cooperation networks in tourism: A study of hotels and rural tourism establishments in an inland region of Portugal (Jesus and Franco 2016).
6	Mexico	Cooperatives	Strengthen sustainable livelihoods: market and non-market based practices (collective childcare, food sharing, caring for the environment, and others).	Enacting peasant moral community economies for sustainable livelihoods: A case of women-led cooperatives in rural Mexico (Soto and Sato 2019)
7	South Africa	Project on Women groups led by Primary Health Care (PHC) nurses	Economic empowerment of women in rural area to promote small business development	The use of PHC clinic-based women's groups for financial empowerment in a rural area (Uys et al. 2006).
8	India	Business initiatives	Irrigated farming, off-farm business activities and others. Low income strata: agricultural wage labour and village artisans.	Identifying factors governing attitude of rural women towards Self-Help Groups using principal component analysis (Patil and Kokate 2017).
9	Spain	Self-employed; Business initiatives;	Rural tourism	Women, Rural Environment and Entrepreneurship (Alonso and Trillo 2014)
10	Russia	Informal economy; Entrepreneurial activity	Sewing, haircutting, food processing, handicrafts, or babysitting.	Gender inequality in Russia's rural informal economy (Wegren et al. 2017)

Source: Own results

In different countries, entrepreneurship related to tourism is identified as the main activity led by rural women. Which has an important role in the sense of preserving the traditions and culture of their regions, so it is inferred that women “*act as an integrator of rural society within the Territory*” (Alonso and Trillo 2014), developing in they the necessary empowerment to be leaders in the economic and social scene.

It was observed that rural women develop organizations of alternative economies such as cooperatives or organized groups of women and indigenous movements, characterized by informality or popular economy. Activities that must also be combined with the care of their homes and families, as a responsibility that continues to be established especially for women due to gender inequality issues, such as a cultural feature widely present in rural areas worldwide.

5 Conclusions

According to the studies analyzed, activities led by rural women can be considered as social innovation, in the sense that they seek a general benefit that involves their communities for the resolution of problems present in them. That is, rural tourism represents an opportunity to create social value, in addition to being an economic support for their families, generating development of local economies, in accordance with the hypothesis based on theoretical postulates.

In this sense, rural women can be recognized as a leader, change agent and entrepreneur in their communities, which is why support for women's ventures and their empowerment as "*strategic protagonists of local economic development*" (Massolo 2006), it has resulted in the establishment of family rural businesses, community associations and other forms of social union.

On the other hand, it is concluded that in the Latin American context a similar situation of gender inequality is reflected with rural areas in other continents, in which women lead different economic activities to support their families, but at the same time they must comply with the home care, which leads to a greater disparity in the labor and economic gaps of women about men.

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