



*Collective Action, Gender Dynamics and the  
Constraints for Scaling Up  
Women's Initiatives in Rural Mexico:*

*The Case of "El Color de la Tierra", an Indigenous Women's  
Initiative in Western Mexico.*

Paper presented at: UNRISD  
Potentials and Limits of Social Solidarity Economy

Authors:  
Contreras Arias, Carolina  
Pernet, Corinne  
Rist, Stephan

07/05/2013

# Content

- Introduction
- Objective & Research question
- Methodology
- Case study: Organización Color de la Tierra
- Results (tensions & rewards analysis)
- Conclusions





# Introduction



Why is the study of women's collective action initiatives, especially in the rural regions, important?

- Mexican rural areas suffer from: extreme poverty, marginalization, food insecurity, and natural resource degradation
- The Mexican country-side is facing a feminization process.
  - Male migration
  - Male shift from farm to off-farm jobs
- PLUS, rural Mexican women confront gender inequalities and discrimination.



## Objective / Research question

Through the case study of one SS initiative in rural Mexico, the aim is to analyse:

- The effects of collective action on: inclusiveness, gender equity, empowerment and sustainability

With special focus on:

- Asymmetrical gender relations that negatively impact the sustainable development of rural areas

RQ: What limits the potential expansion of SS women's initiatives in rural Mexico?



# Case Study: Color de la Tierra

- Initiated in 1996
- Is integrated by 15 indigenous women
- Main activities:
  - Production, transformation and commercialization of local products
  - Eco-tourism

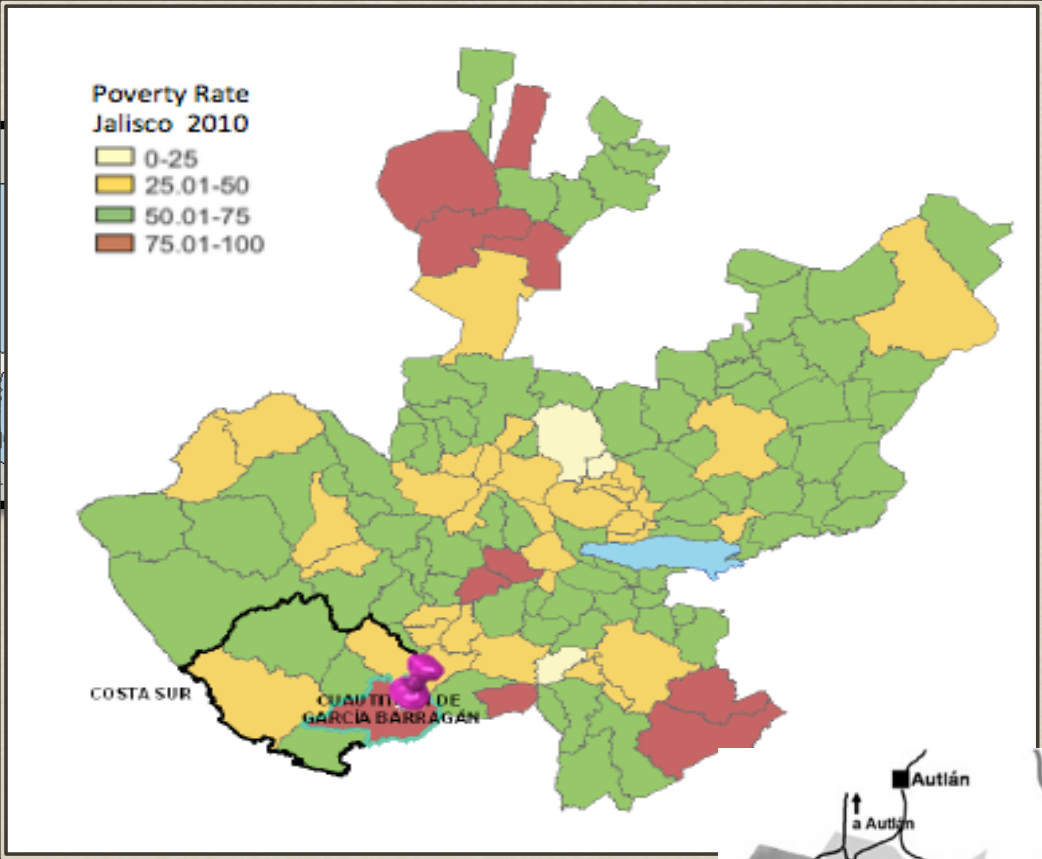
( the production is based on traditional knowledge & organic principles of production)







# Location



Fuente: Elaborado por el Consejo Estatal de Población con base en estimaciones del CONEVAL.



# Methodology

## Qualitative research:

- 8 weeks field work (at least 3 days at each women's house)
- Semi-structured & open interviews
- Participatory observation: gender dynamics, power relations, infrastructure (within the households & during events).
- Focus groups
- Informal talks

Based on the Livelihood Approach framework for Analysis (DFID)

Tensions / rewards analysis

The Roles of women based on Carolina O.N. Moser



# Women's duties in the organization

## Duties

Work one day/week  
(9hrs)

Hosting tourist groups

Monthly meetings

Part. in trainings & events  
(no traveling)

Part in trainings & events  
(traveling )

Spontaneous meetings

Individual production of  
sales goods

**Fulfillment**

Intra-familiar tensions

Rewards  
Individual / familiar /  
community

**No-fulfillment**

- Organizational tensions
- Tensions with external actors



# Activities that challenge the current gender roles

<b>Travelling</b>	<b>++</b>
conduct training about cooking	+
present the cooperative	++
receive training	+

<b>Trainings</b>	<b>++</b>
embroidery	o
pottery	o
cakes/cookies	o
medical tinctures	o
finances/ administration	+

<b>Land owned by women</b>	<b>++</b>
----------------------------	-----------



<b>Contact with external actors</b>	<b>+</b>
politicians/authorities	+
universities	+
NGOs	+
<i>E.A. that are female</i>	+
<i>E.A. that are male</i>	++

<b>Ecotourism</b>	<b>++</b>
Meet tourist	++
cooking for tourists/serving	o
guiding tours	+
selling products	o

<b>Technology owned by women</b>	<b>++</b>
coffee roaster	++
coffee grinder	++
cappuccino machine	o
oven	o

Challenge the current gender roles    ++ = strong, + = slight, o = naught

# Tensions

## Intra-familiar

- ✓ Caused if the women do not fulfill their **“proper role”**
- ✓ Men’s reactions to gossip about “women’s improper behavior”

Might result in:

- ✓ Prohibition of part.
- ✓ Manipulation
- ✓ Violence
- ✓ Exclusion from community



Leads to women’s failure to fulfil their duties



## Organizational

- ✓ Caused by members’ failures to comply with their duties
- ✓ Gossip among members on others performance



Limits the group’s further development

## With External Actors

- ✓ Caused by members failures

Might result in:

- ✓ Mistrust
- ✓ Destabilization of the group
- ✓ Less further support

# Rewards



## Personal development

- ✓ Expansion of social network
- ✓ Knowledge & skills expansions
- ✓ Empowerment
- ✓ Self-esteem & revalorization

## Household

- ✓ Changes in the gender dynamics
- ✓ Food security and safety
- ✓ Education improvement
- ✓ Higher income

## Community

- ✓ Boost of local economy
- ✓ Knowledge (generation and extension)
- ✓ Political power
- ✓ Ecological care
- ✓ Changes in the gender dynamics

# Example: Decision Making Process



Duty:

e.g. Organic production training (travel req.)

## Rewards

- SN expansion
- Knowledge
- Personal dev.
- Higher income

## Tensions

Intra-familial

NOT ASSISTING = INTRA-FAMILIAR TENSION AVOIDANCE STRATEGY

Miss

## Tensions

- Org. members
- External actors

## RISK!

- High probability of quitting the group
- Organization dissolution



# Conclusions

- While SSE models try to integrate excluded actors in the society, in the case of women's collective actions this inclusion might also result in their exclusion at a household & community level.
- Starting motivation was income generation to alleviate extreme poverty and food insecurity.
- The creation of the organization generated expected & unexpected impacts (**Tensions & Rewards**).
- The tensions influence women's daily life, activities, their personal development, and the development of the organization.
- Most tensions are generated by **gender issues**.
- Most of the impacts are caused & encouraged by the involvement of **External Actors (EA)**.
- Changes in the **GENDER DYNAMICS** is the most polemic unexpected impact that the organization has brought to the households and the community.

# Conclusions

## Limits

Local norms regarding the “proper” gender division of labor.

The social pressure on women’s behavior

The highest risk of dissolution is when all TENSIONS happen at once, and no REWARDS are recognized.

## Possibilities to mitigate limitations

Reduce tensions

- ✓ Involving the male partner in trainings
- ✓ Make women aware of their organization’s importance
- ✓ Implementing rules and sanctions within the organization

Encourage women’s personal development by organizing activities that further challenge the traditional women’s role:

- ✓ Car driving, machinery usage
- ✓ Financial opportunities (access to credits)
- ✓ More traveling
- ✓ Activities that involve women being the trainers of men
- ✓ Further education
- ✓ Trainings on agricultural production
- ✓ Involve the partner and family in the trainings



# Org. Color de la Tierra

Thank you!

