

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Brandy Ota for the degree of Master of Arts in Applied Anthropology, presented on August 1, 2006.

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Over the last 25 years structural adjustment programs have challenged Ecuador's ability to provide adequate social services and employment opportunities. In the wake of these policies, many women have turned to non-governmental agencies for possible solutions and assistance. Empowerment programs as a form of development work in particular have been used as a tool for personal, social and economic betterment.

This thesis examines the effectiveness of empowerment programs offered in Quito, Ecuador. Through qualitative interviews, this research reflects the opinions held by women working in the informal sector and their interpretations of empowerment programs. They suggest that empowerment programs are both process and goal oriented, offering tangible and intangible benefits. Furthermore, they must be designed on a grassroots level and sensitive to cultural and political environments if they are to be successful.

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Ecuador's Informal Sector:  
An Analysis of Gender and Empowerment Programs

by  
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Brandy Ota, Author

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## DEDICATION

To my daughter Circe

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Shrouded by a carpet of lush vegetation and steep valleys, Ecuador's capital is divided between two distinct regions, the older historic part of town and the newer business district. The old part of Quito is picturesque and houses many of the city's historic monuments. It is also home to a majority of the open-air markets. The streets are flooded with vendors selling everything – from bathing suits and ice cream to cosmetics and shoes. In stark contrast, the newer part of Quito has quite the metropolitan feel with its sleek modern glass buildings, fast food chains and high-end restaurants, as well as international development agencies such as the World Bank and The United Nations. Buses speed by every five minutes or less, racing down streets and spewing thick black clouds of exhaust that instantly carbonize before raining down on passersby. On the outskirts of town are many impromptu neighborhoods, sprawling from the far hills and valleys of the north to the opposite end of town in the south.

In February of 2001 I began a six-month internship with UNIFEM, a non-governmental branch of the United Nations. UNIFEM seeks to empower women through economic, social and political programs by working collaboratively with other local, national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to create meaningful programs for women. As an international consultant I met with local and national NGOs to review project proposals and determine whether funding was possible. If funded I would make periodic site visits to monitor the program's progress. My research stems from my participation and assessment of such programs in Quito.

This thesis examines the relationship between empowerment programs and their participants. It is two-part in its approach in that I examine both the meaning of empowerment programs offered by NGOs and the effect programs have had on their participants. What originally piqued my interest was the way in which many development agencies refer to "empowerment programs" without first defining what the term "empowerment" means. The "empowerment of women" is often referred to in literature as if it can be universally defined and applied. In essence, empowerment

programs have become a catchall phrase with little scrutiny as to what they actually imply, much less the ramifications and impact they have on individuals and the cultural norms of a nation. I explored these topics by comparing program objectives to discussions I had with the participants about how they interpreted and internalized the programs.

In order to contextualize my study I chose to work with women in the informal sector. "People in the informal economy are those who earn an income outside of the formal economy" (Lund, Nicolson, and Skinner 2000:10). The majority of these workers worldwide are women. Women in the informal sector work as day care providers, domestic servants, independent contractors, street vendors, and microenterprises to name but a few. This thesis will focus on microenterprises found within the informal sector. For the purpose of my research, microenterprises in the informal sector are commonly defined as family owned and operated businesses that revolve around the sale of items ranging from cosmetics to ceramics to consumable goods. These items are typically sold in market places, along streets, on buses, in homes, or in neighborhoods. In light of the recent impact of dollarization (the process of switching over to the American dollar), the informal sector has grown considerably, making it a dynamic area of study.

By contextualizing empowerment programs within the framework of female entrepreneurs working in the informal sector I was able to pose the following questions: What factors are used to determine whether a program is successful? How do the participants view empowerment programs? Are these programs truly addressing women's concerns, or are they merely the only option available?

The decision to create programs that seek to empower a particular group of people (oftentimes women) has the potential to be extremely problematic if it does not acknowledge a country's cultural values. This thesis seeks to explore the meaning of empowerment programs when applied to women in the informal sector. It is my hope that by documenting these women's testimonies I will be able to shed light on how development affects Ecuadorian women.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to create a theoretical framework that will house the remaining chapters of my research. The first part of my literature review will give an overview of development work, of which empowerment programs are a part, followed by a discussion regarding several of the dominant theories within the gender and development discourse. The development field has witnessed numerous changes over the last 60 years, particularly as it relates to women. It is therefore important to first lay down a solid foundation before moving forward. During this time I will introduce the informal sector and the role non-governmental development organizations play during times of economic downturn, as was the case during the time I was in Quito. The breadth of the informal sector and the types of programs offered by nonprofits during economic hardship are significant to any discussion involving development work as they represent the community's response to larger global trends.

Following this discussion I will examine alternative theories to development. While numerous philosophies have flourished around and through the study of development, the majority were grounded in modernization theories and neglected to focus on the views held by the global community. This section will therefore offer alternative philosophies, which seek to be more inclusive in nature. Woven throughout this review is the concept of empowerment. There are many conflicting studies regarding the meaning of the term and what it implies. Therefore I will examine what empowerment means as well as what it implies in relation to larger development programs.

### **2.1 Development work**

In order to truly understand women and development work, one must first explore the global economic and political environment following the late 1940's leading up to the 1970's.

The post-war period was characterized by 25 years of sustained growth in the world economy – the long boom – which created immense demand for raw

materials and tropical products and provided opportunities for Third World industrialization and development (Panayiotopoulos and Capps 2001:35).

These “opportunities for industrialization and development” that Panayiotopoulos and Capps refer to were primarily funded by institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank with the goal of opening up the world market to free trade. The over-arching economic model during this time was one of modernization, which argued that economic independence could be “achieved through a rapid and sustained phase of industrial economic growth requiring large-scale capital and technological aid from the West to the newly independent states” (Panayiotopoulos and Capps 2001:39). It was during this time that the term “Third World” came about.

The political meaning of “Third World” developed in the context of the Cold War. The Third World countries were defined as those new states which were neither a part of the “First World” capitalist bloc nor the “Second World” communist bloc (2001:43).

As Third World countries began to grow and expand via industrialization, so grew industrialized countries’ demands to manufacture and export more goods. In both instances oil was a key export.

Over the years many countries had come to rely on oil to fuel the industrialization process. By the 1970’s, the world witnessed a series of sharp rises in the price of oil. Realizing the potential value, several countries (Ecuador being one of them) came together and formed OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries). The purpose of OPEC was to better oil producing countries’ economic standing on an international level by effectively controlling the price of oil. This increased revenue, commonly referred to as petro-dollars, was routinely deposited into US banks, which were then lent out to various developing countries.

During this time the United States began to cut back on the manufacturing of goods, in part because of their growing debt due to the Vietnam War as well as to rising oil prices as a result of the formation of OPEC. Many Latin American countries nonetheless continued to rely on US recycled petro-dollars to fund development projects with exports as their main source of income. In 1978-79, the world

experienced a second jump in oil costs, causing the US economy to stagger. This led to a decrease in the size and number of loans that countries like the United States were able to offer developing countries. With little or no money available to fund development projects, plus a rise in international interest rates and a drop in commodity prices, many Third World countries were now faced with the reality of not being able to pay back their loans.

At a time when the value of exported goods was dropping, the price of imports more than tripled. The result was that many Third World countries were forced to increase the amount of manufactured exports they produced in order to pay off international debts. Such a feat, however, proved to be impossible.

Struggling with the financial crises that many countries faced, “structural adjustment programs” (SAP) were imposed with the intent to push Third World countries into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. SAP’s, as the name suggests, are macro-economic programs that advocate for drastic government re-structuring to stabilize the economy in relation to the rest of the world.

The package of structural adjustment measures that many countries have submitted to in order to reschedule their loans has varied from country to country, but the basic idea behind each package has been to ‘fix’ the economy of the debtor country in such a way that it can repay its loan (Mosse 1998:120).

SAPs promised that by re-financing old debts, granting foreign investors unlimited marketing access, and emphasizing the exportation of goods, modernization was just around the corner. In order for this to happen, domestic products and agricultural goods were to be slowly devalued and social service programs such as health care and education were scaled back dramatically. As Valentine Moghadam notes:

Restructuring has been characterized by the shift from import-substitution industrialization to export-led growth, from state ownership to privatization, from government regulation of prices and trade to liberalization, from a stable and mostly male-organized workforce to “flexible” and “feminized” labor, and from formal employment to the proliferation and expansion of informal sectors (Moghadam 1995:22-23).

Unfortunately SAP’s were implemented from an institutional perspective, emphasizing a top-down approach without considering a country’s particular

historical, cultural, and political context. The result was that SAP's proved to be short sighted in their attempts to stabilize a country's economies, leading to further international dependence and debt. In the end, as governments struggled to pay back their newly restructured financial debt, jobs became scarce and wages plummeted while living costs steadily increased.

The early 1980's have been called the 'lost decade' for Latin America, referring to the devastating impact of the debt crisis and the structural adjustment policies (Phillips 1998:xv). One of the many bi-products of SAP's was that while the overall formal economy began to shrink due to a decrease in social services and employment opportunities, the informal sector gave birth to a variety of services overnight. These services ranged from contracted work to piecework, from domestic services to street vending. Although the informal sector was first noted in 1972 by the International Labour Organization (ILO), many economists did not acknowledge its contributions to the overall economy until much later. Instead it was commonly believed that the contributions were too minor to count and although necessary, the sector itself was simply a compulsory step in a nation's growth pattern and would eventually disappear. This way of thinking was based in early development theories, which understood any type of economic hardship (in this case the informal sector) as a necessary growth "pang which accompanies every childbirth, in nature as in industry" (Larrain 1990:29). This perspective was in part due to the fact that the informal sector has never historically been seen as a profitable sector. In addition, it was not seen as a desirable avenue for capitalism, as growth in the sector is hard to document. Nonetheless, over the last several decades, the informal sector has endured a significant growth spurt and is now routinely included in many countries' national statistics. For example, in Ecuador the annual rate of growth among the informal sector was measured at 7.8% by Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD). This rate was even higher within the Quito city limits, rising 14.2% between November 1997 and November 1998 (PNUD, 1999).

Over the last 30 years the informal sector has quickly become a recognized avenue for employment. This is particularly true in countries such as Ecuador as noted by the World Bank: "Ecuador has experienced a dramatic expansion of the

informal economy in the last two decades, facilitated by the pattern of economic growth and structural change that resulted in the formal market economy's incapacity to generate adequate jobs" (World Bank 1988, 1990, 1991:4). Due to this rapid rate of expansion, economists and development planners have not only begun to acknowledge its existence, they are implementing programs whose entire focus is the informal sector. What was once referred to as the invisible service sector has now become a vast, albeit marginalized segment of society. With the introduction of new development programs come new challenges, particularly as they relate to gender.

Development work and the informal sector are significant to gender issues for a variety of reasons. In 1995, 60 percent of working Ecuadorians worked in the informal sector, a majority of whom are women. They contribute up to 60 percent to Ecuador's gross domestic product (Lund, Nicholson, and Skinner 2000:5). When comparing rate of pay between men and women, the difference in wages is even more pronounced in the informal sector, forcing women to work longer hours to receive the same amount of pay as men. As noted by "Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing" (WIEGO) at their second annual meeting, issues such as gender segregation and gender discrimination imply that, although both women and men might work in the same trade, men typically occupy the higher paid positions. WIEGO proposes this difference in access could stem from lack of equal access to education and/or credit as well as cultural beliefs that don't allow women to work in certain fields (WIEGO 2000:10). These issues are further exacerbated by the fact that there is less job security in the informal sector coupled with fewer opportunities for growth and no health care or medical insurance available for workers.

Yet another example of how women are disproportionately affected by development work and structural adjustment programs has been the reduction and at times the complete absence of various social services. These services, many of which were primarily utilized by women, ranged from affordable medical assistance to portable water and food subsidies to name a few. As services declined, women were forced to seek out alternative means to address the ever-decreasing number of public assistance programs. This often meant that women's workloads grew exponentially. As governments relied on women's elasticity to fill in the gaps, their roles as



caretakers and leaders within the community increased dramatically. While the economy appeared to be stabilizing from an international perspective, the national economy was stagnating, women's workloads were increasing, and the gap between the rich and the poor was widening. At a time when structural adjustment programs were forcing countries to scale back on social services, development programs began emphasizing women's labor as a possible way to fill these growing demands.

## 2.2 Women and Development

Development was to be a liberating project – a project for the removal of poverty and leveling of socio-economic inequalities, based on class, ethnicity, and gender. While the dominant image of “development” persists as a class and gender neutral model of progress for all, the experience of “development” has been the opposite, polarizing the dichotomizing society, creating new forms of affluence for the powerful, and new forms of deprivation and dispossession for the weak (Shiva 1994:142).

Economist Ester Boserup first introduced this causal relationship between development and gender inequality in 1970. Looking at the relationship between women and development had yet to be discussed or explored. It was commonly thought that development was genderless and that any form of development would benefit both men and women. In her publication, *Women's Role in Economic Development*, Boserup discovered that economic growth actually increases gender inequalities rather than lessens them (Boserup 1970). This, she argued was primarily due to the fact that most development work was designed from a western perspective, which tended to view women as mothers or dependents, roles that were normally not equated with economic productivity. “Women tend to be not fully recognized by the state as citizens, as holders of rights on their own account; rather they are construed to a greater or lesser degree as dependents of men (Cox and Pawar 2006:180). As a result, women were typically not included in development programs. Boserup noted however, that over time these inequalities would diminish as economic growth stabilized and the difference in wages between women and men became too costly to maintain. Her argument was that economic growth could be more quickly obtained if development programs acknowledged women's contributions and/or found ways to integrate women into development planning rather than waiting for economic stability.

Boserup argued that the recruitment of women into the modern sector helps accelerate economic growth, a view that contradicts assumptions held by many bureaucrats who assume women at work necessarily replace men (Tinker 1990:8).

Contrary to Boserup's theory is the argument that "when women cease to be dependents of men, forming female-headed households, their situation usually worsens" (Cox and Pawar, 2006:180). Theorists like Cox and Pawar argue that due to cultural constraints that see women as inferior to men they continue to lose economic standing rather than gain. As the number of women headed households increase, so do the financial and emotional burdens.

Regardless of the perspective, many scholars have pointed out that Boserup's discoveries greatly added to the Women in Development movement.

Her arguments highlighted the hidden contributions of women to development, called for policy makers to become more sensitive to the importance of nonmarket activities (such as household, subsistence, and informal production activities), and identified women as crucial actors who shape the success or failure of alternative development strategies (Forsythe, Korzeniewicz, and Durrant 2000:576).

Furthermore, these findings were instrumental to the way development work has evolved and directly led to the approval of the Percy Amendment to the United States Foreign Assistance Act in 1973, which advocated for the inclusion of women in development work.

Discoveries like Boserup's led to the formation of a new development paradigm entitled "Women in Development" or WID. The original concept of WID was based on the adverse impact of inappropriate economic development programs that undercut women's economic activities by treating them only as mothers (Tinker 1990:39). In other words, WID was "motivated by the recognition that gender biases in mainstream development policies increased women's unpaid work and worsened already oppressive and exploitative conditions" (Barker and Kuiper 2003:13). In addition to highlighting the exclusion of women from the national development process, WID programs also emphasized the need for more inclusive programming. Many studies during this time focused on women in isolation and promoted measures such as increased access to credit and employment. These studies, while grounded in

the modernization theory assumed that “economic growth would slowly ‘trickle down’ and eradicate poverty” (Mosse 1998:153). As part of this step however, WID advocates argued for the need to analyze development work with a gender sensitive lens.

Over the following three decades, numerous studies have concentrated on the ways in which women have been sidelined from the development process and the challenges they’ve faced as a result. The primary focus has been to advocate for more income generating projects for women. Such studies have led to a plethora of development programs whose main focus was women.

While these projects have flourished for quite some time, they are still problematic. A common complaint is that the programs are created from an institutional perspective and lack women’s participation in the actual decision making process. Development planners have “continued to see people as passive recipients of development, planned by outsiders, as ‘consumers’ of development rather than ‘producers’” (Mosse 1998:11). Due to the fact that they are not created at a grassroots level the programs tend to be limited in scope and are often poorly attended.

Yet another common occurrence among development planners and economists was the minimization of women’s contributions in the household. The result is that countless programs have merely served to increase women’s workload rather than offer strategies that better their economic standing.

The perverse effects from such poorly conceived income-generation projects for women are magnified when not only are the women unable to generate income as a result of the training, but the training itself has imposed additional demands on their time, thus negatively affecting the welfare of both the women and their children (Buvinic 1995:220).

Such programs neglected to acknowledge the work that women do, such as care for the young and the elderly, clean the house, cook the meals, purchase necessary household items and network in the community as legitimate ways that women contribute to the workforce every day. Since they did not consider these responsibilities as worthwhile because they did not have a dollar amount attached to them, the large majority of development programs saw women as an untapped

resource. This led development programs to design a multitude of programs designed to utilize women's labor.

There is plenty of evidence that economic growth has led to the subversion of gender norms when it was economically opportune. A prominent example is the extensive recruitment of women in export manufacturing, as classic feminist development has shown (Zein Elabdin 2003:326).

As a result, many of the income generating projects failed to understand women's time constraints and were merely seen as another responsibility in a long list of many. Furthermore, anthropologist June Nash states that many WID programs had a tendency to stereotype women's ability by limiting them to projects that were thought to be "women's work", such as embroidering table and apparel linen (Nash 1998:65). Caroline Moser maintains, "these attempts of inclusion were often treated as last minute add-ons to the main development project" (Moser 1993:3). These findings led critics such as Mayra Buvinic to refer to them as "negligible at best, and perverse at worst" (1995:220).

These concerns have led many scholars and practitioners to question the methodologies used to carry out development work. Anthropologist Lynne Philips questions development work in relation to her research with women in Ecuador. Her work with rural women examines the ways in which Ecuadorian women see themselves in relation to development work. By engaging in conversations with women about their hopes and dreams, she discovered that in reality women's needs differed greatly from what the organizations were currently offering. Through in-depth interviews, Philips received responses that reflected frustration due to illiteracy, stressing education as the single most important goal for their children rather than gendered income generating projects that merely added to their already long workday. Researcher Georgina Ashworth had a similar realization, recognizing that "a mobilization of enormous resources will be required to overcome the human wrongs such as the illiteracy of several hundred million girls and women" (Ashworth 2002:272). In order to promote this style of conducting research, Phillips asserts that by asking women about their aspirations she is stressing the concept of "putting the last first" - stating that "centering on social change from women's point of view, has

been considered a kind of development *with* women rather than *for* them” (Philips 1996:17). Other feminist researchers have also emphasized the need to include women in their research as active participants rather than passive subjects (Reinharz 1992; Lesser Blumberg, Rakowski, Tinker 1995; and Michael Monteon 1995).

### **2.3 Development and Empowerment Programs**

This new way of conducting research eventually led to the creation of the “empowerment approach” or “Gender and Development” (GAD). The empowerment approach argues against previous modernization theories that revolved around the notion that all developing countries strive to be like First World countries and that development will eventually have a positive effect on women. Instead, empowerment advocates look for ways to educate development planners about the systematic ways in which women are oppressed via gender, class, ethnicity, ability, and the relationship between third and First World countries. They argue that WID programs are narrow in scope and that “there is more to development than economic growth and the efficient use of money” (Mosse 1998:161). Furthermore, many supporters of the GAD movement believe that to rely on the outcome of programs whose sole focus is to integrate women into the existing economic model is not only misguided, it can be potentially counter-productive and harmful to the advancement of women in society.

According to the GAD critique, categorical and narrowly targeted strategies that rely on aggregate statistics to measure change in women’s status ignore the differential impact of programming on different groups of women, and they fail to understand the ways in which improvement on some measures of status is often matched by the exacerbation of others, and sometimes even the creation of new problems (Forsythe, Korzeniewicz, and Durrant 2000:578).

For this reason, GAD programs emphasize “how gender is *socially constructed*, via the ways in which men and women participate in both production and reproduction” (Blumberg 1995:9). While WID programs focus on women in isolation, the empowerment approach is concerned with women’s subordinate status to men (Moser 1993:3).

Empowerment or GAD programs also differ from their WID counterparts in that they are often created at the grassroots level and are participatory in nature.

Empowerment is associated with a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach, and much of the thinking about empowerment has arisen out of the feminist writings and emergent women's movement of the South (Mosse 1998:161).

They also tend to acknowledge unintentional indicators when referring to the empowerment of women as well as the intentional outcomes.

This emergent development 'philosophy' has stressed the 'qualitative and perhaps immeasurable dimensions of development; values which give a sense of fulfillment. Self-reliance is highlighted in the context of a participatory democracy in which the 'consciousness-gap' between the leaders of society and the masses is closed', and in which people are seen as the subjects of their own worlds, rather than the objects of other people's worlds (Mosse 1998:20).

Examples of the empowerment model can be routinely found in programs organized by non-profit agencies like Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and the Grameen Bank.

Contrary to this view of Women in Development as being less than supportive of Third World women, some theorists like Irene Tinker argue that the shift from WID to GAD was purely political in nature. "Embracing the academic concept of gender, critics of WID believed that using a different term that focused attention on gender relations would be more effective and gain cooperation from male decision makers turned off by 'feminist' advocacy (Tinker 2006:285). She and others however, believe that changing the focus from women to gender only served to muddy the water and undercut previous attempts to include women in the development process.

## **2.4 Empowerment as a Concept**

At the very core of this dilemma is the fact that the term 'empowerment' has yet to be defined. What exactly does it mean to empower a group of people? Indeed, throughout the creation of empowerment programs and leading up to the present, there has been little agreement as to what empowerment actually implies. As Sylvia Chant notes, "definitions of empowerment remain contested, as do the implications of empowerment, both for women and for their relationships with others" (Chant 2006:92). For Taj Hasmi,

'Empowerment' is a loaded concept, suggesting a process as well as accomplished stage in human civilization where people are entitled to certain rights, having the license and freedom to do things in accordance with their desire or free will to improve, change or modify the prevalent socio-political and economic order (Hasmi 2000:134).

To Jill Bystydzienski,

Empowerment is taken to mean a process by which oppressed persons gain some control over their lives by taking part with others in development of activities and structures that allow people increased involvement in matters which affect them directly. In its course people become enabled to govern themselves effectively. This process involves the use of power, but not 'power over' others or power as dominance as is traditionally the case; rather, power is seen as 'power to' or power as competence, which is generated and shared by the disenfranchised as they begin to shape the content and structure of their daily existence and so participate in a movement for social change (Bystydzienski 1994:3).

Researcher Jo Rowlands shares this definition of empowerment as being more about the process and less about the end result. She argues that empowerment is an individual experience; it is not something that can be routinely achieved or simply given to a group of people. Nor is it simply a matter of "fixing a problem" or "handing over a solution" (Rowlands 1998:11-15).

Naila Kabeer on the other hand argues that it is necessary to first define the opposite condition of empowerment in order to illustrate what the term actually implies. To her, empowerment involves the notion that in order for a person to be empowered they would have to be previously disempowered. "In other words, empowerment entails a *process of change*" (Kabeer 2000:28). In this definition, empowerment is the result of gaining access to choices.

Critics like Halef Afshar however, believe that the entire concept of empowering others "is deeply rooted in Western capitalism with its focus on individualism, consumerism, and personal achievement" (1993:913). Rather than empowering women, she argues that development programs are stripping women of their cultural identities and forcing them to become more like their First World counterparts. She believes that empowerment cannot be done to or for women, but

has to emerge from them (Afshar 1998:4). In other words, empowerment is not something that can be obtained through a development program.

Without clear and readily identifiable outcomes many funding agencies are hesitant to invest. "Defining empowerment as a process, and something which cannot be done to/for women, but which has to be their own, raises serious questions for development agencies" (Afshar 1998:3). Stressing process over result might allow for the creation of personalized programming, though they are often harder to fund since development agencies tend to prefer programs that have demonstrated consistency and reliability. If an agency cannot effectively demonstrate that their program has empowered a group of people, they are less likely to receive future funding.

This desire to standardize programs speaks to a more global issue regarding development agencies and their motives for funding particular programs over others. If the driving force is to fund those programs that are easily replicated, how can one ensure that women are truly being empowered? More important, are funding agencies even concerned with the unique issues any one given country or group of people are facing, or are they merely adhering to larger funding trends? Many theorists argue that international funding agencies are driving the direction of development, regardless of what a particular community or country might identify as being an important issue. As a result, NGOs are forced to compete with one another for funding. In order to secure future funding, some NGOs have been known to compromise the integrity of their programs. As William Fisher notes,

In the views of some observers, the degree of cooptation of NGOs by development agencies through funding and joint initiatives is so advanced that NGOs are destined to become the organizational mechanism for an international welfare system, doomed to be little more than the frontmen for the 'lords of poverty' (Fisher 1997:454).

The empowerment of women and their resulting contributions have suffered a major setback due to the larger forces of standardization and an uncompromising funding infrastructure.

This last argument leads to the current debate surrounding the very intentions of empowerment programs. One argument is that empowerment programs have been



co-opted over the years by international donor agencies in order to gain a better understanding of women's economic contributions in formal and informal sectors. These reports argue that, just as scholars and practitioners were beginning to validate the economic and non-economic contributions that women make, the focus shifted to view women as commodities that could be tracked for future labor possibilities. Other scholars have gone so far as to question the very nature of empowerment programs, claiming their sole purpose has *always* been to account for women in order to keep closer tabs on current labor pools. They suggest that all development programs are just a form of "'Feminist Orientalism' with a colonialist mission of eliminating tradition to increase women's economic productivity" (Philips 1996:16). Concomitantly, Jo Rowlands states, "It is significant that empowerment as a concept has arisen alongside the strengthening of focus on individualism, consumerism and personal achievement as cultural and economic goals" (Rowlands 1998:11).

With so many varying opinions as to the definition(s) and intentions of empowerment programs, it is difficult to understand what practitioner's reasons are for creating/promoting such programs and what they hope to achieve by 'empowering' women. Some scholars argue that the fact that empowerment programs are frequently designed to "help" implies that there is an inherent power struggle involved. The implication that a group of people is 'in need' indicates that there is another group of people who have the power to 'help' or 'fix the situation'. "The difficulty with this view of 'empowerment' is that if it can be bestowed, it can just as easily be withdrawn" (Rowlands 1998:12). This observation is further complicated by the fact that the majority of empowerment programs are funded by overseas agencies, making the program and the outcome eternally dependent on international aid. In this sense, "their success or failure in eradicating poverty, especially raising the status of rural poor women in the region, are not different from those of any country perpetually dependent on foreign aid" (Hasmi 2000:136).

Yet another interesting contingency is that in order to empower a group, they must be viewed as a homogenous group with similar economic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, all having the same goal in mind.

The promoters of these policies, both in formal institutions and in the voluntary sector, have assumed that the interests of all the oppressed and disadvantaged – be it women, ethnic and racial minorities, the disabled, the working class, etc. – are not only always ‘progressive’ but also automatically shared and reconciled (Yuval-Davis 1994:182).

Such an assumption leads to generalizing individuals and entire populations. This view of development has been particularly prevalent among feminist circles. Over the last fifteen years numerous Third World women have argued that western feminists see women in developing countries as being the same with little or no differences between them. Theorists like Chandra Mohanty state that this view is ethnocentric and inherently racist (Melkote and Steeves 2001:90). These assumptions affect how the donor agency or NGO see a group of people as well as what they believe the people are capable of. Hence, entire programs hinge on ideals and cultural norms that do not necessarily apply across the board. These observations have led many people in developing countries to doubt the sincerity of empowerment programs. They question who empowers whom and for what purpose. Furthermore, they question whether there is even a need for development on a whole.

## **2.5 Dependency Theory – Alternatives to Development**

The notion of economic *progress* as seen from a center countries’ perspective is deeply rooted in cultural assumptions about its own philosophical ideas and modern lifestyle norms. That is to say, many anti-development scholars argue that development is only deemed necessary when one sees other countries as underdeveloped in relation to one’s own condition. Theorists such as Arturo Escobar (1990 and 1995), Chandra Mohanty (1991) contend that as countries continue to grow and evolve in a direction that is unique to their cultural, political, and historical background, more industrialized countries have felt the need to impose their own ideas as to when and how development should take place.

Instead of seeing change as a process rooted in the interpretation of each society’s history and cultural tradition - as a number of intellectuals in various parts of the Third World has attempted to do... these professionals sought to devise mechanisms and procedures to make societies fit a preexisting model that embodied the structures and functions of modernity (Escobar 1995:52).

In short, assistance was offered to countries who were deemed impoverished by the controlling powers, not necessarily by those who asked for and actually needed development funding and infrastructure. The insensitivity to unique cultural, social and geographical circumstances has caused many inappropriate and exploitative programs.

This alternative perspective of development is known as "dependency theory" and focuses on the relationships formed *between* First and Third World countries as a result of development. "...Dependency theory argues that capitalist forms of development (in particular) inevitably increase the dichotomies within society and between societies" (Mosse 1998:16). Theorists criticize the modernization model that views First World countries as the measuring sticks by which all other countries should be compared. Such a model inherently implies that First World countries are far superior to their Third World counterparts. It also implies that it is the only model that can be used to truly understand global economies.

Many dependency theorists also argue that development causes Third World countries to become financially dependent on developed countries in order to maintain their current economic state of affairs. For this reason, theorists like Vandana Shiva state, "development is an extension of the relationship that most Third World countries originally had with their colonial masters" (Mosse 1998:15). This modern day perspective of colonialism suggests that "the whole world can be seen as a series of metropolis-satellite constellations, stretching from the board-rooms of New York to the tenant farmer in the remotest Andean valley" (Mosse 1998:16).

Critics of development contend that rather than focusing on statistics that see the majority of the world as impoverished and in need of immediate financial assistance, scholars and practitioners should concentrate on the glaring inequalities that exist between First and Third World countries. Scholars such as Escobar pose the question, "who produces knowledge about Third World women and from what spaces?" and note that "women in the Third World are represented in most feminist literature on development as having 'needs' and 'problems' but few choices and no freedom to act" (1995:8). From this perspective he argues "these representations

implicitly assume Western standards as the benchmark against which to measure the situation of Third World women" (1995:8).

With these points in mind, dependency theorists such as Escobar call for an alternative perspective to development. He and others "are interested not in development alternatives but in alternatives to development, that is, the rejection of the entire paradigm altogether" (Escobar 1995:215). Rather than imposing institutional structural changes brought about by international development agencies, Escobar proposes that social movements might better serve to educate and break down preexisting dominant paradigms (Escobar 1990:668).

One way that this has been accomplished is through the formation of cooperatives. Cooperatives allow women to unite together and argue for social change. They are often formed by a group of people, typically from the same geographical area who are facing similar oppressions, most often imposed by outside entities. As these issues in the community become increasingly difficult, individuals realize the need to come together collectively and address them. This approach differs from development strategies that oftentimes take a top-down approach.

Inherent in this alternate approach is the idea of human agency or the ability to shape one's world without relying on outside influences. Theorists such as Bhattacharyya note that agency is,

The capacity of a people to order their own world...the capacity to create, reproduce, change, and live according to their own meaning systems, the powers effectively to redefine themselves as opposed to being defined by others (1995:61).

Such a philosophy allows for fluidity and flexibility across historical, cultural and political differences. Furthermore, it respects individual's ability and right to shape the direction of their future, both within their own lives as well on a national level. As stated by Escobar, "the unmaking of the Third World – as a challenge to the Western historical mode to which the entire globe seems to be captive – is in the balance" (Escobar 1995:225).

In relation to my own research, I am interested in the relationship between empowerment programs and their participants. Specifically I am interested in the

ways in which empowerment programs are formed, whether the participants are involved in the creation of such programs or whether they are manufactured by large multilateral agencies with a "one size fits all" approach. I am also concerned with the way in which how a program is defined as successful as well as who makes those determinations, the participants or the NGOs? It is particularly important to understand what the participants feel are the benefits of empowerment programs and how these benefits are internalized in order to determine their success. Empowerment programs are useless if they are not meeting the needs of the intended audience.

Development agencies need to work with women on a grassroots level to design empowerment programs that are culturally appropriate. Research has shown that this type of outreach is most effective when the participants play an active role in the creation of programs. It is not enough to simply offer programs that seek to empower without exploring the implications of who will be affected and in what ways. Researchers and practitioners need to consider the purpose of such programs and how they shape countries and future generations. Furthermore, we need to question how literature serves to solidify our way of thinking and viewing the world. It is this type of ongoing dialogue that needs to happen if empowerment programs are to be fruitful.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODS AND MATERIALS**

#### **3.1 Context**

In February of 2001 I traveled to Quito, Ecuador to work for the United Nations as part of a six-month internship. Quito is home to roughly 1,399,378 people and is situated in the middle of the country, cradled between the Andean mountains. The city is nearly five times long as it is wide and it has often been said that at night, when flying over Quito, lights span out in a tentacle fashion, giving the appearance of an octopus.

##### **3.1.1 UNIFEM**

UNIFEM, the women's fund at the United Nations, is one of many divisions within the United Nations. They began in 1976 in response to a growing awareness of gender issues on a global level. Their mission statement complements that of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, both of which focus on equal rights for women. Since their inception, UNIFEM has grown to include more than 15 regional offices and is an integral part to all UN endeavors. While the organization represents only a small number of offices in comparison to other UN organizations, the scope of its work spans all areas of development as women make up more than 50 percent of the world population.

UNIFEM's regional Andean office carries out activities in each of the five Andean countries (Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela and Bolivia). In spite of the economic and social difficulties that many South American countries face, the UNIFEM office in Quito has been able to provide numerous opportunities to improve conditions for Andean women. UNIFEM's main areas of focus are: governance and women's leadership; women's economic and social rights; and the eradication of violence and the promotion of women's human rights. At the time, the office's main priority was women's economic and social rights under the DES program (Los Derechos Economicos y Sociales – Economic and Social Rights). In this framework, the office financed and monitored numerous programs throughout the region which sought to enhance women's enjoyment of the rights guaranteed in the International

Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, among other international agreements.

Oftentimes it was the role of NGOs like UNIFEM to provide social programs that had previously been cut from the national budget. As national budgets continued to cut social service programs, NGOs began to play a more important role in these arenas. As an international consultant for the UN, I met with directors and/or project managers of non-governmental organizations (NGO) to evaluate project proposals in order to determine their eligibility for funding. My responsibility was to review the program to see whether it was feasible given the resources and requests for assistance and whether their project goals fell within the guidelines of the UNIFEM mission statement.

### 3.1.2 CEDEAL

One such proposal, "The Promotion of Economic and Social Rights for Women in the Informal sector" was submitted by "Centro Ecuatoriano de Desarrollo y Estudios Alternativos" (Ecuadorian Development and Alternative Studies Center) or CEDEAL. CEDEAL is a non-profit organization dedicated to the promotion of equal rights through education and social/cultural development. CEDEAL argued that although dollarization was meant to stabilize the economy on a macro-economic level, on a micro-economic level the country was suffering greatly. This was particularly true for women and children. The goal of this program was to find viable economic solutions for women in the *informal* sector due to the ongoing instability of the formal sector. This was to be accomplished by "forming a basic foundation for women regarding their economic and social rights and to realize the difficulties and opportunities that the women face as workers in the informal sector, with the intent to create proposals and solicit these to the city" (CEDEAL's proposal 2001). While I reviewed numerous project proposals during my time at UNIFEM, all of which contributed greatly to the development of my thesis, this particular project was influential as it granted me access to individual women and women's cooperatives in the north and south of Quito.

CEDEAL's proposal, "The Promotion of Economic and Social Rights for Women in the Informal sector" was a 3-month project with 9 weekly workshops and 4 eight-hour seminars offered every other weekend. CEDEAL staff led the 9 workshops while invited guests speakers including the mayor of Quito led the 4 seminars. The project proposal was the last in a series of empowerment workshops. Previous programs discussed citizenship and gender equality, human rights, and domestic violence. This particular program focused more on the economic empowerment of women, exploring issues of poverty and microenterprises. The total time for the project was fifty-nine hours. Within these two themes were three main objectives. They were: 1) to provide the knowledge, the diffusion and the defense of women's economic rights by forming groups to discuss themes in poverty and microenterprises 2) to offer technical trainings in proposal writing and creating a business plan 3) to establish the exchange of ideas between women from marginalized communities and city officials with the goal of creating partnerships to address the needs of women. Topics to be discussed throughout the workshops and seminars were the informal sector, health issues, legal concerns, micro-credit, marketing, and dollarization. The end goal was to increase awareness of women's economic and political rights. This was accomplished through educational courses and by teaching proposal writing skills so the women could learn how to write proposals that could be submitted to city officials. During this process they also designed their own business plans, outlining the product they would sell and marketing strategies they would employ. These steps were necessary if they were to pursue funding from any of the financial institutions in Quito.

### **3.2 Methods Employed**

Prior to funding the project, UNIFEM asked that I visit community centers and attend meetings in both the north and south of Quito. The intent was to verify whether the issues highlighted in the proposal were indeed important to these women and their neighborhoods. These visits allowed me to talk with various women and gather information about what they wanted to see in a project. Before, during and after these meetings I spoke informally with the women about their immediate concerns and the



issues they would like to see addressed through a workshop or project. Time and again the main comment I received revolved around unemployment and the shortage of finances. Following these discussions I met with CEDEAL and UNIFEM employees to determine what steps needed to be taken in order to address these issues. In the end we modified the proposal to include more of an emphasis on larger current trends within the informal sector including problems/discriminations women in the informal sector faced, particularly as it relates to city officials. This allowed us to explore some of the barriers that women faced when dealing with unemployment and lack of finances in addition to working on possible solutions such as starting a microenterprise.

Once the proposal was funded I was able to glean data from the CEDEAL workshops and seminars. The workshops were often led by one of the facilitators followed by breakout sessions to promote dialogue. Discussion topics ranged from marketing to micro-credit and ways to address discrimination. Throughout this time women were highly encouraged to share their results with the rest of the class. The weekend seminars were similar to the workshops, being divided between presentations and group work. These trainings were offered on alternate Saturdays and were led by an invited guest speaker such as a consultant specializing in negotiations and proposal writing. The main goal of the seminars was to create a proposal that the women could submit to the city, demanding more open air markets with better facilities and more permits so they could legally vend. The city mayor was invited and came to two of the four meetings. Both the workshops and the seminars were beneficial to my research as I was able to practice participant observation (i.e. I was able to actively participate in the workshops, both as a fellow classmate and as a facilitator). This was extremely helpful since they complimented my research interests. While my research was more focused on individual experiences, the classes dealt with larger institutional issues such as the lack of licenses available for people to legally vend.

I also had the opportunity to videotape the workshops and seminars. The tapes were a great way to capture fluid conversations between the participants that touched upon a variety of topics. The ability to re-play these discussions has allowed me to capture nuances and facial expressions that were greatly beneficial to my thesis and

my understanding of the issues addressed. In particular, I used the videotapes to identify themes that were brought up in the workshops and later again during my interviews. I also observed how and whom the women chose to interact with and how they portrayed themselves as leaders within their own communities. The videotapes were also extremely helpful when it came to observing and discussing personalities that I would later talk about in my results section (primarily Pastorisa and Beatriz).

### **3.2.1 Interviews**

Throughout the workshops and seminars I had the opportunity to interview twenty-eight of the thirty participants. The majority of the interviews took place at the CEDEAL office. Several of the women did not have the financial means or time to commute into town simply to be interviewed. In these instances I went to their homes. These experiences allowed me to spend time in their neighborhoods and get to know them outside of the CEDEAL workshops. All of these interviews were taped, transcribed and translated into English.

The first two interviews were focus groups, consisting of four and five women respectively. These were beneficial in that both groups consisted of women who were already friends and therefore comfortable with each other. The first focus group took place in Lucha de los Pobres, one of Quito's many sectors located in the south. Lucha de los Pobres is divided into three distinct neighborhoods (lower, middle and upper) with the lower neighborhood being the oldest and most developed. Having arrived by taxi I walked up the main street to the upper neighborhood where their work place is located. Interviewing the women at their workshop was helpful since they were more at ease in their own environment. I was also able to learn about the process and the amount of time it took to make the jewelry and figurines. One of the disadvantages of interviewing the women at their workplace was that it was rather noisy and there were constant interruptions. This was mainly due to the fact that it was later in the day so there were people outside the building walking home from work and/or coming to the community center to pick up their kids.

The second focus group took place at the CEDEAL office and was comprised of a group of five women and an infant from Jaime Roldos in the north. These women

were all either single or divorced and were very adamant about their independence. They met daily to sew clothing and bathing suits. One of the many benefits of working as a group was the ability to take turns watching the children. It also allowed them to pool their resources (such as material and sewing machines). This interview lasted roughly an hour and was very useful because the women built off of one another's comments. The style of interview allowed for more of a dialogue between the women and myself while at the same time being shaped by my interview questions.

The remaining nineteen interviews were one on one and took place at the CEDEAL office with the exception of one that took place at my home. Of these interviews, one was 20 minutes long, eight were 35 to 45 minutes long, seven were roughly 45 minutes to an hour long and the remaining three were a little over an hour. On four occasions I had to re-schedule the interviews when they didn't show up the first time. While the common excuse I received was that they forgot, it could also have been that there was some reluctance on their part and/or financial difficulty meeting me in town. Having to reschedule was somewhat frustrating mainly due to the fact that the CEDEAL workshops didn't begin until the end of April, leaving me with three months to conduct all of my interviews. Following the interviews I took notes about my observations.

Prior to the workshops, the women were asked to fill out a registration application. The following data was gathered from their responses. Women's ages ranged from 18 years of age to 53 with the average of 32. Although thirteen of the women were married, one woman was a widow, eight were single, and six were divorced. The majority of the women I interviewed had children and varied in ethnic make-up including three indigenous women, four Afro-Ecuadorian women, and twenty-one mestizas (these categories were self identified). Of the twenty-eight women I interviewed, thirteen of the women from my sample owned their own microenterprise; seven were homemakers; three were childcare providers; two were domestic servants; two worked in the formal sector; and one was a community leader for a non-profit agency. Their reasons for wanting to work in the informal sector ranged from an inability to find work due to lack of opportunities and/or

discrimination to preferring an independent work setting and the ability to care for their children at home (see Appendix A).

The interview questions I posed were open-ended yet consistent throughout my research. They were broken into several sections: general demographic information and family structure, microenterprises, informal/formal sector, dollarization, a day in a life vignette, and finally, future goals and project suggestions.

The method I used to select the various topics for my thesis was based on “re-emerging” themes that were mentioned in thirteen (46%) or more interviews. While there were many themes to choose from and it could be argued that there were still more pressing issues that weren’t mentioned during the course of my interviews, for practical purposes and in an attempt to remain objective, I coded the interviews by topic, made a spread sheet of those topics and selected ones that were touched on (i.e. mentioned in thirteen or more of the interviews) the most (see Appendix B). The results of my research are discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

### **3.2.2 Additional Forms of Research**

Printed materials from UNIFEM and CEDEAL were also extremely useful in terms of gathering information. Publications such as brochures, newsletters, and bulletins were helpful since they oftentimes included interviews as well as information about previously funded projects. The UNIFEM office also had a women and development library. The library held a wealth of information including past reports, proposals, project summaries, articles, books and documentaries.

In addition to printed materials, I also attended various local, national and international conferences that discussed pertinent information relevant to my study. Dollarization (the process of switching over to the American dollar) in particular was a common theme that affected everything from the daily lives of street vendors to the political and economic environment of the country. Many of the conferences focused on the current financial environment in Ecuador and its impact on Ecuadorians. Oftentimes they were hosted by non-governmental organizations that had conducted numerous studies regarding a variety of topics. This data helped contextualize my research findings and added depth to the issues highlighted in my interviews. They

were also indicative of the current political, cultural and financial environment in which I was studying.

Visiting community centers was another great way to gather information. Community centers were often located in multi-use buildings, as was the case with the center in Lucha de los Pobres. One of the centers I visited in the north was a converted garage run by a woman who rented out the space at an hourly wage. The center was nothing more than a concrete room with a rolling garage door, a single strand light hanging from the ceiling and a handful of chairs. Usually a group of people would meet to discuss a particular topic or issue. Occasionally someone from a NGO led these discussions; other times a community leader would call a meeting. The community would also use the local center to address certain issues, such as the lack of childcare options or the fact that many people were migrating to Spain, causing the number of single parent families to grow. Oftentimes a particular topic that was brought up during an interview with one person would come up later in one of these meetings.

Community Centers were also a place where people could gather and socialize. Occasionally a group of people would form a cooperative, much like a business partnership and meet at the local center to manufacture products. This was often the case when I would stop by the center to visit with people and say hello. One of the times I visited the center in Lucha de los Pobres a group of women, some of who were a part of the CEDEAL workshops were meeting to crochet sandals, a popular item at the time. These visits were great since I was able to talk with the women from the workshops and learn about their work. During these unique opportunities I listened in on their conversations rather than leading or guiding the discussion, as was the case with the workshops and interviews. This also allowed me to step out of my role as a representative of CEDEAL and/or UNIFEM and interact more as a peer. In all I felt these interactions were important opportunities for me to express my genuine interest in their work and to learn about their motives to work in the informal sector.

### 3.3 Limitations

My biggest challenge throughout my research was the fact that I was not fluent in Spanish. While all of the women in my sample were very patient with me, there were several times when I didn't fully understand their responses. This made it difficult to gain further information by asking additional questions. It was also difficult for me at times to understand what they were saying if there were any background noises. There were also times when a difficult or sensitive topic came up. Since I am not fluent it could at times be hard for me to ask questions that would allow me to explore these areas without sounding insensitive or demanding. Furthermore while I was friends with a majority of the women it was mainly on a professional level so there were times when it would have been inappropriate for me to pursue such a conversation. I also lacked the ability to catch many of the regional nuances. Looking back it would have behooved me to hire a translator, which would have been relatively easy since I worked for the UN. The main problem however, lay in my lack of funds.

Another possible limitation could have been the fact that I worked for the United Nations. In addition to being the donor organization for this project, many of the participants viewed the UN as a wealthy organization with strong connections to resources and funds. This connection might have caused my informants to censor their responses during the interviews. Furthermore, as a consultant working for UNIFEM, my job was to evaluate the program and determine its successfulness. This position contrasted to my role as a graduate student. As a researcher I was interested in their stories and whether they felt the program was empowering on an individual level. Although UNIFEM was also concerned with these areas, as a consultant there was more of an emphasis placed on the program and the expected outcomes. To address this possible conflict of interest, I visited the women outside of CEDEAL and learned about their work and lives. This greatly contributed to my ability to be seen more as a peer and less as a consultant.

## CHAPTER 4 BACKGROUND

Ecuador has experienced a dramatic expansion of the informal economy in the last 25 years, facilitated by a pattern of rapid economic growth and structural adjustment programs that resulted in the formal market economy's inability to generate adequate jobs. Prior to the 1960s Ecuador's main forms of export were sugar, shrimp, bananas, potatoes, flowers and coffee. In 1967 the discovery of oil was thought to be a golden opportunity to boost the economy and pull the country out of previously accrued financial deficit. Due to a rise in oil prices worldwide, Ecuador's economy prospered and in 1973 they joined OPEC. During this time Ecuador went from being one of the poorest countries in Latin America to one of the middle-income countries in the hemisphere (Moser 1989:76). In 1982, however, world oil prices dropped significantly, causing the nation's economy to plunge into a severe financial crisis. "When oil prices halved between 1985 and 1986 from 25 to 12.7 dollars a barrel, economic problems were further aggravated" (Moser 1989:77). The drop in oil prices ultimately led to an economic recession, causing the informal sector to swell as jobs in the formal sector became scarce. The inability to generate revenue on a national level led Ecuador to further depend on international assistance.

For the next 20 years Ecuador endured numerous stabilization and structural adjustment policies that brought about reduction in tariffs and quantitative restrictions on imports and exports, interest rate liberalization, tax reform that lowered and unified income tax rates, reduction in government expenditures, and labor market flexibility (World Bank 1991:4). While the intent was to stabilize the government, by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the economy had failed to respond to such drastic measures. Banks nationwide went on an extended holiday for the first time in history in an effort to prevent the public from liquidating their accounts. As the value of the sucre quickly deteriorated, American currency became the common and oftentimes only acceptable means of payment, thus making way for dollarization.

In June of 2000 Ecuador officially accepted the American dollar as the primary form of currency. The premise behind dollarization was to standardize the currency to that of the American dollar. Sadly, one of the immediate results of this switch was

that the actual costs of items and daily goods nearly tripled. What once cost \$2.00 in sucres now cost \$2.00 in American dollars. At that time the ratio was three sucres to every American dollar. The argument was that while switching to the American dollar led to inflation, it allowed Ecuador to pay off their international debt dollar per dollar as opposed to three sucres to every dollar owed. It has been noted however, that switching to the American dollar made countries like Ecuador further dependent on external support due to the fact that dollars are printed in the U.S. rather than within their own country. Additionally, while the cost of living increased, salaries did not.

Dollarization was a direct product of economic reform strategies meant to stabilize the economy after decades of accrued international debt combined with a severe drop in oil prices. With the continual rise in the cost of living, the onslaught of El Nino in 2000, and the constant fluctuation in oil prices, the move to dollarization was touted as inevitable. Ecuador's inability to thrive was further complicated by a continual change in presidency. "From 1996 to 2000 alone, Ecuador had five different presidents" (Floro and Messier 2004:4). By January of 2000, there was a military coup, leading to the replacement of Jamil Mahuad by his Vice President, Gustavo Noboa. One of Noboa's first orders of business was to continue the plan to dollarize the country. As a result, people's real income dropped significantly during this time, causing many individuals to become destitute overnight. With so many financial crises, opportunities for career advancements were few and far between. In an attempt to offset some of these monumental financial discrepancies, non-governmental development agencies offered a variety of programs focusing on social, economic, and political inequalities.

#### **4.1 UNIFEM**

The Andean UNIFEM office is one of fifteen regional offices and has been offering programs since 1994. Since it is one of the smaller UN programs it shares a floor with UNICEF, a program that focuses on the well being of children. During the time I worked there in 2001, the Quito UNIFEM staff consisted of five full time staff, one grant funded position, and three international interns, including myself. They also had a chauffeur who drove us back and forth to meetings and conferences. While I was there the regional director was offered a position in New York as the Chief for the



Latin American & Caribbean Section at UNIFEM. She left shortly after I arrived, leaving us without a director for the remainder of the time I was there. In her absence, the assistant to the Regional Director became the interim director.

The UNIFEM office is responsible for the oversight of over 15 programs at any given time. The majority of these programs span the five Andean countries, having different start and end dates and averaging a run of two and a half years. The office had been operating under a three-year umbrella plan whose goal was to offer programs that dealt with the economic and social betterment of women as was outlined in their report "The Economic and Social Rights of Andean Women". This was to be accomplished by offering numerous overlapping programs that addressed different aspects of women's rights on both a national and regional level.

As with all UN programs, the UNIFEM Andean office operates on a regional level and focuses on structural change from a macroeconomic perspective. One of the leading programs at the time dealt with the issue of gender budgets. The intent of gender budgets is to examine the ways in which national budgets are structured to see if they include a gender *perspective*. By evaluating national budgets, UNIFEM and other international agencies determine whether public expenditures are equally accessible to women. Such analyses are desperately needed due to cutbacks in areas like health care, maternity leave, K-12 education, public transportation, and community centers as a result of SAPs. These items have been identified as services that are predominantly utilized by women, as they are the ones primarily responsible for women's reproductive, child rearing and educational roles. Such programs are typically implemented in phases and take place over the course of several years. On average, smaller programs that are considered microeconomic are typically not funded since they fall outside their scope of work. UNIFEM will occasionally highlight a particular issue on a national level such as a human rights training in Cuenca, Ecuador. These programs are helpful because they give the organization a human face – an intimate look at one of the many programs offered at any given time.

## 4.2 CEDEAL

CEDEAL was one of the many NGOs that submitted proposals to UNIFEM on a regular basis. The project I worked on with CEDEAL was an example of a smaller, shorter program that fit within the UNIFEM's mission statement but whose focus was not macroeconomic. While these programs are not completely uncommon, they are not the types of programs that UNIFEM regularly chooses to showcase.

Prior to my arrival, CEDEAL had been working with UNIFEM to secure funding. Shortly after I arrived I met with the director and project manager from CEDEAL to go over the budget. Once we were able to establish and agree upon the goals of the programs, UNIFEM approved the proposal.

CEDEAL had been working with several groups of women from marginalized communities in the north and south of Quito. This project primarily focused on two neighborhoods, "Lucha de los Pobres" located in the far southern region of Quito and the "Jaime Roldos" cooperative in the far north. Both neighborhoods were roughly a half hour away by bus and were created in the 1970's due to a large influx of migrant people who moved to Quito in search of employment. Since many came with little or no cash they had little opportunities to rent or own a home. The solution to this problem was to claim land on the outskirts of town and slowly build a home. Having no official city boundaries, Quito has been allowed to sprawl with neighborhoods reaching far out into the crevices and valleys of the hillsides. Due to the fact that the houses were not planned by the city, they did not have running water or electricity. Over time, however, they were slowly recognized and incorporated into city planning on a de facto basis, leading to the implementation of basic water and electricity amenities.

## 4.3 Lucha de los Pobres

Roughly 4,500 families live in Lucha de los Pobres (Floro and Messier 2004; p19). The name literally means, "Fight of the Poor". The neighborhood is carved into a hillside and is divided into three sections with the oldest section at the base of the hill. A precarious staircase made of stone ties the sections together. As the asphalt streets change to dirt roads, the basic services and shops slowly disappear. Looking up the hill the houses appear to be stacked on top of one another, sprinkled along the

impromptu streets, jutting out of every possible location. Many of them are made of cinderblock with little surroundings around them. Near the bottom of the hill are shops lining the main entrance to the neighborhood. Among them is a butcher shop where people can place their orders and a small storefront that sells many of the basic necessities such as beans, rice, toilet paper and a few vegetables. Children, waiting for their parents to finish their shopping, mill around in front of the stores and ask for change to buy packets of gum.

Many of the inhabitants of Lucha de los Pobres migrated to Quito in search of jobs. Having come from more rural areas where jobs were limited, Quito was seen as a haven for employment opportunities. When they arrived, however, they were immediately dismayed at the lack of options available, the extreme amount of competition for the most menial positions, and the continual rise in living costs. These factors led many to seek out work in the informal sector. In 1997 UNIFEM conducted a study about migration patterns and the informal sector and found that, while there was a 7.2 percent influx of people to Quito, only 1.2 percent of them were able to find jobs. The rest went to work in the informal sector.

#### **4.4 Jaime Roldos**

Clear to the north of Quito is Jaime Roldos, a much larger neighborhood. It was named after Jaime Roldos Aguilera, a social democrat who was elected president in 1979, shortly after the discovery of oil (1967). His presidential platform was one of social and economic equity, particularly as it related to the equal distribution of oil profits. While his people loved him, he was largely unsuccessful in his efforts to even economic classes and, in 1981 he died in an airplane crash. There is some speculation as to whether this crash was an assassination on the part of the U.S. in order to gain control and better access to Ecuador's oil industry. His name is still honored among the working class as a person who died fighting for the rights of the poor.

Upon entering Jaime Roldos by bus there are a few small stores and a tavern. Many of the roads I traveled on were unpaved and somewhat precarious in areas. During a conversation with one of the women from Roldos she mentioned that portions of the road would flood and wash out from heavy rains, making it impossible

to travel in or out of certain areas. Amidst all of this is a thriving neighborhood with a well-maintained school that teaches kindergarten through eighth grade.

#### **4.5 CEDEAL Workshops**

On a typical day I would work until noon at UNIFEM and then walk 2 miles to spend the second half of the day at the CEDEAL office. The CEDEAL office is much smaller than the UNIFEM office and consists of an executive director, two grant funded positions and a front desk person. Whereas UNIFEM mainly funds other organization's programs, CEDEAL actively seeks out and depends on funding from other larger organizations. In addition to two rooms, one for the executive director and the other for the two grant funded positions, there is a kitchen, a bathroom and two meeting rooms with tables and chairs. The larger room of the two was, at the time, primarily used to teach workshops.

The workshops were structured in such a way that there were nine altogether, each one addressing a different topic ranging from the informal sector, health issues, and legal concerns to micro-credit, marketing, and dollarization. They were held once a week at the CEDEAL office beginning at 3:00pm and lasting roughly three hours. Because many of the women in my sample were mothers, they often brought their small children with them. Oftentimes the workshops would begin with a discussion about a particular topic, followed by break out sessions and several small exercises. After each of the exercises the women would present their results to the rest of the class. This information was gathered throughout the meetings and put together during the weekend workshops in the proposal that was later submitted to the city.

The women were able to meet with the mayor of Quito on several occasions and present their demands in the form of a written request. Their particular focus was to have the city create more legal outdoor markets where women could sell their products. Ideally the outdoor spaces would have bathrooms, wash stations for cleaning dishes, and locked storage areas so the women could store their products overnight rather than having to pack and unpack every day. They also wanted the city to issue more vending permits. Meeting with the city granted them the opportunity to put these goals on the legislative table. It also encouraged them to develop their

personal and professional goals so that their immediate family needs could be met as well as their long-term business goals.

Throughout this time, CEDEAL worked with the women to create their own business plans. In particular, CEDEAL encouraged them to identify the type of product they wished to sell and worked with them on ways to make this possible. Together the women created marketing strategies (how and who they would market their product to and where they would sell it). They had to justify why they chose to sell a particular product over another, discussed possible challenges they might face (such as limited vending licenses, low product demand, etc) and how they might resolve these issues. They also drew up a budget outlining all the initial start up costs as well as ongoing expenses. These exercises encouraged the women to explore what it means to own a business. It was also necessary to have such a business plan if they wanted to take out a loan from any financial institution.

The next chapter will explore the women's responses to the questions I asked about their participation in the program and why they chose to work in the informal sector. By asking them about their reasons for enrolling in CEDEAL's program, why they were interested in starting a microenterprise, how they felt about working in the informal versus the formal sector, and their future goals, I was able to learn more about how they viewed the program offered through CEDEAL and whether they felt the program was truly addressing their concerns. The ability to participate in and videotape the workshops also supplemented my research greatly as did meeting with the women at the community centers, holding interviews, and attending conferences. Because many topics covered during the workshops were similar to the responses I received during the interviews, (the informal sector, legal concerns, micro-credit, marketing, and dollarization) I was able to determine whether CEDEAL's program was successful as determined both by the participants and based on the initial project proposal that CEDEAL submitted to UNIFEM.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

Silvia

Lucha de los Pobres, Ecuador

3/11/01

One Sunday, Dora Lastra, a friend of my mother's for many years and the committee president of my neighborhood came to my house and asked me if I would like to learn more about a women's rights course offered through CEDEAL. At first I didn't accept, saying that I didn't have the time; I worked outside of the house and so I didn't have a chance to take such a course. Dora told me that I would like the class, that it was a lot of fun, and that it would help me to get a better job. I thought about what she said and, with some reluctance and a lot of insistence, I decided to go to one of the get-togethers. Two get-togethers came and went before I attended one. When I did go we watched a movie about women leaders. It was a surprise for me because I didn't know anyone but as soon as I walked in the door the Executive Director of CEDEAL came right up to me and greeted me. She immediately knew who I was and came over to welcome me, saying, 'We've been waiting for you. This is a space for you. Your neighborhood leader elected you to become a community educator in women's rights and self-care.' And so I joined CEDEAL.

Over the years I have learned a lot about my rights as a woman and as a human. I am now able to negotiate for my rights in my job. Because I am an Afro-Ecuadorian woman I have faced a lot of racist discrimination. CEDEAL has taught me how to defend myself against people who treat me differently because of the color of my skin. I learned that there are no significant differences between others and myself regardless of our skin color. We all feel, think, suffer and we are all able to be happy. We are all human and I know that we can treat each other with respect and equality (Silvia).

Silvia's testimony speaks to the nature of empowerment programs on a multitude of levels. She begins by highlighting the fact that for many women, empowerment programs represent one more responsibility in a long list of obligations. The fact that women with limited financial resources are asked to participate in such programs when they are already so taxed speaks to a nation's inability to offer adequate social services. Rather than the government providing these services, women are expected to ensure that their basic rights and health care needs are met.

The fact that she was identified and greeted by the director of CEDEAL emphasizes non-profits and empowerment program's desire and ability to create and nurture leaders in the midst of larger economic crises. By offering classes on human

and women's rights, non-governmental agencies such as CEDEAL are providing much needed alternative forms of education at no cost. They also work to unify communities by creating a space where women can come together to address issues that are pertinent to their community. In providing this space, they offer women a sense of hope.

What Silvia's commentary does not address is why empowerment programs exist or whether they are actually successful in their attempts to empower women. Such programs could be considered deceptive, prefacing a "do it yourself" attitude above challenging governments to offer such basic services as equal access to employment and education, childcare, and affordable health care. The fact that empowerment programs exist serves as a testament to a government's indifference and/or inability to address such issues. Ultimately women are expected to find alternative solutions to these problems. In essence, it could be argued that women are asked to shoulder a nation's inadequacies in the name of empowerment. Non-governmental agencies have become the means by which this happens. This arrangement becomes increasingly difficult, however, when major economic shifts such as dollarization occur.

For clarity, I have divided this chapter into three distinct sections. I begin with a brief discussion about dollarization and the impact that it had on the women I interviewed. Since people are heavily influenced by their social and political surroundings I felt it was important to place my research within the context of dollarization in order to effectively discuss my findings. The second section focuses on the intentional and unintentional benefits women gained from CEDEAL's empowerment workshops. I will also examine some of the potential negative effects that empowerment programs can have on women. This information comes from my conversations with the women and is a reflection of how they view the program in terms of its benefits as well as its inadequacies. In reference to my research questions, this section explores how participants view empowerment programs and whether they are truly addressing women's concerns. This section is also a reflection of what is important to them. The final chapter introduces two case studies, one from Jaime

Roldos in the north (Beatriz) and one from Lucha de los Pobres in the south (Pastorisa).

### 5.1 Dollarization

Although dollarization is not inherently a part of empowerment programs, it is significant to my research in that it influenced the responses I received. Over the course of my time working in Ecuador and throughout my interviews, I spoke with numerous people about the effects of dollarization. In general, many of the responses I received revolved around inflation and the lack of employment opportunities, leading to an increase in the number of people living in poverty.

Everything has increased in price. Although we have always been poor, I think that at this moment the biggest problem is that there is no work. And things cost a lot more now. It is very difficult. For example, in my family, we are always thinking about money. It seems it is impossible to get ahead (Rosa Maria, 2001).

As Rosa Maria's comment highlights, poverty is a very real situation in Ecuador. In 1999, the extreme poor accounted for 21 percent of the total population (12.4 million) and the poor accounted for 52 percent of the population (UNDP 2003).

High rates of unemployment have always been a problem in Ecuador. This is particularly true among the extreme poor with 20 percent of the poorest population witnessed a 24 percent increase in unemployment rates in 1999. On the other hand, 20 percent of the richest population only witnessed a 5 percent increase in 1999. (Floro and Messier 2004:5). Switching to the dollar in 2000 only served to increase this dichotomy between the wealthy and the impoverished as opportunities for employment became further and farther between.

In light of issues like dollarization and unemployment, several women I spoke with expressed an overwhelming sense of hopelessness. These women had an extremely dismal outlook on life and spoke quite frankly about their frustrations and disillusionments with their government.

A lot of the time I feel frustrated because I'm capable, but the situation doesn't allow me to work. For example, I would like to study for a career, but it is impossible. Our government lies to us. They say we can get a job or go to



school but there are no jobs and I cannot afford school. The economic situation doesn't let us (Maria del Carmen Morales, 2001).

One way that women sought to ease this frustration was to enroll in empowerment programs like the one offered at CEDEAL.

A majority of the women I spoke with have taken numerous empowerment courses through CEDEAL and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs). While the focus of these courses vary from human and women's rights to community activism, self care, poverty and microenterprises, the basic goal of the courses is the same: to empower women. What follows is a discussion regarding some of the benefits and limitations of empowerment programs.

## **5.2 Empowerment Programs**

Like so many NGOs, CEDEAL seeks to address political, social and economic disparities such as dollarization and lack of employment opportunities through programs offered to the public. The majority of people who accessed these programs came from marginalized communities as they were typically hit the hardest by larger political and financial changes. Whereas these issues were once addressed through social programs funded through the city, the onslaught of cuts in social services over the years left many communities to fend for themselves. As a result, people have turned to NGOs for support.

### **5.2.1 Informal sector**

"Overall there are more women in the informal sector because there are less opportunities for us in the formal sector" (Jimena).

Scholars have repeatedly shown there is a direct correlation between severe economic recessions and rises in the informal sector. As jobs and resources become scarce, people tend to look to the informal sector for financial assistance. Dollarization is a prime example of a macroeconomic policy that led to a significant increase in unemployment rates. Since Ecuador's economic focus switched entirely to paying off international debts, local social service programs were cut in an effort to save money and reduce any internal expenses that were viewed as extraneous. This, coupled with inflation due to the currency switch resulted in lay offs and little or no social services

for people to access in times of need. In these instances, where there are a lack of choices available, working in the informal sector becomes a necessary means to escape poverty.

A major factor that contributed to women's decision to enroll in CEDEAL's course was the fact that the workshops dealt with the informal sector. Women in particular are heavily affected by economic recessions. Of the women I interviewed, 85 percent mentioned the informal sector and the desire to start a microenterprise in order to combat rising costs. This desire led them to attend CEDEAL's workshops, which focused on women and the informal sector. As was outlined in the methods chapter, CEDEAL's program sought to find viable economic solutions for women in the informal sector due to the ongoing instability of the formal sector. The focus of the program was a reflection of larger economic trends that preferenced programs dealing with the informal sector. At the time of my internship, UNIFEM was operating under a five-year umbrella program entitled DES, (Los Derechos Economicos y Sociales – Economic and Social Rights). While the programs they offered and funded were broad and varied, the informal sector was definitely an area of interest to UNIFEM and other national/international agencies.

The informal sector consists of many different types of employment. Piecework and consignment are just two examples in addition to contracted work. Street vendors and cottage industries are also considered to be services commonly found in the informal sector. The latter two examples are further defined as microenterprises. Mary E. Okelo defines microenterprises as:

Small size, loose informal structure, ease of entry, requiring very little capital to start up, high flexibility, little or no education required, tends to be labour intensive, generally a one person or family business, depends on the business acumen of proprietor/promoter (1989: 241).

CEDEAL was specifically interested in working with women and the informal sector to develop strategies that would alleviate poverty. The primary focus of this particular program was women and microenterprises.

Locating jobs or finding creative ways to earn money in the informal sector can be extremely difficult. CEDEAL's course was appealing because it sought to

address these issues. At a time when major shifts were occurring in the economy, the opportunity to gain skills that could translate into a job was extremely desirable. During one of the workshops, Pastorisa commented,

I took a class through another non-governmental organization about how to make art out of tagua and then I started this business. I learned how to make necklaces, bracelets, figurines, and things like that. Now we buy our own materials and since we have the machinery we are able to work for ourselves (Pastorisa, 2001).

Programs like this one encouraged Pastorisa to start her own business. Her products are primarily marketed to tourists and overseas vendors. She later mentioned that she was particularly interested in the course through CEDEAL because she wanted to learn more about marketing her product and ways to secure additional financing so she could build the business. Offering programs that focused on the informal sector and developing these skills is one instance of how organizations like CEDEAL continue to support their constituents by encouraging individuals to develop their entrepreneurial skills.

One of the unintentional benefits of empowerment programs that continued to come up during my interviews as well as the workshops is the idea of “freedom” and “flexibility” with regards to the informal sector. In talking with women I often heard them use these terms when discussing employment opportunities and how they prioritized their basic needs. The terms “freedom” and “flexibility” meant different things depending on the person. For Lilia, working in the informal sector meant not having a supervisor.

I work in the informal sector mainly for the freedom, so I don't have to deal with a boss and people I don't know or like. For example, if I worked [in the formal sector], say a textile industry, and one person said, “Oh, this person is crazy” then I would lose my job. It's not worth the trouble (Lilia).

To Nelly, freedom meant the ability to make money and have a retirement.

If we analyze the situation in our country today, it's better to be in the informal sector. For example, if we think about the situation of retirees; they worked all their lives in this country, and what they receive in return are negatives: problems with getting their miserable pensions, terrible health care, etc. So we

prefer to earn the money now, to take care of our bills and finance our future (Nelly).

Nelly clearly preferred to work in the informal sector because she felt it was more stable and predictable in the long run. Due to declining job opportunities in the formal sector, the informal sector made more sense.

Although the informal sector can be a rewarding and fulfilling line of work for some, for others it is simply a matter of necessity. For Pastorisa, Maria Flor, Lilia and Esthela, working in the informal sector bought them financial independence *along* with freedom and flexibility. "Working for ourselves allows us to value ourselves and not have to depend on anyone." Others like Fanny named financial necessity as their main motive for pursuing work in the informal sector. "I need another income because what I earn is not sufficient to pay rent because I don't have a house and bills and food are very expensive." Similarly, Norma felt a microenterprise was the best opportunity she had to help families and friends. Following this comment, she explained, "We have always lived marginally and this way we can do it on our terms" (Norma). Regardless of the reason for enrolling in such classes, CEDEAL's workshops were obviously seen as a resource.

For people like Jimena, working in the informal sector is all she knows. Prior to the founding of their current business, Jimena and her husband used to own and sell chickens. They also owned several vehicles that they used as taxis but the regulations and taxes drove them to sell the business. Now they sell ice cream in the summers and candies in the winters on the buses, in front of churches and schools, on the streets and in neighborhoods.

Contrary to these notions of freedom and financial independence are the harsh realities that women like Maria del Carmen face on a daily basis as an Afro-Ecuadorian woman. For her, working in the informal sector is neither a choice nor a symbol of freedom.

I cannot find a job. First of all I believe that it is because I'm a woman, and also, because I'm a black person. There is a lot of racism. The only alternative that I have is a microenterprise in order to avoid the problem of discrimination (Maria del Carmen).

All three of the Afro-Ecuadorian women I interviewed mentioned similar experiences. In this oppressive environment, starting a microenterprise such as vending food or other expendable goods was seen as the only way to extricate oneself from such economic, political and cultural pressures.

Another point that came up while talking with women about the informal sector was the type of business they wanted. While some women were very specific, others were indifferent, stating that it was more important to stay on top of trends so they could maximize their profits.

For me, it is not that important. For example if I sold shoes and no one wants shoes then I am in trouble. Therefore it is better to sell whatever is in demand. That way I will be able to make money. Right now, crocheted shoes are very popular (Maria del Carmen).

Rosa Maria made a similar comment, stating, "In reality, I just want to work. I thought maybe this workshop would help me decide". These comments suggest that working in the informal sector and taking programs like those offered through CEDEAL are not so much about empowering individuals as they are about finding a way to make ends meet during times of financial hardship.

### **5.2.2 Leadership**

"I want to be able to help the people in this sector, to create new jobs, and to be able to thank all the people who are helping us" (Ofelia).

Next to the informal sector, the concept of leadership was the most frequently mentioned topic throughout my interviews. Nineteen (71 percent) of the 28 women I interviewed referred to leadership and giving back to their community. This percentage is to be expected, considering that the majority of the women were already in leadership positions prior to taking this course. When their communities were faced with certain issues, such as lack of childcare facilities or space to work in, women like Pastorisa or Beatriz were among the first to offer their homes and/or find the resources to construct a community building. They were also the ones that demanded electricity and water for their neighborhoods. The fact that they enrolled in CEDEAL's

workshops would suggest that they believe the courses offer and/or nurtured such leadership skills.

CEDEAL also addressed women's and human rights. For many, this was the first time they had been exposed to such concepts.

I am learning new skills by taking courses like this one. First I took a course on gender and now I'm taking one on financial resources. It's good because I didn't know about our social and political rights as women and humans. It is very interesting, too, plus I think it's good to have this connection with CEDEAL. (Esthela)

Learning about these issues has given these women the leadership skills and the confidence to be more assertive in their own lives and in the workplace.

CEDEAL also acted as a place where people with leadership skills could encourage others to get involved and take the initiative to confront issues in their own lives and in the community. During the workshops and interviews, women spoke about their rights, their treatment as workers in the informal sector, and how to organize others to get involved. Empowerment programs gave them a structured forum and the resources to act in accordance with their values, and often yielded concrete results.

I've always taken a leadership role in my community by organizing meetings to discuss problems that we are facing in our neighborhood. I believe it's important to mobilize and address these problems head on so I went around and talked with women about these problems and got them involved with CEDEAL (Jimena).

The following statement also reflects Jimena's commitment to change and what her role as a leader should be. "The current economic situation is very difficult. That is why I believe that the people who have the skills should help those who don't so that they can have opportunities to." This sense of responsibility was echoed by many of the women I interviewed.

### **5.2.3 Access to Credit**

"You know, you can only do so much, try to save a bit here and a bit there but it starts getting impossible. People are discouraged" (Silvia).

Lack of finances and not having access to credit was a critical factor for 71 percent of the women who joined CEDEAL. Some women had a business plan ready to implement but lacked the capital to start. Others like Beatriz had a business selling ceramics but was unable save due to the fact that all her income went back into the business. Several women I spoke with mentioned the fact that they were unable to get a loan from a bank. The reasons for this varied from not having a line of credit established with any bank to not being in a relationship and/or not having a male figure such as a father with credit who could co-sign on a loan. It was not uncommon for banks to see men as the primary breadwinners of the family and therefore did not feel comfortable working with single female-headed households. This form of discrimination was obviously difficult for many single women with children who were working in the informal sector, regardless of their association with CEDEAL. Without a male figure in their lives, they virtually had no access to credit whatsoever.

Dollarization added an additional layer of complexity for many women seeking loans. In talking with women, one of the principal problems they faced was the high interest rate on loans. As Maria Susana notes, "I have a lot of problems with banks because their interest rates are very high and I can't start losing money. With the recent effects of dollarization, they [loans] would be impossible to repay." Furthermore, women like Gloria and Ofelia only felt comfortable taking out a small loan; something that most of the banks did not feel was a worthwhile endeavor.

In talking with the women it became apparent that there was some miscommunication as to the nature of the workshops. Several women were under the impression that CEDEAL was going to give them money to start their own business. While this was clearly not the case, CEDEAL did talk with various banks in town and compiled a list of institutions that would lend smaller amounts of money to women, provided they submit a business plan. One of the banks even volunteered to come to one of the workshops to explain the application procedures. Coincidentally, while I was in Quito, the Grameen Bank, a micro credit lending program opened up a local branch. This was the first bank of its kind in Quito.

#### 5.2.4 Education

"I want to learn new things because the quality of my life is not good" (Rosa Maria).

Of the women I interviewed, 68 percent said they attended empowerment programs for educational purposes. Of the 28, 10 had completed sixth grade, 14 had completed high school and 4 had some form of college experience. The average level of education was 11.5 years. The classes were beneficial, offering an alternative to more traditional forms of schooling. Courses and programs offered through non-governmental organizations have the additional benefit of often being free, whereas for most, taking a university course is financially out of the question.

I want to take the class for the education. I want to learn more. I never had a formal education, I didn't go to school – that was my fault. But I don't want that for my kids. I want them to go to school, I want to be able to take them to the doctor when they are sick, buy them medicine. That's why I'm taking this class. So I can learn (Maria Flor).

Here Maria Flor highlights the potential long terms benefits that are gained from empowerment programs. She clearly states that receiving an education is important, not only for her own well-being but for the future of her children. The opportunity to partake in such courses allows her to gain an education so that she can better provide for her children. She is also acting as a role model by stressing the importance of receiving an education.

Many of the women I interviewed tended to equate education with financial success. Participants sought out empowerment programs for educational purposes, attempting to broaden their economic possibilities. "I have to take classes to gain more skills; that way I can have another economic resource" (Beatriz). Whether or not their educational level was actually sufficient or useful in the economic marketplace could not be verified; what was important was a commonly held perception that they needed to improve themselves in this regard.

Financial success guarantees that their children have a better chance of attending school for a longer period of time. Many of the schools in Ecuador charge for entrance exams and books. If forced to make a decision between their children's education and food for the family, the latter would undoubtedly win. Attending



classes at CEDEAL, albeit difficult at times being that they were held in the late afternoon and almost 40 minutes from either neighborhood in the north or south, was an opportunity to better oneself and hopefully allow these women to seek out better means of employment. This in turn would lead to more schooling for their children.

One of the many skills that the women gained from participating in the CEDEAL workshops was how to write formal proposals. The main premise of their proposal to the city was to secure rights for vendors and to create spaces where they could legally sell their merchandise. As a result the women learned about the current economic state of the country, how to start a business and/or better their product and how to navigate their way around county laws and regulations. They also learned how to negotiate with city officials to demand better working conditions and rights.

### **5.2.5 Discrimination**

“Because I am a black women I face a lot of discrimination. It has forced me to have to protect myself against people who think differently about me because of the color of my skin” (Silvia).

The following paragraphs discuss some of the forms of discrimination that women face on a daily basis both in society and as a result of working in the informal sector. I will also focus on how empowerment programs can be used as vehicle to address these injustices.

Though issues of discrimination are very real and are felt on a daily basis by many, there are very few opportunities to actively explore how these instances impact women on a personal level. Oftentimes seemingly unrelated events, such as the inability to find work or affordable housing are connected to larger systems of oppression and racism. Of the 28 women I interviewed, 18 or 64 percent mentioned some form of discrimination. Some responses focused mainly on one type of discrimination, such as gender or ageism, while others highlighted a whole range of injustices such as lack of education, gender, ethnicity, classism, ageism and systemic oppression. These testimonies serve as an example of how complex the intersections of discrimination can be.

Of the different forms of discrimination, gender appeared to be the most prevalent. Several of my informants stated there are more women in the informal

sector due to gender stereotypes that situate them as the primary care providers and assume that they are therefore unable to hold a position in the formal sector long term. They also noted that when women do work in the formal sector, they tend to occupy the lower paying jobs. One way that non-profits like CEDEAL sought to offset these inequalities was to offer courses that focused on ways for women to develop their skills within the informal sector so they could better their economic standing.

Gender also played a significant role with regards to dollarization. Switching to the American dollar caused daily expenses like food, health care, electricity and water to nearly triple. Since women have historically been responsible for these costs due to cultural practices and social norms, they invariably felt the burden more so than men. Interestingly, Maria Lorena felt that men were more affected because there were more systems of support such as non-profits like CEDEAL, which are mainly geared toward women. She also stated that due to a failing economy, there were fewer jobs in the formal sector and less construction opportunities in the informal sector, both of which have historically been occupied by men.

Gender also played a direct role in women's ability to receive an education, as they are more likely to be pulled out of school if the family needs help providing additional income or watching younger siblings.

I think there are more women in the informal sector. Maybe it's because we have less chances to continue with our education so we have less opportunities to work in the formal sector. There always seemed to be something that kept me from school (Silvia).

This last comment highlights the intersections between gender discrimination and the inability to pursue an education. Empowerment programs like CEDEAL create spaces where issues of discrimination can openly be discussed.

While only three women in my sample were Afro-Ecuadorian, all of them referred to numerous experiences they had with racism in addition to other forms of discrimination. When asked about how racism and discrimination affected her ability to get a job, Maria replied:

A year ago, I had a confirmed job, but when the supervisor saw me, he gave a lot of excuses and didn't give me the opportunity. The person that was my

contact called him to ask for the reason and he said that it was because I am a person of color and it would not work. This is a very serious problem. It is very difficult here (Maria del Carmen Morales).

Following these comments, Silvia also spoke about her frustrations.

How can I explain? I don't have a sufficient education to get a job. I didn't study after 6<sup>th</sup> grade. There are not many opportunities for people like us... and so I found a job that was easy. People are not treated well in this line of work [house cleaning], but what can you do? After this job I don't think I will clean houses again. It is a little redundant. After I clean their house I come home and clean my own house. I would prefer to start my own microenterprise. I would like that a lot, working for myself so I can get ahead (Silvia).

When I asked Silvia what she thought could be done to change the current situation she replied:

I think we need to educate people. I want to start a group for black people, especially for young children of Carchi, where I was born. I want to teach them about our culture, our dances- like the bomba, our food, our songs and our history. I want our children to know about their cultural identity, where they were born, where they live now, their race. I want them to live with dignity (Silvia).

Silvia's comments show that while racism continues to be a very serious problem, she is still hopeful for future generations and is determined to make a difference. While three of the women I interviewed were indigenous and undoubtedly experienced racism and other forms of discrimination, they declined to elaborate. This might have been due to cultural reasons or the fact that they simply did not feel comfortable sharing that type of information with me.

Current vendor laws act as another form of discrimination. City laws and ordinances are a constant form of control over microentrepreneurs via regulations and restrictions that limit women's ability to work in the informal sector. During one of my focus groups Jimena replied,

We would like to join an association of vendors so we can fight for political and legal rights because at the moment the police and other business owners discriminate against us. They treat us as if we were criminals. The police are always trying to "clean the streets of street vendors". They try to break us too, steal our products, fine us. They are clowns (Jimena).

One of the main goals of the workshops was to create a proposal demanding that the city provide more open air markets with wash stations and bathrooms so more people could legally vend their products.

In addition to more vending spaces, the women wanted the city to issue more licenses. Vending licenses were hard to come by for several reasons. Not having the funds to purchase a license is the most obvious reason. Yet another reason was that, in order for women to obtain a vending license they have to register their business with the city. Although the government does not recognize the informal sector, the city does issue a set amount of permits per year in order to keep tabs on the number of vendors. The actual number of permits issued fluctuates from year to year depending on who is in office. Obtaining a license and vendor permit however, allowed them to have protection (such as police harassment and fines). At the time that I was in Quito, the city only issued a few licenses at a time. This forced many microentrepreneurs to sell without a business license, thereby subjecting them to harassment and fines. For example, if a person was caught selling without a license it was not uncommon for her to be fined and possibly have her merchandise confiscated. Police brutality was also fairly common where women were often subject to periodic "sweeps" in an attempt to "clean the streets." Without vending licenses the women had no protection from the law and therefore were unable to file a complaint when abuse occurred. Working with CEDEAL created a space where they could make their demands heard and push for better treatment among vendors.

Another common factor that complicates women's ability to find jobs in the formal sector is age. As Maria Hernandez (age 53) states, "Well, I would like to work in the formal sector but there aren't very many jobs available for people my age. And I don't have the training or education for most jobs" (Maria Hernandez). The average age among the women I interviewed was 34; however, as Maria Aurora points out, "When a person is over 35 years old it doesn't matter what their sex is - they can't get a job, and if they are working, it is very possible that they will get fired" (Maria Aurora). Empowerment programs offer people like Maria Aurora the chance to

acquire additional skills and pursue other avenues of employment in the informal sector.

A final form of discrimination has to do with classism. There was a distinct difference between people who worked in the informal sector and those who worked in the formal sector. The formal sector offers health benefits, retirement and paid vacations. The informal sector offers none of these benefits. Furthermore, people in the informal sector were oftentimes looked down upon and treated poorly. They were thought of as too lazy to get a real job and were sometimes accused of being drug addicts. They were also an embarrassment to society, proof that the economy was failing to meet the needs of its people. When I asked Beatriz how she thought this situation could be changed, she replied:

I'm not sure if there is anything that can be done. There aren't enough licenses for one thing but you can't change the way people think about street vendors. People will always think street vendors are beggars. That's why I don't sell in the streets (Beatriz 2001).

Even within the informal sector there was political strife between those vendors who were able to afford a vending license and those who could not. Oftentimes vendors with licenses felt that those without one were contributing to the negative stereotypes that people held about street vendors because they were violating the law. Issues of classism became even more pronounced shortly after the country decided to dollarize. "I believe that it [dollarization] has really affected the social classes. At this moment, the situation in Ecuador is very hard because things are very expensive and the salaries are very low" (Maria Susana). CEDEAL worked with women to formulate proposals to the city outlining their demands. This in turn allowed them to organize and fight for better treatment and more legal protection for microentrepreneurs, leading to a more positive image of entrepreneurs on a larger societal level.

### **5.2.6 Children**

"We need to come up with ways to earn money so we can feed our children... The informal sector is more practical and flexible for women, especially if you have young children" (Rosa Maria).

Twenty four of the 28 women I interviewed had children. Of those, 57 percent mentioned children at some point during our interview. Conversations ranged from cultural beliefs and social stigmatism around mothers who return to work and place their children in daycare to simply not being able to afford daycare costs. Working in the informal sector allowed women like Esthela to get around these stigmas. "I work for myself because if you are a woman and have children you are responsible for them and you always have to worry about them. If you work for yourself you can care for your children" (Esthela). For Esthela, being able to work with her kids meant that she could cut down on daycare costs. It also meant that she was fulfilling her role as a mother and the primary caregiver while earning money at the same time. In this instance, working in the informal sector was viewed as a positive solution.

For others like Nelly, having a child forced her to quit her job due to lack of childcare options. Although she enjoys being a parent, she struggles with the fact that she is unable to utilize her degree simply because she cannot find adequate daycare. "I finished a bachelors and was working in a mini-market as an accountant but after I had my daughter I could not continue....the problem is that I don't have anyone to watch my daughter... Now I am selling clothes but it isn't going well" (Nelly).

In Nelly's case, working in the informal sector is less of a choice and more of a necessity. As her comments relay, oftentimes the amount of money that a person earns is either not enough to live on and/or is completely consumed by daycare expenses. She and others joined CEDEAL's workshops in hopes of finding new ways to make money while maintaining their cultural roles as mothers.

As the primary care provider, women are solely responsible for attending to children's health concerns. Having to leave work to take children to appointments can at times be problematic. "That's another reason why I like working here. I don't have to worry about what to do if my child is sick, I can just bring her to work with me. Or sometimes I have to go to the doctor's office or run an errand" (Maria Flor). Having flexibility with regards to childcare is particularly important for women like Rosa Maria, whose child has epilepsy and needs constant attention.

Because of my daughter's epilepsy I have to dedicate myself exclusively to her... Right now everything goes towards the girls. I would like to send my older

daughter to a better school where she could get a better education but that's not possible at the moment (Rosa Maria).

Unless Rosa Maria is able to find a place of employment that was sympathetic to her daughter's needs, she will most likely have to work in the informal sector indefinitely. She stated that she chose to enroll in CEDEAL's classes so she could better her skills in an attempt to be as productive as possible.

### **5.2.7 Women's and Human Rights**

"Knowing about your rights lets you see what is possible and that you deserve to be treated respectfully" (Jimena).

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of CEDEAL's programs is the ability to learn about one's legal rights. Women's and human rights continued to be brought up throughout my interviews and in much of the literature I read. As many as 53 percent of the women I interviewed reported an increased awareness in universal rights and subsequent life changes as a result of empowerment programs. Prior to taking such courses, several of the women I spoke with reported a lack of knowledge when it came to such issues. "I am learning new skills by taking courses like this one. First I took a course on gender and now I am taking a course on financial resources. It is good because I didn't know about our social and political rights as women and humans" (Maria del Carmen Morales). Another person in my sample made a similar comment:

Ever since I started taking classes at CEDEAL things have gotten better: I have learned about human and women's rights. I have improved my skills and now I feel prepared for something better. So really, my life has changed for the better since I began taking courses through CEDEAL. Today I believe that women can perform the same role as men... By being in this program we inform ourselves and we inform the community about our constitutional human rights, those that say that we have a right to education, free medicine, and those rights are being violated today. Now is the time to fight for our rights (Maria Carmen Hernandez).

Maria's comments echo those of her peers and their desire to bring about change and demand justice for all women. She and others argue that human rights are a universal and guaranteed entity that should be protected.

Women like Jimena were particularly interested in furthering women's rights as street vendors. Specifically she was interested in organizing street vendors so they can have more legal rights and better protection.

I thought if I took this class, I could meet other vendors. Right now I am working with street vendors in the north and south to create such an organization but I thought this project would be helpful since you are meeting with the city several times to argue for our rights as business owners (Jimena).

Jimena's comments are indicative of the work and expectations people have of non-profits to defend and maintain individual rights.

### **5.2.8 Social Benefits**

"I started working here in CEDEAL and it has helped me a lot, not only economically, but emotionally because after the separation, I wasn't doing very well" (Irma Teresa).

The primary respondents reported that many of the unintentional benefits were social and emotional in nature. Fourteen or 50 percent said empowerment programs gave them a sense of meaning. The opportunity to partake in these programs allowed them to shift their focus away from their own current struggles and challenges and focus on larger issues such as better working environments and equal access to jobs for women and men. This opportunity in essence made these women *feel* productive. It also provided structure in their lives and something to look forward to. At a time when very few jobs were available and formal education was out of the question, the ability to have structure not only broke up the day but also created a space where they could begin to tackle some of the obstacles they faced.

For several of the women, participating in the courses was as much, if not more, about the process as it was about the final outcomes.

I have taken many classes over the years. You have to because it is the only way we can really come together and try to tackle some of the issues we have, like childcare, or the fact that the cost of living continues to go up.... Since there are very little services like this in our part of Quito we have to deal with these problems on our own. We are always looking for new ways to do this" (Jimena).



In many ways the goals outlined in the proposal were secondary to having a place where they could express themselves and their concerns. Women routinely stressed the importance of the process over the end results, although they acknowledged that ideally both should have successful outcomes. This point is significant for a variety of reasons. Although the government was clearly failing to meet the people's needs, NGOs like CEDEAL offered ongoing support through empowerment programs.

Having a place to dialogue and develop friendships also gave them a chance to see that they were surrounded by other women facing similar problems. This was particular obvious during the two focus groups I conducted. While many women were not surprised to hear that others were struggling financially, they utilized these opportunities to brainstorm, vent, and connect with others. Some would argue that the psychological value was unintentional and therefore insignificant and/or difficult to measure, yet a full half of the participants mentioned this in some way and many spoke about it passionately.

They [the classes] have been very helpful to me... I think programs like these are very important because they offer us skills and support. Things are so bad these days. We need to have a place where we can get together to talk about our problems and to help one another. CEDEAL offers these things (Maria Hernandez).

In short, empowerment programs such as CEDEAL's offer many women a sense of hope and improved self-identity.

### **5.2.9 Solidarity**

"What is most important is that we are a group of friends. We support each other and that way we all benefit. It's a great opportunity for us." (Beatriz)

Another thread throughout my interviews was a sense of solidarity. Approximately 46 percent of the women brought up the importance of friendship, not only with regards to camaraderie but in business settings as well. Many of the women were friends long before taking classes at CEDEAL. Attending the workshops allowed them to meet up on a regular basis and relax while strategizing about ways to address problems they faced. Others met while taking courses and went on to form long lasting friendships and occasional business partnerships. Others still started their

own businesses prior to taking the courses but enrolled so they could learn more about marketing and micro-credit. In each of these instances there was a strong connection between friendship and work.

One group of friends from the north had known each other for several years prior to taking classes at CEDEAL. They would meet on an informal basis to sew clothes and bathing suits. Working together allowed them to share their resources such as materials and sewing machines as well as time, support and childcare responsibilities. As Marcisa states:

We are all friends, plus we are all women, which allows us to work more easily together. We can talk about problems and our families. We support each other because we are all friends (Marcisa).

These women came to CEDEAL so they could organize their business and learn how to more effectively market their product. What they found was that sharing resources and working as a group was extremely rewarding. Several women I spoke with noted that they were able to connect with other women in their neighborhood and share resources. One woman in particular mentioned that she was now working with the group of women in the north who made clothing once she discovered they had access to sewing machines. Other women, like Piedad was able to reach out and get women from both the north and the south of Quito involved in developing their leadership skills through additional meetings outside of CEDEAL. Working together, whether at CEDAL or in their homes was clearly as much a priority to getting together and socializing. It provided them with a forum where they could discuss their goals for the group and how to be more successful. Prior to their involvement they already realized the value of shared resources and ideas. Through CEDEAL they hoped to take their business to a higher state in a competitive and depressed economy.

#### **5.2.10 Cooperatives**

"We are trying to improve our skills because there is so much to learn in order to be able to start a business. This is the principle reason for which we are in this group" (Gloria).

Although only a few women mentioned cooperatives during our interviews, they are significant in that many of the women were a part of one in some way or

another. Cooperatives are usually created on an informal level and consist of a group of women that come together on a semi-regular basis. They can be purely political in nature, designed to address community concerns, or they can serve as a way to get together to work on income generating projects such as crocheting sandals, as was the case at Luchas de los Pobres. Oftentimes there was some crossover between these two types of cooperatives. In either case cooperatives allowed the women to address community concerns while working as well as supporting one another and enjoying each other's company.

Cooperatives also offered strength in numbers. For instance, if one woman was frustrated with the fact that her neighborhood has no community center or support from the city it is viewed as her opinion and has no real value to anyone other than herself. As a group however, they were able to mobilize and argue with the city for better treatment. Employing large numbers of people to challenge existing structures is one way that women can be empowered to change their immediate surroundings.

The following case studies showcase two examples of women who are a part of a cooperative. I chose to focus on Pastorisa and Beatriz because they stood out during my interviews as having strong leadership skills and a commitment to helping others in their neighborhood. Their stories highlight the relationship between gender and the informal sector; particularly in regard to households where one of the parents is absent, as was commonly the case. Not all participants fit this profile; however, there are many commonalities.

The following section highlights two members from the workshops. I selected Pastorisa and Beatriz primarily because of their leadership skills but also because they were representative of many of the participants in their desire to have their own business and be self-sufficient. I also wanted to highlight someone from each of the two neighborhoods.

### **5.3 Pastorisa**

Pastorisa is 39 years old, married and has three children - two teenage girls and an eight-year-old boy. Although they have lived in Lucha de los Pobres for 10 years, her husband migrated to Spain to find work a year and a half ago. He now works in construction and continues to send money home to the family. He plans on staying

there indefinitely or until the economy in Ecuador improves. During one of our conversations Pastorisa mentioned that at times this can be difficult.

I'm married but my husband is in Spain so at the moment it's just me and the children. My husband left over a year and a half ago to find a better job since there aren't any here. Now he's able to make more money so he sends money home once a month but I'm hoping he'll be able to come back sometime soon (Pastorisa).

Pastorisa's comments are reflective of larger economic trends in Ecuador. In 2000, Foreign Ministry officials estimated that there were more than 300,000 Ecuadorians living abroad, two-thirds of them as undocumented immigrants (Lucas 2002). Anyone traveling to Spain must obtain a tourist visa, which is valid for three months with the possibility of applying for an extension. A work permit is required however, if they are to work legally. Since there is such a high demand for work permits, many people enter the country as tourists and go on to work illegally. "There are between 150,000 and 200,000 citizens of Ecuador living and working illegally in Spain, and another 40,000 are there with proper papers" (EFE News Services 2001). For this reason she hopes that her husband can return to Ecuador sooner rather than later.

### **5.3.1 Work**

In 1992 Pastorisa got together with a group of friends and decided to start a small business selling jewelry and small figurines out of tagua, a type of seedpod the size of an avocado pit that grows in clusters in large coconut-like fruits. Such items were very popular at the time throughout tourist stores and were relatively inexpensive to make. She and 12 other women formed a cooperative and contacted several organizations to see if anyone had access to the types of tools they would need. Cutting tagua requires the use of heavy machinery such as a table saw, drill press and band saw. After numerous attempts they were able to rent out a space in the basement of a church and with their help the group slowly purchased the necessary machines. Over the following seven years the number of women and level of commitment fluctuated anywhere between three and 13 women. At the time that I interviewed Pastorisa, there were five women, three of whom had been with the cooperative since the beginning.

In 1990 the group decided to explore the possibility of building a community center that would permanently house their business. They contacted an alternative/sustainable building organization, much like Habitat for Humanity, and asked if they would help build a community center for the sector. The goal was to have a larger center that housed other cooperatives like theirs and was located in their immediate neighborhood. This way the neighborhood could use the center for meetings or get together and have a place where classes could take place. The organization agreed and they now have a two-story building made of cement and cinderblock. There is a large community room with the sustainable business organization on the main floor and a childcare facility and tagua workshop on the top floor. The alternative/sustainable business on the main floor currently pays all the overhead costs associated with the building and another cooperative maintains the childcare facility.

The community center has been very beneficial for a variety of reasons. Pastorisa and her co-workers have a place to work that they share with other members in the community. Their childcare expenses are nonexistent since the parents run the daycare cooperatively. They also have a space where they can hold meetings and/or groups can meet to work on income earning projects such as crocheting sandals, as was the case while I was there.

### **5.3.2 CEDEAL**

Pastorisa and the other women from the cooperative have been taking courses at CEDEAL and other non-governmental organizations for several years. They are always looking for new ways to improve their business. As Pastorisa notes, "I want to learn more, how to better manage the business. I am improving my skills and although I am working, one always makes mistakes." She was particularly interested in the workshops since they focused specifically on the informal sector. Having taken so many classes Pastorisa has had the opportunity to develop her leadership skills. She attributes much of this to organizations like CEDEAL. Learning about her rights and meeting other women with similar life situations inspired her to seek out funding sources that led her to build a community center. Recognizing that tagua will not be profitable forever she continues to take courses, both those that focus on self-

improvement as well as income generating workshops. Her goal is to grow her business so she can employ more women in the neighborhood.

#### **5.4 Beatriz**

Beatriz is 31 and separated. She lives with her four children in Jaime Roldos located in the north sector. Her daughters are twelve, ten, and three years old and her son is eight months. Shortly after she finished high school she became pregnant with her first child. She mentioned that she would have liked to attend college; however, having a newborn and no finances made this unfeasible. Over the years she has taken numerous courses through CEDEAL and other local neighborhood nonprofits.

##### **5.4.1 Work**

Beatriz's main source of income comes from selling painted ceramic figurines out of her home. At the time that I met her she had been working in the informal sector for two years. For Beatriz, painting ceramics was therapeutic.

I've had a microenterprise for two years and I like it a lot because I work for myself, and also it serves as therapy for me and makes me feel better. Sometimes when I am mad I can sit down and paint and then I don't feel so angry (Beatriz).

Having a microenterprise has provided her with a productive avenue to channel her frustrations with the government. She and 21 other women from the neighborhood would regularly meet and work on various income-generating projects. Due to the high number of participants, Beatriz built a small store onto the front of her house where the women could work and sell their products. Since many of the women had small children they would take turns watching the kids while the others worked. Some made shoes, others sold make-up or non-consumable goods, and some made clothes. They shared the proceeds collectively so that if a customer didn't want ceramics but they did want shoes, everyone still benefited from the sale.

Interestingly, all of the women were all either divorced or single. In recognition of their independence they named their group "Las Reinas" or 'The Queens'. When I asked Beatriz whether she thought having a partner would be helpful, she explained:

Maybe, but it depends on the person because in some cases it would be worse. They could be drunks, they could beat us, maybe they don't make any money. Better to be alone than in bad company (Beatriz).

Several other women nodded their heads in agreement when Beatriz made this comment. Overall the general consensus was that working together with other women was a more supportive atmosphere.

Beatriz bought pre-made ceramics from a store in the historic part of downtown Quito, which is over 45 minutes away by bus. Although there were stores in the north, the ceramics in the south were more affordable because public services such as lights and gas were less expensive. On average she spent \$1.00 on pre-made ceramic figurines, another \$2.00 in materials, and was able to sell them for about \$6.00. Any money left over went directly to cover food and rent costs as well as more supplies for her business. Occasionally she was able to save money during the larger holidays when people tend to buy more.

#### **5.4.2 CEDEAL**

Beatriz joined CEDEAL in 1999. She originally learned about the NGO from a friend in her neighborhood. Prior to the workshop series, CEDEAL frequently held interest meetings in both the north and south of Quito as a way to attract new people and stay in touch with the community's needs. These informal gatherings fostered relationships between potential participants. Over time Beatriz became a regular member and eventually began leading several of the discussions in her neighborhood.

Like many of the women at CEDEAL, Beatriz was a community leader in the north sector. She joined the workshops so she could learn more about the process of starting and owning a business. Her long-term goal was to formalize the cooperative she was a part of so she and her friends could become a legal business and establish credit. There was also a political component to their group but in order to advocate for women they needed to know their rights. Once they gained this information they planned to share it with others in their neighborhood. This process of education and dissemination is at the core of CEDEAL's mission.

Pastorisa and Beatriz exemplify many of the qualities that the women of CEDEAL portrayed. They are community leaders, dedicated to the betterment of women. They have children and for various personal reasons are the heads of the household. They were part of a larger group of women who were committed to helping each other both politically and financially. These characteristics are also representative of the kind of people that CEDEAL typically attracted and therefore shaped the types of programs they offered.



## CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During one of CEDEAL's workshops the women were asked to add commentary to a comic strip dealing with gender and the informal sector (see Appendix C). The strip begins with an image of a woman vending flowers on a street corner. In the next frame a policeman arrives and appears to be asking the woman some questions. Following this conversation he confiscates the flowers and fines the woman for selling without a license. The policeman leaves the female street vendor empty-handed, and she hangs her head down in grief. In the second version a *man* is vending flowers. He too is stopped by the police. Rather than fining him, the two go out for drinks. Afterwards they shake hands and the policeman leaves the man to sell his merchandise on the streets.

The comic strip highlights the impact gender has on the informal sector. While the exercise was somewhat leading, the issue of gender and the informal sector was serious enough of a topic that CEDEAL felt it was important to address. This chapter analyzes the responses I received regarding the level of success the women were able to achieve given their involvement with CEDEAL. In keeping with the results section, my analysis begins with a discussion about dollarization and its effects on Ecuador's economy. The subsequent section examines the advantages and disadvantages of empowerment programs, followed by a discussion on the two case studies, Pastorisa and Beatriz.

### 6.1 Dollarization

The decision to dollarize was clearly the result of failed structural adjustment programs that neglected to consider the negative short-term effects of poor development planning. Though the switch to dollarization meant to pull the country out of deficit, the change to the American dollar only forced Ecuador's national economy into a financial tailspin. Unable to keep up with rising costs, many people purchased less, causing the level of consumerism to drop. Many of the comments I received throughout my discussions with the women referenced dollarization and the added burdens they experienced because of the country's decision to switch

currencies. During these conversations, women mentioned some of the challenges they faced keeping up with bills, food, and rent while salaries remained the same. They also criticized the goals of dollarization, stating that they were shortsighted and only focused on the larger economic issues.

As I have outlined in previous chapters, this lack of consideration with regards to individuals on a microeconomic level led them to seek out alternative means of support. With very little resources available for women in particular, empowerment programs were one way they could come together and address some of the many immediate issues they were facing. The question remains whether these alternative channels of support were actually successful in their attempts to empower women.

## **6.2 Empowerment Programs**

My initial assumptions about empowerment programs were that they should offer concrete skills that could be readily identifiable. In order for empowerment programs to be deemed successful I felt there should be some measurable way to determine whether women had been empowered. In some ways these assumptions proved to be correct. For example, CEDEAL taught women proposal writing skills and how to negotiate with city officials for better treatment and rights as microentrepreneurs. These and other concrete skills demonstrate that the program did result in greater ease in obtaining more vending licenses from the city, permitted storage structures, and adequate bathroom and sanitation facilities. This style of project proposal is traditional in the way it provided guidelines and goals to be achieved by the end of the empowerment program. As written in CEDEAL's proposal, the program's three main goals were to:

- Provide the knowledge, the diffusion and the defense of women's economic rights by forming groups to discuss themes in poverty and microenterprises;
- Offer technical trainings in proposal writing and creating a business plan;
- Establish the exchange of ideas between women from marginalized communities and city officials with the goal of creating partnerships to address the needs of women.

These stated intentions demonstrate CEDEAL's adhesion to the standardized approach and its goal-oriented nature. If one were to go by these points alone, it could be

argued that my research confirmed traditional ideas of success in this regard. However, as the themes in my results suggest, I came across many additional intentional and unintentional benefits as well as several points of contention that may or may not be accredited to the empowerment program.

CEDEAL met weekly and on alternate weekends to discuss topics and offer trainings. The meetings were extremely well attended and new themes were constantly addressed. The ideas and knowledge were often later shared in informal neighborhood settings. Meeting topics were preconceived by CEDEAL officials and usually linked to an activity or discussion. Respondents often echoed similar topical concerns during interviews and in casual conversation. The workshop topics contained one or more of the following themes: lack of education, poverty, discrimination in the workplace, lack of credit and women's rights. There was an overwhelmingly positive reaction to the meetings and the content of the CEDEAL agenda. When asked for suggestions or ways to improve, I generally received only praise for the agency's efforts.

This high level of satisfaction expressed by respondents (all 28 interviewees expressed satisfaction with the program for one reason or another during their interview) was primarily due to CEDEAL's grassroots approach and their ability to establish a sense of ownership among the participants. This level of satisfaction was also visible during the workshops and through the literature that CEDEAL produced about the participants and their reasons for joining CEDEAL. By visiting neighborhoods and asking women what types of programs they would like to see, CEDEAL's approach exemplifies a desire to truly understand the issues the women faced and sought to address them through alternative means rather than relying on the top-down approach to programming that was handed to them by an international donor agency. This style of development work is a reflection of the classic empowerment model that works *with* communities, rather than imposing foreign development programming without acknowledging cultural differences. As was mentioned in my literature review, by working directly with communities, organizations such as CEDEAL allow for social movements to occur and encourage the idea that participants can be active agents within their communities and are able to bring about

positive change (Escobar 1990). Contemporary theorists like Bhattacharyya (1995) cite this quality as a key ingredient in affecting social change, and critical in determining whether it will be long lasting.

Sustainability is a favorite buzzword today in many fields and for the purposes of this study I suggest it be used broadly to examine the apparent and actual permanence of new change. This may signify economic, social, legal or other condition. For example, when women come together to fight the city for street vending rights and win individual permits, it is viewed as a small success. However, if they protest the absence of legal rights as female vendors and city legislation is passed, it is presumed to be a permanent change in their favor and will likely outlive the program that originally enabled the women to affect the change. Over the years, CEDEAL has placed emphasis on such examples as the latter, while still supporting the former. Empowerment programs must address very real and immediate issues such as poverty and human rights violations while seeking to affect more permanent changes. Only through such vision can the cycle of dependency be broken.

Toward the end of my study, I had my semi-professional sewing machine (a surger) shipped from the U.S. to Quito so that I could donate it to the group of women in the north known as Las Reinas. The sewing machine was badly needed, as there were over 21 women in the group and only three sewing machines, none of which were surgeons. Having the additional machine allowed them to increase their production and improve the quality of their garments. This in turn helped them to bring in additional income, as they were able to meet supply and demand as well as charge more per clothing item. While the donation was gratefully received, it was mildly contradictory to the CEDEAL mission, being a gesture of direct assistance rather than an attempt at structural change or reprogramming. It is possible that in this case it made a real difference, as Beatriz pointed out to me the increased production the machine would allow and subsequent business reinvestment that would result later.

Many scholars argue that this type of initial start up, whether in the form of equipment or seed money, is what most small businesses in the informal sector lack in order to truly address the issues of poverty and have real long lasting success.

CEDEAL provided a venue where women were able to network and learn about such opportunities.

Education was also clearly a critical component to addressing poverty and women's rights. The ability to access education regardless of the format empowers individuals and their family members so they in turn can receive an education. The knowledge participants gained from the CEDEAL workshops did not end with the program. Several respondents indicated that new ideas, approaches and techniques would be shared with women who were unable to attend the workshops. This diffusion of knowledge is exactly what agencies like CEDEAL hope for but likely have difficulty verifying. While this obligation to disseminate information cannot definitively be accredited to CEDEAL, it is part of a sustainable structure of education. It could simply be a prevailing cultural attitude of reciprocity, in which individuals who are drawn to such programs possess leadership qualities.

CEDEAL has worked with the majority of these women and they for the most part have been identified as leaders by their neighborhood. This was clearly visible in the videotapes of the workshops where one woman would frequently speak up about their opinions and experiences. Whether CEDEAL created leaders or simply attracted them is debatable. One could argue that women like Jimena and Doris Lastra were already relatively empowered and outspoken individuals prior to their involvement with CEDEAL. Regardless of the cause, there seemed to be an altruistic attitude toward sharing information with the community, something that CEDEAL helped to foster.

This sense of community and solidarity could be found in many other aspects of their daily lives as well. As I mentioned earlier, many of the women were friends prior to the workshops. Enrolling in the workshops merely provided them with a sense of legitimacy to pursue their quest to start their own business and a space where they could regularly meet up with friends. Furthermore, several of the women with spouses reported their partner's lack of support and/or disbelief that they could successfully run their own business. In these instances, the workshops served as a symbol of their commitment to independence and their refusal to buy into gender stereotypes that saw women as unable to own and manage their own business.

CEDEAL also created spaces where issues of discrimination could openly be discussed. Many women spoke about a diverse range of discriminations they faced as women in the informal sector. Some of the women were well versed in systems of oppression and expressed a feeling of empowerment when they spoke out about these injustices. Others never had a context within which to place their experiences. It was only after they became involved in CEDEAL that they came to recognize the discriminatory practices that take place on a daily basis. At times during the workshops I would observe one woman making a comment only to have several others quickly chime in and begin sharing their experiences. These examples show how empowerment programs provide women with a place to share their frustrations. They also bare witness to how central women's and human rights are to all CEDEAL's programs. As their mission statement claims, their goal is to "promote equal rights through education and social/cultural development" (CEDEAL 2001).

Through my interviews and focus groups I came to realize that the workshops also functioned as a motivator to get the participants to form their own businesses. One way this was accomplished was by working with the women to identify the challenges they faced. In addition to lacking the funds and/or the ability to acquire business licenses, CEDEAL worked with participants to develop business plans, complete with marketing strategies, where they would sell their products, and target their audiences with a comprehensive outline of all related start-up costs. Since most banks required such a business plan, these exercises were extremely helpful. These examples highlight the program's ability to foster a sense of agency while pushing the women to gain perspective on their economic situation. In many ways it could be argued that CEDEAL served as the vehicle that encouraged them to develop these skills.

The general focus of the meetings was the informal sector and how to begin a micro-entrepreneurial career. Many women expressed a sense of empowerment from taking such courses through the program, which offered them tools in the form of alternative education. Irrespective of their employment standing or current financial status, this self-perception of improved social and educational status was empowering. For example, the program in which I participated was attempting to address larger

social and economic issues by working with the women to create proposals they could submit to the city and business plans to the banks for funding purposes. This gave the women both the skills and the self-confidence to execute a business plan. While this would seem to be a very nebulous area, an extra boost of confidence could be the critical element that causes certain individuals to act.

CEDEAL, like many NGOs, had political connections and power within the community. Many of the women who were a part of a cooperative saw this as an opportunity to gain access to city officials in order to have their voices heard. CEDEAL benefited in turn as their participation opened doors for CEDEAL to secure potential future funding from larger national and international funding agencies like UNIFEM.

As demonstrated thus far, empowerment programs do not solely focus on readily identified or measurable outcomes. Oftentimes there are no immediate solutions to the issues participants face, hence the need for such programming. The programs, because of their exploratory nature, tend to be very process-oriented with results that cannot always be measured in obvious ways. One of the main goals was to establish the exchange of ideas between women from marginalized communities and city officials to create partnerships. By including women in the process, CEDEAL was able to offer women skills in order to seek solutions through *community-based* processes. In recognizing the process as equally as important as the results, without clear outcomes it can be difficult to secure ongoing funding.

A common complaint about gender and development is that the program goals are gendered. As June Nash (1998) points out, expecting women to embroider linens is both ethnocentric and shows gender stereotyping. Conversely, CEDEAL did not suggest income-generating projects. Their main goal was to empower women to come up with their own business plans. This approach relied on participant input while recognizing that preexisting problems were not simply symbolic of women's lack of action.

### **6.3 Limitations of the Program**

Although there were many positive outcomes from CEDEAL's work, there were also limitations. For example, CEDEAL was centrally located in Quito;

however, many of the participants who attended the workshops lived up to 40 minutes away by bus. This meant that women had to have the time and the bus fare to attend the classes as well as a care provider for their children. While it was acceptable to bring their children with them, the workshops were offered in the late afternoon and three hours long on average. Children often became cranky and tired as the night wore on. Ideally CEDEAL would go to the neighborhoods of potential participants rather than have them come to the office.

Another point to consider how these women came to participate in empowerment programs in the first place. When Rosa Maria learned about the workshops at CEDEAL she joined because she wanted to work but knew it would have to be in the informal sector. Due to her child's severe epilepsy, her options were limited. This was typical of many participants, though not necessarily for the same reasons as Rosa Maria. From this perspective, CEDEAL's program does not challenge these inherent cultural limitations that see women as the primary childcare providers; it merely creates a possible solution to poverty that is socially acceptable. In addition, women who were drawn to the workshops were universally marginalized for one or more of the following reasons: lack of education, gender, discrimination, age, race, disability, or children. This clearly predetermines who will seek such services. Based on the goals of the proposal, it would appear as though they successfully reached the audience they were attempting to attract. However, due in part to program logistics, some individuals (i.e. those who were not aware of the workshops, lived far from CEDEAL, or those without the financial resources) were unknowingly excluded. The tendency to group people with similar life experiences reflects the argument presented in my literature review by Nira Yuval-Davis (1994) regarding homogeneity and the expectation that all parties are equally oppressed and are all struggling for the same outcome. Clearly this is not the case.

Although CEDEAL was dedicated to social justice and bringing about positive change, they were limited to the type and amount of funding they were able to obtain. For example, just as UNIFEM was operating under the DES program (Economic and Social Rights), other national and international agencies were also soliciting for proposals and had their own agendas about what kinds of programs were most needed.



In many ways it could be argued that funded programs reflect the donor agency's interests as much if not more than the people involved or the organization in charge of administering them. As an example, prior to my internship, CEDEAL submitted their program proposal to UNIFEM asking for partial funding. As mentioned in the methods section, one of the first assignments I had as an international consultant was to determine whether the vision of the proposal was actually coming from the women or CEDEAL. After talking with numerous women in both neighborhoods, there were some minor modifications made to the proposal. Even though the changes were subtle, they reflected UNIFEM's ability to weigh in on the vision of the program. Taken to an extreme, it would be difficult to determine whether development agencies had ulterior motives, such as actively encouraging a non-profit (CEDEAL) to change the direction of a program so that the donor agency (in this case UNIFEM) could justify additional and/or ongoing funds from a larger institution. Had this been the case with CEDEAL, the program would no longer be considered "grassroots", a quality that is central to their mission.

CEDEAL, like many non-governmental agencies, relies completely on outside funding. Whether they are soliciting for funds from an international agency like the United Nations or a national organization that receives international aid, they are always in a dependent relationship with their donor agency. This type of relationship is exactly what dependency theorists warn against. As noted in my literature review, Taj Hasmi states that the "success or failure in eradicating poverty, especially raising the status of rural poor women in the region, are not different from those of any country perpetually dependent on foreign aid" (Hasmi 2000:136). It could easily be argued that what was previously thought to be empowering is no different than a modern day colonialist relationship that "3<sup>rd</sup> world" countries like Ecuador has with their "1<sup>st</sup> world" counterparts.

#### **6.4 Pastorisa**

Pastorisa's story is somewhat unique in terms of the extent she went to to have a center built for the community that housed her work as well as a daycare and a non-profit agency. The majority of the people I spoke with would not have had the leadership skills or the vision to accomplish something of that caliber. She *is*

representative of other women at CEDEAL in her commitment to community and her sense of entrepreneurial initiative. Her ongoing dedication to helping fellow women in the neighborhood is witnessed by the fact that she joined CEDEAL even though she already had a business of her own. Although her tagua business was thriving, she wanted to learn more about owning a business, ways to secure new markets and how to locate new audiences, not only for herself but also for other women who utilized the community room on the main floor. As I mentioned in the results, there was a general-purpose room on the ground floor where people in the neighborhood held meetings and/or pursued income-generating projects like crocheting sandals.

In talking with Pastorisa, CEDEAL allowed her the opportunity to be with friends outside of a work setting and meet other like-minded people. It also gave her a reason to get out of the house. The departure of her husband left her to care for their three children. She mentioned that this arrangement was difficult at times. CEDEAL gave her a break from her normal routine and the pressure of being a situational single parent.

### **6.5 Beatriz**

Beatriz was an extremely outspoken person. She was often the voice for her group during workshop exercises, saying what other women were clearly thinking but were not comfortable saying. On more than one occasion I noticed other women nodding their heads in agreement when she talked about the gender discrimination and the lack of support they received from the city when it came to working in the informal sector. During the weekend workshops she confronted the mayor several times with specific demands for adequate city services like proper plumbing and electricity. She also pushed for more publicly owned and managed spaces like parks and general green spaces for her neighborhood in the north. Much like working for herself, joining CEDEAL gave Beatriz a place where she could vent her frustrations.

Beatriz was one of the women who had misunderstood the goals of the CEDEAL workshops to be a program that offered assistance. However, her perception of the project and subsequent expectations of the workshops changed, and she came to see value in learning the skills necessary to affirm, protect and improve her place in the informal sector. These changes, she noted, were a direct result of

participating and discovering what deep down she already knew; women did not have an equal place in the society.

## 6.6 Conclusions

It is clear that empowerment programs came at a time when structural adjustments programs were not meeting the needs of the citizens, when social services were being cut daily and the formal sector was shrinking. Empowerment programs are the product of failed structural adjustment programs (SAPs). They reflect either 'first world' countries' desire to make up for previously failed attempts to industrialize a country *or* are a country's way of dealing with the aftermath brought about by development programs. The fact that they are a recent addition to development work forces one to step back for a moment and analyze what the real goals and reasons for empowerment programs are. Had countries like Ecuador never been pulled into a global economy that espouses industrialization as a form of salvation, they might never have turned to empowerment programs.

CEDEAL's program falls under the Gender and Development (GAD) paradigm. As Julia Mosse (1998) and Caroline Moser (1993) argue, the workshops focus on empowerment as a concept that emerges from women, for women. My research illustrates CEDEAL's desire to create programs with the participant's consent and cooperation so there is an immediate sense of ownership from the very beginning. They clearly see the participants as active agents and not as passive consumers, waiting for development to happen *to* them as many early Women in Development practitioner's approach was to development work. By striving to honor the community and their opinions, they are operating in a much more holistic manner.

CEDEAL's philosophical approach to programming is also very much in alignment with researchers Jo Rowlands (1998), Nira Yuval-Davis (1994), and Taj Hasmi (2000), who state that empowerment is process oriented. In talking with the employees of CEDEAL I found that they were as much concerned with the experiences and lessons gained during the workshops as they were with the actual outcomes and final results outlined in the proposal. Provided that the desired objectives were met, any additional benefits were considered to be an added bonus. Both the workshop participants and UNIFEM had similar feelings. The unintentional

benefits like friendship and solidarity, as well as the opportunity to connect with other like-minded people and city officials were hugely significant, albeit difficult to measure when evaluating empowerment programs.

In relation to my research I have found that if programs focus too heavily on the predetermined intentional benefits they tend to miss the larger picture of empowerment. Empowerment is not a fixed set of steps; it is an organic process that requires that the participants take ownership. As Jo Rowlands (1998) points out, the process in and of itself is what empowers individuals. From this perspective, I would argue that CEDEAL's program is a textbook example of how "empowerment becomes a process that cannot be done to or for women, but has to emerge from them" (Ashar 1998:4).

While Halef Ashar (1998) criticizes practitioners, stating that such programs are merely fronts for cultural co-optation and are firmly grounded in capitalist ideologies, CEDEAL's focus was *as* much if not *more* focused on community building and networking. The fact that CEDEAL continued to check in with the participants before, during, and after the program demonstrates that they are more concerned with a form of empowerment that emerges *from* the women rather than something that was done *to* or *for* them. This approach illustrates CEDEAL sensitivity to the wishes of the community they were working with and therefore were able to devise unique and culturally appropriate programming from a grassroots level. It is important to note that I do not feel that my research or CEDEAL's programs are necessarily a reflection of all empowerment programs. It would be a gross generalization to assume that all NGOs work with their constituents in the same way as CEDEAL. In terms of assessing what makes an empowerment program successful, CEDEAL emulates many of the desired qualities.

The idea that NGOs are chained to international agencies for funding speaks to the level of control they have with respect to the shape and direction of future programs. It implies that development agencies have the ability to dictate the type of programs that are offered and the effect they will have on a country's development. I agree with theorists like William Fisher (1997) that there is a fine balance between meeting the needs of the people by offering quality programs and the needs of the

international community in order to secure ongoing funding. The belief that “NGOs are destined to become the organizational mechanism for an international welfare system, doomed to be little more than the frontmen for the ‘lords of poverty’” (Fisher 1997:454) does not allow for human agency or the ability affect social patterns. I would argue that society and culture are far too fluid and dynamic to fall prey to such a static view. The fact that the women met with city officials and successfully increased the number of vending permits issued per year is proof that change is possible. Introspectively learning about women’s rights opened the doors for potential long-term change as well.

Another topic mentioned in my literature review was whether programs are empowering women or just creating more work for them. Simply creating and offering workshops is not empowering in and of itself, just as high attendance rates are not necessarily a sign of success. In order for a program to be truly successful it needs to address the issues pertinent to the community and offer solutions, or create a climate from which solutions arise. Because the women were actively involved in the decision making processes and chose the focus of the workshops, it would be safe to say that they were committed to the program. Based on their responses during my interviews it would also appear as though they experienced some level of empowerment as well, as perceived through their own definitions.

Finally, does CEDEAL actively challenge gender stereotypes? In offering workshops that explore ways to start a microenterprise in the informal sector, it could be argued that this program merely operated within the age-old framework that sees women as the primary care provider and therefore unable to pursue work in the formal sector. As a response, does having a microenterprise add another layer of responsibility in addition to child rearing? For Silvia, time constraint was her biggest hesitation in joining the workshops. Raising three children did not allow her much time to attend workshops. Silvia is representative of many women that CEDEAL worked with during the time I was there. On the other hand, once she did join CEDEAL she found there was an excellent support group and that it was possible to bring her children to the workshops if necessary. Contrary to June Nash’s (1998) argument that women’s abilities are often pigeonholed to income generating projects

such as embroidering linens, CEDEAL did not dictate the type of microenterprise the women pursued. In fact, the majority of the women came to the workshops with a particular type of business in mind or were already running their own enterprise. CEDEAL just provided additional resources and support.

In closing, dependency theorists are wise to analyze the relationship between first and Third World countries and question "who produces knowledge about third world women" (Escobar 1995:8). Focusing on the process and outcomes of a program does not take into consideration the larger ramifications and historical context that created the need for such programming in the first place. It does not address why countries like Ecuador are facing ongoing financial crises. From this perspective empowerment programs could be accused of being severely short sighted. For this reason dependency theorists like Arturo Escobar (1995) argue for the rejection of development work altogether. Since empowerment programs are a recent addition to development work, they are not as innovative as one would like to believe. CEDEAL on the other hand is not typical of development agencies. They are a locally run and operated non-profit working within the larger paradigm of development. Their workshops did question who produces knowledge about women. Although their programs were partially funded by international agencies like UNIFEM, they challenged existing development models and relied on local input when creating programs. The participants were not seen as having "needs" or "problems", rather they were asked to identify areas that they felt were important. They diagnosed their own economic situations and came up with the idea to have CEDEAL organize a series of workshops that dealt with microenterprises and the informal sector. This approach to program development is central to much of what Escobar and other dependency theorists advocate for when discussing alternatives to development.

### **6.7 Recommendations**

This study reinforces the view that in order for empowerment programs to be successful they must actively seek out the opinions of the participants. One way to ensure full inclusion and representation would be to hold the workshops in various locations, in both the north and south sectors of Quito. They might also branch out to other neighborhoods and marginalized communities within the city limits. Although

the majority of the women I interviewed and who participated in the workshops sold goods in the city, they all lived on the outskirts of town. Holding multiple workshops in various locations would ensure that more women would be able to attend. This could enhance the quality of the workshops, as the facilitators would become more familiar with the particular challenges the women face in any given locale.

CEDEAL should also take into consideration the unintentional benefits as well as traditional and clearly identifiable goals when designing programs. While they did appear to welcome and value the unexpected outcomes the workshops offered, they were not acknowledged in the project summary that was submitted to UNIFEM.

I would highly recommend including city officials at the beginning stages when designing such programs in the future. CEDEAL did have various city personnel attend the weekend workshops; however, had they been involved in the formation of the project they might have felt more strongly about seeing that the women's demands were met. As it stood, the city did increase the number of permits they handed out per year. There was also talk about opening up several more outdoor markets. This type of inclusion is vital to all programs.

A final suggestion would be to work closer with several of the smaller banks in town to discuss loans and gaining access to credit. This was an obvious concern and setback for many of the workshop participants. CEDEAL did work with the women to develop a budget as part of their business plan. Gaining connections and learning more about the specific details that are associated with accessing credit would allow the women to apply the knowledge they received from the workshops.

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DEMOGRAPHICS											
Name	Age	Marital Status	# of children	# of people in household	Level of education completed	Other NGO projects	Sector	Neighborhood	Location of work	Type of work	Goals for this project
Josefa	38	Married	3(f) 1(m)	6	6th grade	CEDEAL (2), ACS & NAC	Lucha de los Pobres (South)	Medio Alto	Manazana R lot 82	Bazaar work and sweets	To learn more about enterprises
Norma	35	Married	4(f)	6	High school	CEDEAL & NAC	Coop. Jaime Roldos Aguilera (North)	El Porvenir	America & Veracruz	Child care provider	To find new and better ways to earn money
Silvia	34	Married	2(f) 1(m)	5	6th grade	CEDEAL & NAC	Coop. Jaime Roldos Aguilera (North)	Union and Progreso		Domestic servant	To have my own enterprise
Lilia	43	Married	1(f) 2(m)	5	High school	CEDEAL, NAC & ACS	Lucha de los Pobres (South)	Bajo	Manzana AJ	Tagua	To learn more about enterprises
Fanny	44	Single	2(f)	3	High school	CEDEAL & NAC	Coop. Jaime Roldos Aguilera (North)	El Porvenir	At home	Home maker	To obtain more knowledge in order to start my own business
Luz Maria	38	Divorced	3(f)	4	High school	CEDEAL & NAC	Coop. Jaime Roldos Aguilera (North)	Union and Progreso	Manazana 86 y Lote 9	cosmetics	To learn how to organize my business better
Ofelia	38	Married	2(f) 1(m)	5	6th grade	CEDEAL & NAC	Coop. Jaime Roldos Aguilera (North)	America	At home	Home maker (used to own a bakery)	To better organize a business
Rosa Maria	39	Married	1(f) 1(m)	4	6th grade	CEDEAL & NAC	Coop. Jaime Roldos Aguilera (North)	America	Manzana 86 y Lote 9	Home maker	To learn how to manage a business
Marcisa	25	Single	1(m)	2	College	CEDEAL & NAC	Coop. Jaime Roldos Aguilera (North)	America	Urbanization El Condado	Child care provider	To learn more about enterprises so I don't have to depend on anyone
Maria de Lourdes	44	Divorced	2(f) 1(m)	4	High school	CEDEAL & NAC	Coop. Jaime Roldos Aguilera (North)	America	Paz y Mercadillo	Domestic servant	To know how to organize my own business
Narcisa	25	Single	1(f)	2	High school	CEDEAL & NAC	Coop. Jaime Roldos Aguilera (North)	America	Manzana 76 y Lote 18	cosmetics	To learn more about enterprises so I don't have to depend on anyone
Nelly	26	Married	1(f)	3	College	CEDEAL & NAC	Coop. Jaime Roldos Aguilera (North)	America	Crecia y Mariana de Jesus	Retail	To own my own business and to employ others
Esthela	35	Single	2(m)	3	6th grade	CEDEAL & NAC	Lucha de los Pobres (South)	Bajo	Manzana AJ	Tagua	To organize a business by myself

Name	Age	Marital Status	# of children	# of people in household	Level of education completed	Other NGO projects	Sector	Neighborhood	Location of work	Type of work	Goals for this project
Maria Susana	39	Single	0	3 (lives with parents)	College	CEDEAL & NAC	Kennedy (North)	Hnos Utreras 362	Juan Salina 527 y Bogota	Retail	To acquire knowledge to start my own business
Piedad	35	Single	0	7 (lives with extended family)	BA in Human Pedagogy & Religion	CEDEAL, INTINUSTAS & NAC	La Argelia (South)	Oriente Quiteno	Calle B N 50-51 y Vilcabamba	Community Educator	To organize a business by myself
Flor Maria	43	Married	1(f) 4(m)	7	6th grade	Taller Arte Tagua	Lucha de los Pobres (South)	Bajo	Manzana AJ	Tagua	To have my own enterprise
Maria del Carmen	34	Single	0	1	High school	Grupo Neocate Cumeno	Lucha de los Pobres (South)	Medio Alto	At home	At home Daycare service	To have my own enterprise
Maria Aurora	45	Divorced	1(f) 1(m)	3	6th grade	CEDEAL & NAC	La Argelia (South)	Mons. Leonida Proano	Calle Balazar y Sumbayua	Pinatas & Physical therapy	To understand how to maintain a business
Beatriz	31	Separated	3(f) 1(m)	5	High school	CEDEAL & NAC	Coop. Jaime Roldos Aguilera (North)	America	Manzana 74 y Lote 3	Ceramics	To learn more about enterprises
Jimena	34	Married	4(f)	6	High school	Ajoc de Mujeres & AMSA	Lucha de los Pobres (South)	Alto	Av Maldonado y Puente LP	Ice cream	To understand how to maintain a business
Irma	50	Divorced	1(f) 3(m)	7 (lives with extended family)	6th grade	Neighborhood president	Coop. Jaime Roldos Aguilera (North)	America	CEDEAL	Office assistant	To organize a business w/ my children for the neighborhood
Maria Carmen H.	53	Widow	7(f) 3(m)	5	6th grade	CEDEAL	Coop. Jaime Roldos Aguilera (North)	Comuna	Av Loudres Casparde Villareal	Home maker	To have my own enterprise
Pastoriza	39	Married	2(f) 1(m)	4	High school	Taller Arte Tagua	Lucha de los Pobres (South)	Bajo	Manzana AJ	Tagua	How to move forward with an enterprise
Lorena	18	Single	1(m)	4-lives with parents	High school	CEDEAL & NAC	La Argelia (South)	Hierba Buena I		n/a	To form a microenterprise with my parents
Rosa Maria	39	Married	1(f) 1(m)	2	6th grade	CEDEAL & NAC	Coop. Jaime Roldos Aguilera (North)	America	Manazita 76 y Lote 19	home maker	To learn more about enterprises and how to manage one
Doris Lastra		Divorced	0	1	High school	CEDEAL & NAC	Coop. Jaime Roldos Aguilera (North)	Union and Progreso		Day planners	
Gloria		Married	1(f)	3	High school		Coop. Jaime Roldos Aguilera (North)	Union and Progreso		Disposable Goods	
Susana Marilu	26	Married	1(f) 1(m)	4	High school	CEDEAL & NAC	La Argelia (South)	Hierba Buena I	Calle Chura N 95 y La Cosauga	Sells clothing	To learn how to manage my business better

APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHICS (Continued)

Themes											
Name	Informal Service Sector	Leadership	Microcredit	Alternative Education	Discrimination	Children	Women/Human rights	Dollarization	Support	Solidarity	Total # of themes per person
Josefa	1	1	1	1	1		1	1			7
Beatriz	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	9
Silvia					1		1	1			3
Fanny	1	1	1	1				1	1		6
Jimena Cuvi	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
Ofelia	1	1	1		1		1	1	1	1	8
Rosa Maria	1	1		1	1	1		1		1	7
Pastoriza	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
Maria de Lourdes	1	1	1	1		1	1			1	7
Doris Lastra	1				1	1		1	1		5
Piedad	1	1	1				1		1		5
Irma Teresa	1	1	1		1	1	1		1		7
Maria Susana	1		1		1			1			4
Flor Maria	1	1	1	1		1		1		1	7
Maria del Carmen	1		1	1	1		1	1			6
Maria Aurora	1		1		1				1		4
Luz Maria	1	1	1	1		1				1	6
Marcisa	1	1	1	1		1				1	6
Maria Carmen		1		1	1		1		1		5
Narcisa	1	1	1	1		1			1	1	7
Lorena	1	1	1	1	1		1	1			7
Gloria	1		1	1	1	1			1		6
Susana Marilu		1		1	1		1				4
Lilia	1	1		1		1		1	1	1	7
Norma	1	1	1	1		1				1	6
Nelly	1		1	1	1	1	1				6
Esthela	1	1		1		1		1		1	6
Maria V.					1		1		1		3
person	85%	71%	71%	68%	64%	57%	54%	54%	50%	46%	



