

Empowerment processes in management and self-management in two rural communities

Ramírez-López, Nelly Lizbeth¹; Pimentel-Aguilar, Silvia¹; León-Merino, Aurelio¹; Reyes-Toxqui, Álvaro^{2*}

¹ Colegio de Postgraduados, Campus Montecillo, Posgrado en Estudios del Desarrollo Rural. Carretera México-Texcoco Km 36.5 Texcoco, Estado de México.

² Universidad Autónoma Chapingo, Carretera Federal México-Texcoco km 38.5 Chapingo, Texcoco Estado de México.

* Correspondence: silviapimentel@colpos.mx

ABSTRACT

Objective: To draw attention to the empowerment in management and self-management that rural women can achieve individually and collectively.

Methodology: Two workshops were conducted with the participation of n=77 people of the communities of Tepexilotla and Carrizal, in order to identify the abilities and capacities that facilitate a better life quality, and greater personal and collective power for rural women.

Results: There is a greater empowerment in the community of Tepexilotla than in Carrizal, because the first had training by academics from educational institutions, as opposed to Carrizal.

Limitations on the study: Machismo as part of the patriarchy limits the participation and attendance of women to the training workshops.

Conclusions: The capacities, strategies and prominence are factors that foster the empowerment process in rural women, driving their participation in management and self-management.

Keywords: Diagnosis, participation, gender, rural development, community organization.

Citation: Ramírez-López, N. L., Pimentel-Aguilar, S., León-Merino, A., & Reyes-Toxqui, Á. (2023). Empowerment processes in management and self-management in two rural communities. *Agro Productividad*. <https://doi.org/10.32854/agrop.v16i12.2376>

Academic Editors: Jorge Cadena Iñiguez and Lucero del Mar Ruiz Posadas

Received: September 06, 2022.

Accepted: July 15, 2023.

Published on-line: December 27, 2023.

Agro Productividad, 16(12). December, 2023. pp: 11-18.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0 International license.



INTRODUCTION

The management and self-management carried out by inhabitants of rural communities allow us to visualize the point of coincidence to reach agreements for participation, inclusion and decision making about common needs. Understanding, recognizing and valuing the contributions of rural women in community resolutions, as well as their contributions to the family both in the cultural and the economic aspects are defining factors in their individual and collective empowerment. The impact of educational institutions (Colegio de Postgraduados, Universidad Autónoma Chapingo) on training in different topics, including technical aspects of production, care for the environment, and human relationships, can contribute to the scientific knowledge of gender and rural women (Pimentel-Aguilar and Sandoval-Quintero, 2014; Mikery, 2014).

Colegio de Postgraduados (COLPOS) and Universidad Autónoma Chapingo (UACH) began training processes in Tepexilotla since 2009 and continued until 2021. From the beginning, the women became involved in training processes, contributing to decrease patriarchal relationships and have generated greater management and self-management of women in Tepexilotla (Pimentel-Aguilar and Sandoval-Quintero, 2014). The participation of women from the community of Tepexilotla in cultural and training workshops has been constant, which has not happened in other communities such as, for example, Carrizal.

This study found that the training process which was offered increased the capacities for communication and interrelation of the participating families. This allowed the inhabitants to suggest new strategies for internal collaboration that motivated greater social and family prominence, both individually and collectively. The participation of women allowed for these internal transformations supported by external agents to become part of the empowerment process of women in the communities of study.

Empowerment is “the process by which women, in a context where they are at a disadvantage due to structural gender barriers, acquire or reinforce their capacities, strategies and prominence, both individually and collectively, to reach an autonomous life in which they can participate in equal terms in the access to resources, recognition and decision making in all the spheres of personal and social life” (CCOO, 2017). Empowerment in praxis manifests in specific processes of management and self-management.

Management is the action of accomplishing and, according to Bozeman (cited in León, 2007), the disciplinary field of public management is associated to the perspective of public policies. The relationship of the community with the outside is understood as management, that is, something that can be accomplished with external agents, such as authorities of different levels (municipal, state or federal), public or private institutions foreign to the community. Considering its etymological definition, self-management is understood as management carried out by oneself (Hudson, 2010). Management implies that the community takes control over how to use a resource of common use, as well as decision making in its form of organization inside the community. Based on this, the objective was to draw attention to the empowerment in management and self-management that rural women can achieve individually and collectively in two rural communities of Veracruz, Mexico.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Location of the study area

The study was conducted in the communities of Tepexilotla and Carrizal in the municipality of Chocamán, Veracruz, Mexico (Figure 1) (19° 01' N and 97° 02' W), at 1 360 masl. It borders to the north and northwest with Coscomatepec, south with Fortín, and southwest with La Perla.

The climate is temperate-humid with an average temperature of 19 °C. The communities of study have a rich ecosystem where mountain mesophyll forest predominates, made up of cold pine forest and temperate deciduous forest.

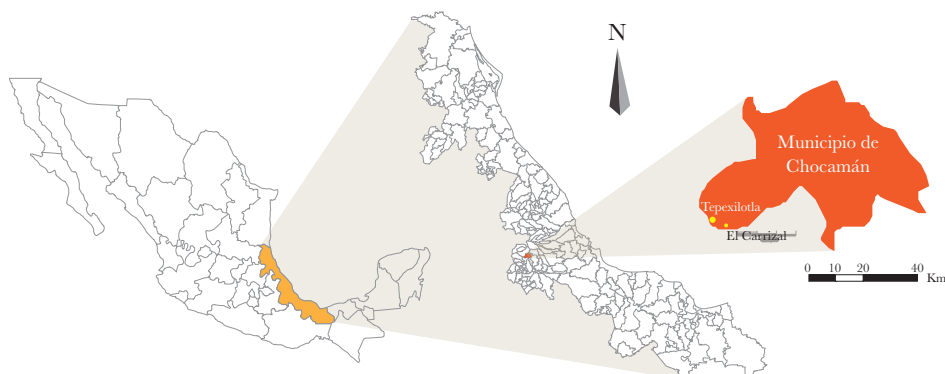


Figure 1. Location map of Tepexilota and Carrizal. Source: Mikery, 2014

Study methods

The field information was obtained through a participatory diagnosis carried out in February 2019 in both communities with the participation of local inhabitants. This diagnosis with perspective allowed observing the gender relationships inside the community, the forms of organization and the decision making processes that lead to empowerment (León, 1997), as well as the gender relationships between women, between men, and between men and women (Alberti, 2004). When the gender category is incorporated as methodological tool, the social inequality between women and men was evidenced (Núñez, 2000).

Six tools from the methodology proposed by Geilfus (2002) were applied in two workshops with the inhabitants of Tepexilota and Carrizal. The tools were:

- **Map of the farm with gender perspective:** this allowed identifying the differentiated gender roles in the family about who decides, who is responsible, and who performs the work in the farm.
- **Use of time:** allowed identifying specifically the activities of women in a typical day, and it was a learning dynamic between men and women regarding the real contribution of women in the activities of family exploitation in the farm. The use of time is a simple and convincing exercise to dissipate myths about the “limited” role that women have in the family, in the community, and in society.
- **Matrix of priority needs:** this allowed understanding the management activities and processes that the community has carried out and their form of organization, to identify and resolve conflicts.
- **Problem tree and identification of local solutions:** helped to recognize the difficulties and self-management processes that have been carried out by the community.
- **Map of natural resources and land use:** this showed the access points to natural resources and made visible the use of space and resources of the community. The gender perspective used transversally (Lamas, 1996) allowed observing the different levels of participation of women within the decision and action processes that are carried out in the community. This was recorded observationally *in situ*, resulting

in 26 participants in Tepexilotla (8 women, 8 girls, 2 men and 8 boys), and 25 participants in Carrizal (7 women, 1 man, 10 girls and 7 boys) (Table 1).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tepexilotla and Carrizal are rural communities that have a total population of 139 and 114 non-indigenous inhabitants, respectively. According to the census by IMSS (2019), both communities have a very high degree of marginalization and high social backwardness (INEGI, 2010).

There are clear differences in participation between the two communities that were identified after performing two workshops with attendance of 30% women, 32% boys, 31% girls and 7% men. The women from Tepexilotla showed greater contribution of information than the women from Carrizal. This indicates that the capacities that women in Tepexilotla have developed to communicate their opinions and perceptions about their environment have increased, which is the result of the continuous work that the academic and technical staff from COLPOS and UACH have carried out in issues related to caring for the environment in the community (caring for the river by not throwing out trash or spilling drainage), rescuing the temazcal, promoting the musical culture, and drawing attention to and reevaluating the contributions of women in the production unit.

In the community of Carrizal, it was the first time that work was done with participatory workshops as a result of this study, so there was not enough trust and this limited the flow in obtaining information. In this community, more marked patriarchal characteristics were seen that are expressed through “machismo”, which limits the women from attending workshops or any other type of activities that help them to develop their capacities and strategies for management and self-management. This was also observed in Tepexilotla at the beginning of the participation-action workshops that institutions in the community promoted, but inasmuch as the courses and workshops were offered, the participation of women increased gradually, resulting in them becoming organized in a savings bank, an agro-ecotourism group, and even small food businesses linked to agro-ecotourism, among others (Figure 2).

The results from the diagnosis explain the capacities, strategies and prominence individually and collectively. The individual capacities are faculties and/or skills that each individual has to perform or develop different tasks (Figure 3).

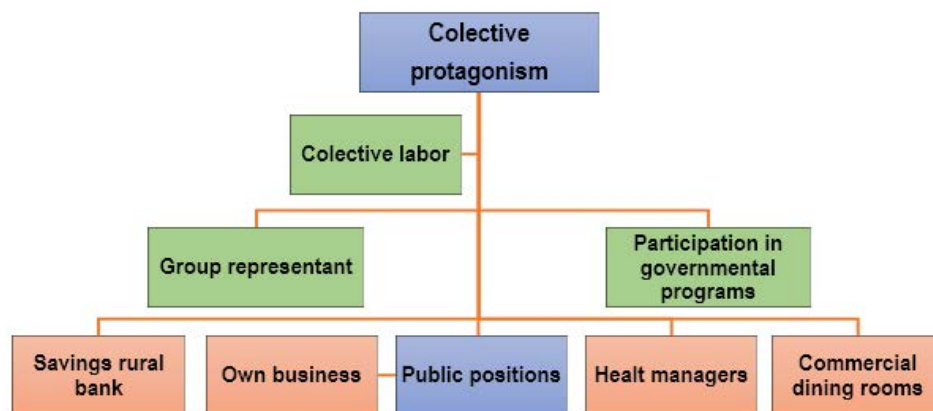
Table 1. Sociodemographic data of the men and women participants. Source: Prepared by the authors.

Description	Tepexilotla		Carrizal	Total attendance	Percentage
	Day 1	Day 2			
Women	8	8	7	23	30%
Men	2	2	1	5	7%
Girls	8	6	10	24	31%
Boys	8	10	7	25	32%
Total	26	26	25	77	100%

Table 2. Comparative of collective capacities/Map of access to resources.

Location or identified resource	Tepexilotla	Carrizal	Gender informant.			Importance
			Tepexilotla	Carrizal	Total	
Hills	3	2	M2	F1	M2 F1	Medium
Crops	2	---	F1 M1	---	M1 F1	Medium
Houses	10	9	F3 M4	F5	M4 F8	High
Church	2	---	M1	---	M1	Low
Pantheon	1	---	M1	---	M1	Low
Schools	2	---	M1	---	M1	Low
Path	3	1	M1	F1	M1 F1	Medium
River	1	1	M1	F1	M1 F1	Medium
Municipal agency	1	---	M1	---	M1	Low
Other communities	---	2	---	F1	F1	Low
Bridge	1	---	M1	---	M1	Low

*M=male F=female.



Women
Men
Both

Figure 2. Comparative model-collective prominence. Source: Prepared by the authors.

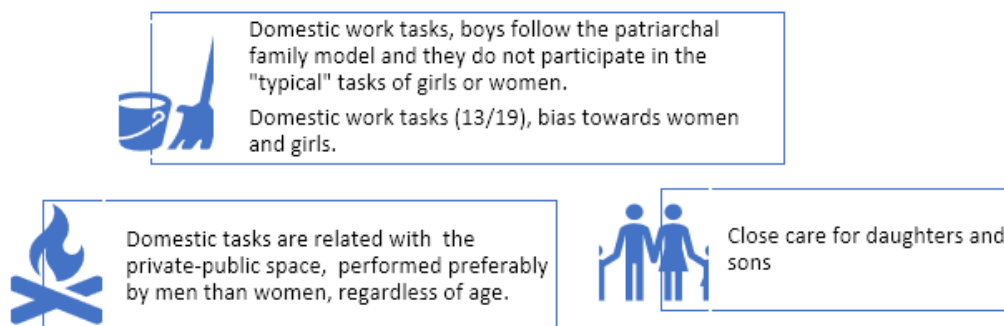


Figure 3. Results of individual capacities. Source: Prepared by the authors.

The three categories (domestic work: interior and exterior and attention to the children) represent the activities of reproductive work that are considered of the domestic scope and exclusive of women. However, the participation of men stands out in domestic work related to the exterior, such as purchasing food. This implies that women who stay at home do not have the opportunity of expressing the needs that could exist in their community to external instances such as the municipal government. Meanwhile, men that are used to being outside the home are related to these instances and with others to manage backing, according to what they consider priority. The priorities of men and women are different, which was seen in an exercise where the resources that they have were identified. For the case of women, the resource that they consider most important was the house, since it is the family's shelter. For their part, men identified the forest, the paths, the crops and the river as important resources because that is where they acquire supplies and sustenance. This indicates that men and women have differentiated valuations of resources (Table 2).

The individual strategies refer to the various ways that women have to acquire the necessary resources for daily use. Both communities agree that water is the primordial need and propose taking care of it and not contaminating it. On the other hand, they also propose the government of the Chocamán municipality should be the one to provide the service of piped drinking water, since the inhabitants must carry water from natural sources of water near the community. They also propose denouncing the people who contaminate this fundamental resource and having communication between neighbors to become organized and thus obtain water from the nearest water sources.

The collective strategies are the way in which men and women identify common problems and agree how to solve them as a group, such as: access to drinking water, adequate management of trash, and electrification. The collective strategies are similar in both communities. The problem of alcoholism and drugs was identified in Tepexilotla, as well as bullying in Carrizal, although there were no adequate proposals to control this situation in both communities, because they do not have clarity as to how to address the causes or recognize the institutions that they can resort to in order to attend to each specific problem; furthermore, they do not have clarity in what they can do themselves to become organized to solve that situation.

Individual prominence implies the salience of one subject over the others, and in this case we are speaking of women, actions and/or decisions that lead them to achieve greater empowerment. The comparative fact with data of women from both communities allows us to note that empowerment is increasing, breaking with the patriarchal structure, although women from Tepexilotla stand out. They seek higher income, which could be interpreted as greater independence in decision making, although this means adding hours to their workday.

A clear case is the women who are health representatives in each community. Something to highlight is that in Tepexilotla women are the ones who attend small businesses of their own that collaborate with the family income, such as: small shops, commercial dining halls, and even rural lodging in their own homes. This is different in Carrizal, where there is only one store that is looked after by a woman.

The collective prominence refers to the groups that stand out or have greater

participation in community activities, whether inside or outside the group. Both sexes participate in collective tasks, although gender division is reflected in the reproductive tasks and of care towards women, and those of load towards men.

The women in Tepexilotla are more prominent in collective activities than women in Carrizal, since they have organized a savings bank and an agro-ecotourism group (mixed), presided by one of them, and participate in programs and projects for community, artistic and cultural support. However, no women from either community are prominent or participate in any public position, even honorary ones.

The women of Carrizal do not participate as group representatives or in government programs. There is knowledge that they do not participate in collaboration of institutions such as COLPOS, UACH or others, and they deny participating in government programs, although it is known that several of them are recipients of the Programas para el Bienestar, and were recipients before of the *Programa Oportunidades*.

Another form of participation are the collective tasks, where both genders participate from both communities, indicating that there is a sense of belonging to the community since they help to improve the conditions of each place. Being a representative of a group promotes community, which is why it is very important for community management and self-management. An example of this is the negotiation they made with the government of Chocamán, as well as with CONAGUA for the defense of the Metlac River to prevent raw sewage from being spilled into it and they attained the protection. This negotiation was made with the initiative of a group of people from Tepexilotla and invited others from Carrizal, where both men and women participated. The way in which they distribute water within the community it is very particular, since it depends on small deposits where they connect and those who own them allow their neighbors to take it. This is an example of self-management, since it is a resource they control and distribute according to certain internal agreements without external intervention. Both communities in the study share territorial proximity, but they are differentiated by small things: 1) empowering actions, 2) self-recognition, and 3) informal training.

CONCLUSIONS

The empowerment process is the formation of awareness, identification of problems, and development of capacities that contribute to the design of strategies that give solution to the problems of each community both individually and collectively. The factors that promote empowerment of rural women are capacities, strategies and prominence. Informal training in gender perspective, inclusion and equity allow strengthening self-trust and self-esteem in the women participants, and with this to achieve projects that give differentiated answers to the needs of each gender that drive their participation in management and self-management.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors thank Colegio de Postgraduados and Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (Conacyt) for the support given for the research, and the inhabitants of Tepexilotla and Carrizal for their information and support for the field research.

REFERENCES

- Alberti, P. (2004). Participación de las mujeres en las ceremonias religiosas de Xochitecatl, Nativitas, Tlaxcala. En Pilar Alberti (Coord.). Género, ritual y desarrollo sostenido en comunidades rurales de Tlaxcala, México. Plaza y Valdés/Colegio de Postgraduados. pp. 117-155.
- CCOO (Secretaría Confederal de Mujer e Igualdad de Comisiones Obreras). (2017). Mujer e igualdad. Tribuna feminista. Secretaría Confederal de Mujer e Igualdad de Comisiones Obreras (CCOO). GAMAG (Alianza Global de Medios y Género) de la UNESCO. Recuperado de: <https://tribunafeminista.elplural.com/2017/02/que-significa-el-empoderamiento-de-las-mujeres/>
- Geilfus, F. (2002). 80 herramientas para el desarrollo participativo: diagnóstico, planificación, monitoreo, evaluación. San José, C.R.: IICA. 217 p.
- Hudson, J. P. (2010). Formulaciones teórico-conceptuales de la autogestión. *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, 72(4), 571-597.
- IMSS (Instituto Mexicano de Seguridad Social). (2019). Censo local. Realizado por María Luisa Vázquez de la Cruz, representante de salud de la localidad. Documento manuscrito.
- INEGI (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática). (2010). Catálogo General de Localidades 2010. Recuperado de: <http://mapserver.inegi.org.mx>
- Lamas, M. (1996). La perspectiva de género. *Revista de Educación y Cultura de la sección 47 del SNTE*, No. 8: 216-229
- León, B. (2007). La nueva gestión pública y el estilo personal de gobernar. *Sociológica*, 22(65) 253-263.
- León, M. (1997). Empoderamiento: relaciones de las mujeres con el poder. *Revista Foro*, (33), 37-49.
- Mikery, M. J. (2014). Potencial agroecoturístico de Tepexilotla, Veracruz, México. Tesis de maestría. Colegio de Postgraduados. México. 125 p.
- Núñez, M. (2000). Charo: La feminización de la pobreza. Universidad Autónoma Chapingo (UACH), Texcoco, México. 165 p.
- Pimentel-Aguilar, S. & Sandoval-Quintero, M. A. (2014). Situación de la Mujer en Tepexilotla, México. *Ra Ximhai*, 10(7), 159-163.

