

# Women's Empowerment:

## Strategic Impact Inquiry Research Summary

**The Context:** Over the past ten years, political and economic instability have exacerbated inequalities in Ecuador. Monetary devaluations paired with price hikes, have led to the falling buying power among Ecuadorians, particularly affecting the poor. Households that live by scavenging, many of them headed by women, work under dangerous conditions, stigmatized by society and compete for materials to sell to unscrupulous buyers.

**The Project:** CARE Ecuador's SII focused on its Solid Waste Recycling Project in Cuenca and El Valle. From 1997-2003, CARE Ecuador worked with municipality governments and Ecuador's Department of Children and Families to mobilize women recyclers through:

- The establishment of two associations: the Association of Recyclers of El Valle (AREV), the Association of Recyclers of Urban Cuenca (ARUC);
- Training on sales to factories; and
- Workshops on reproductive health, domestic violence and finance, emphasizing self-esteem.

### CARE Ecuador's Strategic Impact Inquiry (SII):

For the SII, CARE Ecuador chose to study its work with women recyclers because the program marked the end of CARE's direct involvement with clients, and also represented its focus on poor, marginalized women. The key questions it explored were:

- What are the key changes in women's lives, how are they felt?
- What did CARE do to promote or initiate these changes? What did CARE fail to do?
- What did other institutions do to promote the changes?

The [Strategic Impact Inquiry](#) (SII) seeks to evaluate CARE's impact on women's empowerment. For CARE Ecuador's full SII report, contact: [pqlibrarian@care.org](mailto:pqlibrarian@care.org).

**The Methods:** CARE Ecuador rooted its approach in qualitative, participatory research.

#### RESEARCH DESIGN

- **Research Team:** CARE Ecuador staff, partner staff, members of recycler organizations, and qualitative research and psycho-therapy professionals
- **Workshop:** Team discussion of the dimensions of empowerment, budgeting

#### DATA COLLECTION

- **Overview:** February-June 2006
- **Respondents:** ARUC and AREV, women members, former partners, informal recyclers, donors, municipality officials, citizenry, CARE personnel, family of recyclers, industrial cardboard enterprise staff.
- **Direct Observation:** recycling plants on two occasions as well as households
- **Document Analysis:** Review of project documents, reports and evaluations
- **Semi-structured Interviews:** Perceptions of project, mapping of power, context
- **Focus Group Discussions:** Empowerment, life changes
- **Experiential Workshop:** Experience with project
- **Life Histories** (4 respondents): Empowerment processes and life changes of participants

#### DATA ANALYSIS

- **Triangulation:** Data validation across methods, locations and researchers
- **Reflective Process :** Staff kept a journal of process and reflection of data collection
- **Participatory Analysis:** Team analysis of findings, emerging conclusions and lessons validated in communities.

#### Limitations

- Objectivity may be compromised from the involvement of recyclers in the study, though they offered invaluable perspectives/insights.
- Likewise, external teams may also inhibit research given limited contextual understandings, but offered their expertise.

# ECUADOR

# Women's Empowerment:

## Strategic Impact Inquiry Research Summary

### Women's Own Views on Empowerment:

#### AGENCY

Self-confidence  
Awareness of effort invested  
Sense of personal self-worth  
Decision-making

#### STRUCTURE

Access to resources

#### RELATIONS

Relations with partners and family  
Inter-institutional relations  
Intra-organizational relations

### Impact on Empowerment\*

#### Implications:

##### *CARE Ecuador learning on empowerment*

- Recognize empowerment as a process with inter-connected dimensions. For the poor, this process can provide hardships as they fight status quo.
- Engage women to reflect on their own empowerment and recognize that empowerment and the impact of projects varies with the particular dynamics of each individual woman.
- Analyze gender equality and empowerment approaches in both urban and rural realities.
- Identify areas of unity, shared aspirations among women to provide support.

##### *CARE must support empowerment through long-term strategic vision and support suited to their local context, realities and needs*

- Support the transition of management of the project to be one of equality, empowerment and allow enough time/support for transition.
- Be aware of potential harms arising from project termination, seek to reduce them through long-term strategic vision, but prepare participants sufficiently if it ends.
- Recognize/mitigate the toll programs can take on women given their multiple responsibilities.
- Engage men in open dialogue and seek alliance with men in formal and social organizations.

##### *CARE's ideas of equality and empowerment must be maintained coherently through methods, tools, innovations, partnerships and human resource management.*

- Make strategic alliances with private enterprise, local government, NGOs and social services for access to resources/services, increase political impact.
- Mobilize new resources at local, national and international levels to fight poverty.
- Be aware of power games within development organizations and their impact project results

##### *Enhance organizational learning through SII methods to make project learning explicit*

- Engage staff and partners in introspective and reflective processes that help them better connect their own lives with their work in communities.
- Open dialogue with women and others as equals, and seek local alliances for the formation of networks for shared learning and mobilization.
- Undergo study for greater capture of innovation and learning for more effective initiatives against poverty in other women's empowerment projects.

	Association of Recyclers of Urban Cuenca	Association of Recyclers of El Valle (AREV)
Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-esteem, confidence, voice</li> <li>• Personal appearance, hygiene, self-care</li> <li>• Aware of own efforts, determination, security</li> <li>• Ability to give/receive sympathy</li> <li>• Decision-making around money</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self confidence, demand rights, communication skills, assertiveness, fall in conflict, self-worth, self-respect</li> <li>• Awareness of effort, benefit to community</li> <li>• Increase in income/material resources</li> <li>• Awareness of rights, sexual /reproductive rights, relations</li> </ul>
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shift in public perceptions of recyclers: seen as citizens, "not trash"</li> <li>• Access to resources</li> <li>• Meeting space for resolution of problems</li> <li>• Still responsible for household chores</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shift in public perceptions of recyclers, "not trash"</li> <li>• Credit, benefits from corporation help women but sometimes work demands too high</li> <li>• New recyclers' corporations represent collective interests – but are weak and require strengthening</li> </ul>
Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respectful relationships (community, family)</li> <li>• Negotiates with husband</li> <li>• No sense of belonging for members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved relationship between women and family</li> <li>• Better communication with family</li> <li>• Equal relation between CARE experts and women</li> <li>• Do not know corporation relationships with others</li> </ul>

\* Affected women differently given particular dynamics facing each individual woman.

For more information, please contact Sofia Sprechmann (sofia.sprechmann@lac-care.org), Marcia Sigüenza (nen\_sig@yahoo.com) or Fernando Solís Carrión (rfernando.solis@gmail.com).