

## HUMAN AND PRODUCTIVE PROCESSES OF WOMEN IN NACARARE, GUAZAPARES, CHIHUAHUA

Ricardo Aarón **González-Aldana**, Addy **Anchondo-Aguilar**, Damián Aarón **Porras-Flores**,  
Martha Irma **Balandrán-Valladares**, Ana María de G. **Arras-Vota\***

Facultad de Ciencias Agrotecnológicas, Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua. Chihuahua, Chihuahua, México. 3100.

\*Corresponding author: aarras@uach.mx

### ABSTRACT

The research focused on the *sembrador@s* (planters) collective, whose members referred to the Sowing Life Program (*Sembrando Vida*, SV). The objective of this study was to describe, from the perspective of social actors, how the SV program reached the Nacarare community and the ways in which it has impacted their living conditions, the empowerment of women, and the promotion of networks and social capital. The study was qualitative, using phenomenological, hermeneutic, analytical, and synthetic methods. The data collection techniques were interviews and direct observation; the unit of analysis was the individuals comprising the collective, made up of fifteen indigenous women, six mestizo women, four indigenous men, and two mestizo women. The results show that social capital was fostered in terms of the trust generated between community members and the outreach to other groups, creating networks of relationships, the presence of gender equity among the members of *sembrador@s*, and the acceptance of female leadership. Likewise, the equitable organization and neutralization of certain sexist models generated significant changes in the development of the locality and improved the living conditions of its members. The Nacarare collective demonstrated the empowerment of women through the SV program; they became key agents of economic, environmental, and social change in their community.

**Key words:** empowerment, gender, networks, social capital, territory.

### INTRODUCTION

Rural women represent more than a third of the world's population and 43% of the agricultural workforce. Their participation in food production and family care goes beyond the productive aspect, to extend to the social scope. Rural women not only perform agricultural tasks, but rather, they also maintain ancestral, regional food practices and have protected biodiversity (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, FAO, 2019; Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, 2024). These statements seem to configure a story of success, happiness, and female empowerment. But this is not the case; paradoxically, such assertions are correlated with poverty, marginalization, and violence. Suffice it to say that 70% of the world's poor are women (Comercio para el Desarrollo, COPADE, 2018), and those living in rural areas face conditions of acute and persistently high economic and social inequality (FAO, 2020). While

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poverty and hardship impact both men and women, men tend to migrate and seek employment in urban areas, as they can travel more easily; in general, they do not take responsibility for childcare. It would also not be correct to shelter under the banner of reductive feminism, and to pontificate about the better fate of men. In fact, the current male condition has generated few studies and little systematic reflection (Segato, 2014).

This research focuses on the socio-productive process undertaken by women inhabitants of the Sierra Tarahumara, specifically of Nacarare, a town attached to the municipality of Guazapares, Chihuahua; and how its women inhabitants overcome day to day the harsh circumstances of their habitat, isolated in a vast area of ravines that may seem imposing and beautiful to the tourist's eye, but for those who live there are filled not only with steep cliffs, but also with challenges and difficulties of various types.

Adding to the socioeconomic problems in the area, there is environmental degradation of natural environments, whose ecosystems have been severely affected by deforestation, habitat fragmentation, invasive species, and climate change (Mieles *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, in the Sierra Madre Occidental of the State of Chihuahua, excessive logging, forest fires, and prolonged droughts are particularly prevalent, making survival more difficult and influencing the need to migrate in search of better living conditions. Thus, Tarahumara families became dependent on salaried labor and relationships with the mestizo population, at the same time as their family and community nuclei disintegrated, and they adopted urban consumption patterns foreign to their dietary traditions, undermining the identity references of their culture (Ruiz *et al.*, 2022).

Likewise, with the migration of men, communities began to be left to women and the elderly. In the mountains, certain villages have been depopulated, have become extinct, or appear to be in the process of extinction (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, INEGI, 2010, 2020). Due to these conditions of poverty, environmental degradation, migration, and acculturation of the Rarámuri communities, participation in the *Sembrando Vida* (SV) program was proposed, whose objectives are to rescue the countryside, reactivate the local economy, and rebuild the social fabric in the communities (Secretaría de Bienestar, 2020).

The research arose from linking SV with the women of Nacarare, who were in need of technical guidance to enable them to add value to the criollo peach produced in the area. The study area is in the Sierra Tarahumara, at a distance of a six- or seven- hour drive from Chihuahua, Chihuahua, where Nacarare shows severe economic hardships and a very high level of marginalization (45.92), lack of basic services, and 60% of its population aged 15 or older did not complete basic education (Secretaría del Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales, SEMARNAT, 2021).

Presently, Rarámuri women are reorganizing around the family economy; they perform various jobs that allow them to contribute financially to supporting their households (Anchondo *et al.*, 2023). The women farmers of Nacarare have had to assume new responsibilities and play roles that until now had been unknown to them. The negotiations to obtain support from the SV program, its adequate administration, and accountability have favored a shift in their activities and in their feminine consciousness. Nacarare allows us to observe the type of human collective and the nature of relationships formed between its members, who, by organizing, expanding production, and adding value to it, generate relationship networks with other stakeholders.

The study has the objective to describe, from the perspective of social stakeholders in Nacarare, how the SV program reached their community and the ways in which it has impacted their living conditions, the empowerment of women, and the promotion of networks and social capital.

The hypothesis was: From the perspective of the social stakeholders, members of the community of Nacarare, the program was brought to their community through their efforts, and thanks to this program, their quality of life has improved at a personal and group level, and intra- and inter- community networks have been generated with bonds of trust as a result of social capital, as well as the empowerment and leadership of women in community activities.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Empowerment, gender, identity, social capital

Human processes are experienced in territories, hence the importance of setting out this concept, which refers to different dimensions and scales of reality. Initially, it should be noted that it is not synonymous with place, nature, landscape, or homeland. It goes beyond these notions, although it certainly contains them. It is necessary to overcome the reductionist definition of territory and broaden its conception, to understand it from the paradigm of power. Lopes (2000) speaks of territory as referring to an instrument for the exercise of power. Thus, understanding and describing a territory implies discerning who dominates or influences whom in that space (territory), and how they dominate or influence.

Before becoming a place of human settlement or a space for production and reproduction, territory is an instrument of power that determines and establishes its character and purposes. The mountainous region studied is a habitat occupied by indigenous groups, who resisted and survived over time, and remained throughout the country's different historical phases: remote, exploited, subject to predation, and a refuge or shelter as well for that defeated *Otherness* that indigenous peoples were and are still today, a group among them the Rarámuri. Therefore, it is possible to see that it is power that divides,

organizes, and determines the natural space (forests, rivers, mountains, deserts, etc.), which ceases to be “nature” or a source of vital resources and becomes territory. So, what is a territory apart from an instrument for the exercise of power?

Haesbaert (2011) conceptualizes territory from four dimensions: 1) from the legal-political tradition, which conceives it as an objective space of control, management and planning; 2) from naturalism, which highlights the physical and biological characteristics to delimit the territory; 3) from a dimension that sees it as a material basis for existence, and 4) as a symbolically constructed space, valued, nominated and capable of providing identity and belonging to the subjects who think and nominate it. The author also proposes the integration of these dimensions as a social construct produced by its use, its appropriation, its significance and its control, within the dynamics of the multiple power relations that build it and not just the one referring to the State (Paz, 2017). From such a vision, it is possible to incorporate into the discussion concepts such as empowerment, gender, identity, and social capital.

Identity emerges while interacting with the territory, another complex sociocultural construction which always develops in relation to another or others, so it is variable and is configured in negotiation processes within the course of daily interactions (Marcús, 2011; Hall and Gay, 2003). Although identity defines the being and the groups to which it belongs, it also determines the possibilities of relationships between individuals; this is because it is identified as a social structure and the ways in which these relationships can be developed. Thus, identity is constituted as a regulatory apparatus of social practices (Rivera-Plata, 2018).

Identity is configured in several scales or dimensions that are always in interaction and are permanently constructed in and against everyday reality. An internal dimension, that of a subject within a territory from which he/she extracts the resources that are vital to them, and from which the subject thinks of and narrates him/herself as a singular and unique unit, in the face of other subjects with whom he/she shares spaces and processes for survival. In this account of themselves, in this subjective dimension, the individual forges both his/her personal identity and his/her social identity. Therefore, the sense of belonging is an extension of the identity constructed by the subject in daily actions, whether significant or not, but always with a basis of group sharing. The sense of belonging is more of a feeling of identity that the individual generates with the community, with which he/she interacts to achieve common goals (Corona, 2020).

Networks, by contrast, are a set of individuals or subjects interconnected through patterns of communication (Arras *et al.*, 2012), information exchange relationships, between a set of stakeholders who have common interests in

the development or application of knowledge, for a specific purpose, whether scientific, technological development, or of the community. These interactions presuppose reciprocity, understood as correspondence, the bilaterality of communication flows between stakeholders. Networks have a semi-formal membership and operate based on bilateral or multilateral exchanges regarding their exchange rules and are voluntary and temporary.

On the other hand, social capital is a concept that has been used in various disciplines for the past two decades. From a sociological perspective, Bourdieu (1986) was one of the first to define it and to consider it as another type of capital, seeking to explain how forms of capital are transformed, although they all retain their original character: giving power. In Bourdieu's explanation, the distribution of social capital and other capitals responds to and shapes the social structure. Coleman (1990) incorporated the notion of social capital, formulating it as a public good, since its benefits are not only received by those involved in a social relationship, but also by others.

From a political science perspective, Putnam (1993) defined social capital in relation to aspects of social organization, such as networks, norms, and, uniquely, trust. For Guette *et al.* (2019), it is the set of personal, categorical, structural, formal, and functional networks that constitutes an asset for individuals and society, since they allow expanding their options and opportunities to improve their quality of life through trust, which is an expectation that enables a person to have certainty about how another person will act for the good of all (Bateman *et al.*, 2017). Despite all the semantic nuances, social capital always denotes a force that favors communication through cooperation networks.

Referring to the importance of rural women and their development necessarily implies addressing the gender situation in the rural environment, which presents its own peculiar characteristics. Regarding the theoretical construct of *gender*, there is a rich literature that accounts for the debate surrounding the term. The first issue has a controversial semiotic nature: the difference between the terms *sex* and *gender*, which lead to two distinct dimensions of meaning. The concept of *sex* is a phenomenon that determines the biological traits that differentiate each subject. Gender, on the other hand, is a social construction (Ochoa *et al.*, 2020).

People are born with certain biological and psychological characteristics; their natural condition as male or female is determined based on these. The definition of gender, by contrast, is shaped by the society in which one is born, with socially assigned attributes, in accordance with biological differences and beliefs about what is right or wrong to do, based on one sex or another (Chávez and Marrero, 2023: 21). From a patriarchal perspective, women will always be subordinated to the male figure and power. [...] patriarchal regimes throughout history, not only affect women placed on a plane of inferiority

in most areas of life, but also limit and restrict men themselves, despite their privileged status [...] by assigning women a type of expected and accepted behavior according to their own sex, men are forced to dispense with these behavioral roles and strain their differences with them to the maximum (Gauché -Marchetti *et al.*, 2022: 257).

In rural areas, social relationships prevail that place women as secondary in various aspects. One of these is social and labor inclusion (Rojas-Rojas *et al.*, 2021). For rural women, equal conditions of access to the necessary resources, goods, and services for a dignified life is a pending issue in most countries. Not all of them receive monetary income for their activities, and much of their work is considered mere family support. As a result, the daily work of rural women, both outside and inside the home, is, in many cases, *invisible*. From a gender perspective, the empowerment of rural women focuses on understanding the structural and cultural barriers that limit women's autonomy and opportunities in these zones.

On the other hand, rural women must directly confront the lack of protection in the agricultural sector: "Rural depopulation, globalization, labor migration, climate change, the gender gap, sexist violence, and the lack of employment opportunities are elements that negatively influence their empowerment, participation and leadership in the rural environment" (Morcillo-Martínez *et al.*, 2023:143). Applying the gender perspective within the rural world offers the possibility of understanding how discrimination against rural women takes place, and the ways to transform it. Rural development programs with a gender focus are aimed at women and another one of their purposes is to correct the cultural conditions that sustain inequality (Massolo, 2006; Mora *et al.*, 2019).

Regarding leadership, it is understood as a set of organizational, mobilization, and activation capabilities. A person is seen as a leader because they have the ability to develop strategies, mobilize others, influence and stimulate the members of a group to work towards achieving common goals (Bonilla and Pardo, 2023). The leader is capable of promoting change and plays an active role in stimulating and directing a social, educational, and political transformation. Now, regarding female leadership, it is important to emphasize that the leader is the woman who consciously and responsibly embarks on the path to free herself from the conditioning and influences of centuries of patriarchy, regaining self-confidence.

It can be said that, linked to female leadership, *empowerment* is a process of overcoming gender inequality. It seeks to have women recognize that there is an ideology legitimizing male domination. If subordination has been viewed as natural by patriarchal ideology, it is difficult for change to emerge spontaneously from the condition of subordination (Camberos, 2011: 45). To

empower oneself is to break with paradigms of submission and to have the means to assume authority over the resources and decisions that affect their lives. In this sense, female empowerment is more than just women's access to decision-making; it is a process that requires self-perception, self-recognition, and self-valuation of one's capabilities.

## METHODOLOGY

The research design, the problem selection and formulation, the techniques, the analysis and interpretation of information collected in documents and in the field are inscribed in a qualitative approach. The Sierra Tarahumara, specifically the Nacarare community, was chosen as the unit of analysis. Several women received support from the SV program and required a technical plan to guide them in adding value to the criollo peaches they cultivate. Fieldwork was conducted in May 2023, and the project was limited to the community of *sembrador@s* in Nacarare, which is why it was conceived as a case study. This is an empirical method that involves observing, discussing, and collecting data on actions in the "real world", that is, in a specific environment.

Among the techniques used, direct observation and in-depth interviews (7) (with six women and one man) stood out. In addition, a collective meeting was held, where other members of the collective were present and a dialogue with them took place. Both in the interview responses and in the group dialogue, people expressed the meaning that the SV program has for them. This communicative action refers to the hermeneutic method, in whose dynamics the researcher participates in a dialogue to explore the life history of the actors and reflects on the texts of the speakers, "interpreting the text in a back-and-forth journey between the parts and the entire text" (Quintana and Hermida, 2019:79).

The responses were coded and organized, reflecting both the participants' opinions and the researchers' interpretations. The interviews revealed the roles each plays within the group. There is a committee composed of a president, secretary, treasurer, and six commissions: Bio-Factory, Nursery, Savings, Education, Sustainability, and Transparency.

Audio and video recordings were made using the techniques outlined and in-depth interviews, and the information collected was then transcribed into Word format. The information contained in the files was used for discussion and reflection on the results. The interviews were conducted in a location where the collective usually meets, allowing for observation and interaction with the group. Members worked in teams to project their vision for the future of the transformation of raw materials. Tours of the area were conducted to convene a meeting with the collective, which the members attended in the designated meeting space (a kiosk). A table was set up in the center to work

in a circle and begin the introductory process, after which the fieldwork itself began. Subsequently, family gardens were visited, and a tour of the greenhouse facilities was cond.

The information was analyzed with the qualitative systematic process, by which relevant themes and patterns were identified; in addition, axial coding allowed grouping and interrelating similar codes. This made it possible to organize the data from each category into broader categories, applying analytical-synthetic and theoretical-deductive methods.

The study universe was defined with participants of the SV program from Nacarare, a town now attached to the municipality of Guazapares, Chihuahua (Figure 1).

The study area was the community of Nacarare, municipality of Guazapares, located in the extreme southwest of the state of Chihuahua; its name means “a place like an ear”, it is surrounded by mountains, and has a total area of 2,145.8 square kilometers (INEGI, 2020). The community is made up of 47 families, of which 27 are part of the SV program. In *sembrador@s*, there are 21 women, 15 indigenous and 6 mestizos; and 6 men, 4 indigenous and 2 mestizos. All 6 are owners of their land and have joined the collective along with their families. It is essential to highlight that, in this locality, the main source of sustenance is rainfed agriculture, corn growing for self-consumption, and plantations of criollo peaches, which are processed into preserves or sun-dried for sale in nearby communities (Figure 2).



Source: prepared by the authors.

**Figure 1.** Location of the municipality of Guazapares, Chihuahua, where Nacarare is located.



Source: photograph taken by Anchondo Aguilar, 2023.

**Figure 2.** Nacarare collective in a meeting with the research team.

## RESULTS

The meeting with the *sembrador@s* collective was carried out around the kiosk in Nacarare. During the presentation, María stood out for her vision of managing and organizing the project. All the group members identified her as a hard-working, responsible, and steadfast woman, capable of achieving every goal she sets for herself, just as she did to ensure her community was included in the SV program. So, we spoke with her:

—Hello, Maria, you introduced yourself as the person who leads the project; however, we see that there is a president, secretary, and treasurer within the project, and you don't appear on any of the committees. Why is that?

Maria answers:

We were at a meeting in Creel and the delegates and technicians told me to be the delegate's substitute. I am a female leader; I have taken the reins of everything. I mean, here, I am the one who always drives forward and the whole group follows me. I go to fairs and wherever it is needed to take

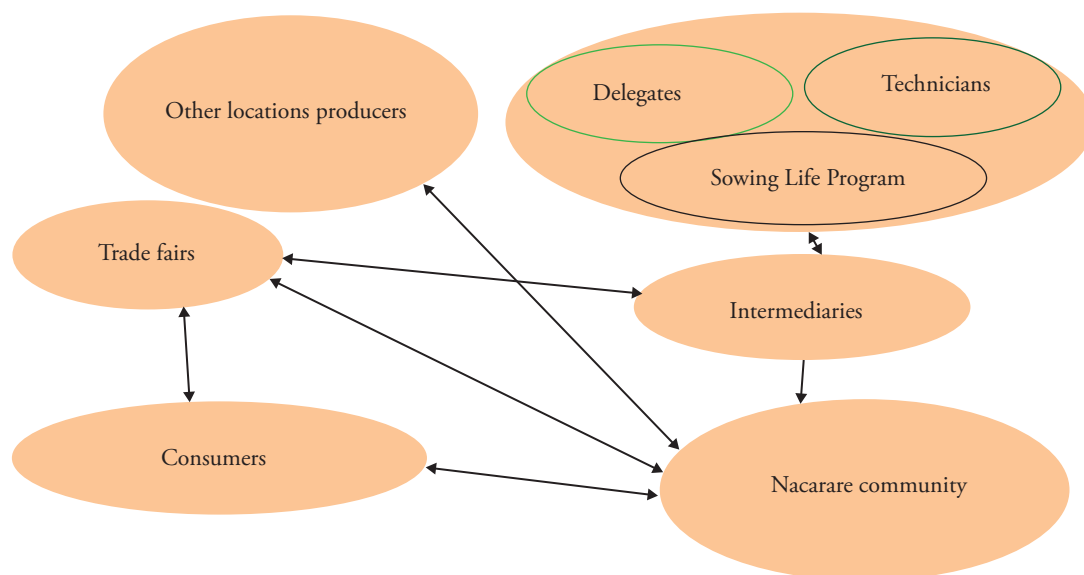
our products. Each one of us knows what to do, we each understand the responsibilities we have, and if any doubts arise or we must go somewhere, everyone agrees that I should do it. They follow me because they know me, and they know that I work well.

Maria's approach shows that she acts as an intermediary in the relationships network. It was also observed that specific tasks that people should perform within the project have been reexamined. They expressed that since joining the SV program, they feel safer and trust each other (Figure 3).

In this regard, Lupita, another farmer interviewed, mentioned:

Before the program, I lived in isolation. As a matter of fact, we live far away from each other, I felt lonely and without any desire to do anything. Now, with the federal program, my life has changed, getting up in the morning has a meaning, I know that I have to open the nursery, because the day's production depends on it. It's my responsibility and I know what I must do. I'm very proud of that: belonging to the group helps me feel useful and if I also receive money for the sales of our product. What could be better?

At the meeting, the women mentioned that through the SV program, they had also received advice from agricultural trainers, who had been in the community and taught them techniques for creating and maintaining nurseries, propagating plants, transplanting and caring for peach trees, pruning them



Source: diagram by Arras-Vota (2024).

**Figure 3.** Expanding relationships network.

properly and in a timely manner, and cultivating the orchard's fruit trees. Each participant in the group has specific tasks that they understand well, and they know that other processes depend on them. They have interacted with the trainers, who have shown them both the techniques and the importance of completing tasks on time.

During the on-site training, the way in which interactions between the group and those who transfer knowledge to them through the SV program was confirmed.

Based on Lucía's experience, whose garden we visited, the following was found:

The program technicians came, and at first, we built the greenhouse. Meanwhile, in our gardens, they taught us how to prune and care for the trees. We worked together in the greenhouse. Some people went to fairs and brought our produce, peaches and dried apricots, and we also sold them in a community store in Creel. When the program arrived, we had a conversation and came to an agreement. With the help of the trainers, we organized ourselves and everyone participated.

From this conversation, the creation of an initial network of relationships was visualized, which expanded with the incorporation of more actors (Figure 3), among which the intermediaries stand out. They are also members of the group and go out into the community to contact people, find places for sale, acquire new knowledge, and sell products from Nacarare. Trainers from the SV program are also included in this network.

During the meeting at the kiosk, it was confirmed that it is indeed María who the group listens to and follow in teamwork organizing. She was asked about this:

María, how did the SV program come to Nacarare?

I heard some people say that some technicians were coming to the community of Monterde and I said to myself, "I'm going to Monterde", and I went. Monterde is a very remote place, as far as the end of the paved road (four hours away). So, I went this way, went up and up and then hitched a ride from here to there, I walked for three hours, and I couldn't find them. But I went back because I heard a lot about it in the news from Guachochi, on the radio and that's why I started with a kind of temptation that if this support came here, to this place, I would sign up. Then they said, "well, in Monterde they are going to sign up for the SV program", so I investigated, and they said it was only for ejidatarios and I said, "well no, well no, I am not an ejidataria". And I said: "well, too bad, it's not my turn" and then some ejidatarios went to sign up and they told them that everyone, that whoever wanted to sign up could sign up. So, I went up to the highway and

hitched a ride and went again, and I didn't find them again, but they told me where I could find them. I went back and talked to the technicians, and I invited them to a meeting in Nacarare, to talk to the people. I told them: "after all, you have a car and everything". And they did come, and that's how the group started here, and that's how it all began.

The SV program emerges from federal public policies to address the problems of different social sectors (Secretaría del Bienestar, 2020). According to the Nacarare farmers, SV promotes better living conditions and social cohesion. It has trained them, and together they carry out tasks of propagation and care of seedlings in the greenhouse. These characteristics include teamwork and recognizing their personal abilities and the interdependence between group members.

This is how Gumara, another planter, expressed it:

Hello, Gumara, what have the social programs meant to you and your community?

Well, there are many benefits for us, many. We live here just like this. We used to struggle a lot. Here we work logging wood, cutting wood. Well, now, well, it's an additional support and, yes, it has brought us many benefits because we have the resources to buy clothes, food, and some people have expanded their houses. For example, my house only has a kitchen and a small room, and I have already built another small bedroom. We haven't moved there yet, but I already made it. In addition, we produce apples to turn into dried fruit, jam, and jelly, and that's how we get extra money. But, above all, we want to stay like this, working. Now we will have support to get machinery, and we want a dehydrator. SV has brought a lot of unity between us. Before, we didn't even say hello, and now we even work together, all for the good of everyone. We want our children to come back, for them to see that there are opportunities here too. They are there in the city; we want them to come back and see that we have a chance to move forward.

Observing the assembly, we found that the participation of those who make up the *sembrador@s* collective, mostly women, introduced themselves individually, stating their goals and expectations for acquiring an industrial dehydrator; we found interactions in small discussion groups, a sense of belonging, and supportive attitude of its members (Figures 4 and 5).

It was also important to interview Juan, a farmer who is part of this group and whose activities, as he told us while showing us the greenhouse, are very important to him. In the greenhouse, we noticed the progress of the collective work:



Source: photograph taken by Anchondo Aguilar, 2023.  
**Figure 4.** Teamwork among *sembrador@s* in Nacarare.



Source: photograph taken by Anchondo Aguilar, 2023.  
**Figure 5.** Meeting for new projects.

I learned about this program through my neighbors' comments. Word spread through the community, and some people came, invited by María, to sign up.

Then, in response to what he feels about working with so many women and having one of them be the leader, he commented:

I work comfortably. She's very pleasant, intelligent, and well-organized. Plus, everyone knows their role in the group; it's very well-established, and we don't have to be after them, or us. I'm responsible for the greenhouse, opening and closing it, and keeping track of what's needed. I'm responsible for being on hand at the fairs to stock things, arriving on time to open and close. I know my duties. We help each other and lend a hand. I thought it would be complicated coexisting with so many women, but they're very organized. All this time, we enjoy working together. Of course, there are problems, like in any group. There are people you can't handle, but you know what? We've learned to adapt, to coexist, and above all, to sell our products. I'm very happy with this. I hope these projects continue.

Incidentally, Juan also acts as an intermediary between the group, the trade fairs, and the technicians (Figure 3).

The role of this function becomes especially important, as it allows the community to open to its environment, connect with it, send its production, and receive information and income from selling outside, update certain knowledge and information, and be able to act accordingly. This entire process of closing and opening, of incoming and outgoing information, allows Nacarare to remain true to itself and, at the same time, begin to open to the surroundings, to other communities.

## DISCUSSION

We assume that the territory is, in the first and many instances, an instrument of the exercise of power; a space, which can be land, sea or air, that a hegemonic group has appropriated (Lopes, 2000). The Sierra Tarahumara, as has been exposed, has historically configured a complex territory, crossed by a silent and long struggle between economically and militarily dominant groups and groups established, at first, by indigenous communities, alongside which, others that are not exclusively indigenous have emerged. They are product of several miscegenation processes with the common denominator of poverty and marginalization, since not only indigenous people are poor and marginalized, in the Tarahumara or in the cities.

The geographic distribution and socioeconomic organization of the mountains have been, and still are, products of an exercise of power and organization

of the territory, according to Paz (2017), which is thus seen as a fundamental piece of a political power, which benefits from natural and human resources that drives, creates or imposes settlements, demarcating areas of prosperity and zones of deprivation. This usufruct, this impulse, this creation or imposition, this zonal delimitation, constitute the forms, the ways by which power is exercised. And such power is not and never has been monolithic or unipersonal. It is a fine fabric of interests, trajectories, conceptions and plans of a group, since power is an act of unison, of common agreement. It is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and exists only as long as the group remains united. Someone is "in power" when they have been empowered by a certain number of people to act on their behalf (Arendt, 1986). Therefore, in this study, the territory becomes consubstantial to the issue of the *sembrador@s* collective of Nacarare. Given the situation of the marginalized communities of the Sierra Tarahumara, two axes are proposed for the analysis and elaboration of possible solutions: one, the application of a policy that considers the sociocultural construct of gender, given the success of programs such as SV and the consequent female empowerment. And two, the promotion of the idea of social capital, which has evolved from the theses of Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam, to arrive at the 21<sup>st</sup> century, reinterpreted, and operate as a key to the actions of participation and trust between networks and heterogeneous social groups, as proposed by Bateman *et al.* (2017) and Mora *et al.* (2019).

The changes generated in the territory analyzed are a product of economic conditions and the disruptive elements that arise with them. In all spheres, although especially in rural areas, gender roles have altered, and women have had to assume unprecedented tasks and responsibilities. It is as if the biological destiny advocated by patriarchy has been shaken by socioeconomic emergencies.

However, rural women have overcome greater obstacles to exercising their rights and to fully realizing their potential. First, most of them have limited access to land ownership and have lacked formal credit assistance (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, 2024). However, territories function for the exercise of power, and this exercise has changed globally and also in our country. In light of the debate on human rights and the resulting respect for gender identities, national programs have been created that seek equal opportunities between men and women. Equal rights mean equality to participate in and transform society.

From this perspective, women farmers have revalued themselves as agents of change; they are beginning to function as collectives that agree on new rules and new roles, and work with clear objectives. Thus, they have begun to generate relationships with external actors (Robinson *et al.*, 2019) and,

with this, they can weave social networks through communication patterns that allow them to participate more and better in community actions and in productive processes. Collective action and knowledge transfer have been facilitated, in accordance with the results presented by Arras *et al.* (2012). This allows them to mobilize both individual and social resources (Mora *et al.*, 2019), and by generating bonds of certainty about the actions of others and their commitment to the community, they build social capital, which allows them to expand their options and opportunities to improve their quality of life through trust (Bateman *et al.*, 2017).

The SV program is not merely financial support; its systematic nature, subject to banking rather than clientelism laws, accompanied by on-site technical advice, has gradually incorporated women farmers into a dynamic of participation, discipline, shared responsibilities, trust, and solidary actions. Naturally, this is not intended to be a panacea; it is only an attempt to outline its successes and perhaps glimpse what needs to be improved. It should be noted that social capital, a construct that still generates doubts, no longer represents what Bourdieu (1986) considered. In this study, it has been seen as a novel means of empowerment, not only for women but also for the community of Nacarare.

The proposal is not to turn women farmers into “capitalists” (since that would increase their social capital). Rather, it is about empowering rural women, by favoring their equal participation in production processes and in community decision making. Likewise, it is about listening to and supporting their plans for diversification, management, and expansion of networks and contacts with other groups outside the community. This entails supporting the generation of alternative livelihoods and, at the same time, socializing the recognition and respect for the identity basis of indigenous peoples, with programs that also promote attachment to their communities of origin (Ruiz *et al.*, 2022:107).

The collective from the Nacarare community has already significantly increased its social capital through organization of work, equal incorporation of women into productive tasks, learning of agricultural techniques, group discussion of problems, meaningful communication among members, and acceptance of female leadership. The participation and expansion of their networks has fostered social unity in the community, and dialogue has been established as a mechanism for both communication and productive organization, thus establishing well-defined roles for teamwork, in favor of the community of participants and their families. Female leadership has not caused any problems.

All of this common good is social capital, and its foundations primarily began with female empowerment and the neutralization of certain sexist behavior patterns. And that alone, to begin with, is already good social capital.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on what has been exposed and analyzed, the conclusion is that programs like SV promote social capital, since bonds of trust have been forged and a network of relationships based on mutual acceptance, responsibility to the community, and a willingness to go to other places and exchange products and knowledge has been generated. This was evident through the testimonies given in interviews and in field observations.

The leadership of rural women was also confirmed. In Nacarare, the most important positions in the group's leadership are held by women, whereas they were traditionally assigned to men. Therefore, it is possible to state that significant changes have occurred in the conception of women and their social value.

Having said that, within the Nacarare collective, strength lies in the participation of women, who hold key positions such as president, treasurer, and secretary. And the central figure of the productive project is a woman who initiated, managed, and has continued it. The performance of rural women empowered by their activity, organizational capacity, and perseverance was observed. Those who make up the collective recognize the importance of transforming power relations, redistributing resources, and creating opportunities for equitable participation to ensure inclusive rural development.

According to the *sembrador@s* collective in Nacarare, they have achieved economic and environmental changes with their participation in the SV program, from which, human and productive processes have emerged, based on knowledge applied to the field, as well as the formation of a social group, which became a team committed to community improvement.

For the collective, this team works because they have learned to delegate responsibilities, distribute tasks equitably, and each of its members has assumed responsibility for doing their part, aware of the importance of fulfilling it throughout the whole production process. This entire dynamic has provided them with cohesion and trust; in other words, it has generated social capital. Relationships of equality, solidarity, and participation have encouraged them to expand their options and opportunities to improve their quality of life and that of their community. The group has the initiative and willingness to plan and undertake new projects, based on equality and trust. This is a reflection of the ways in which they have built their social capital.

As with any study, one task remains: to follow up on the community's project for an industrial dehydrator, to explain its benefits, its scope, and how it would change the human and productive processes in Nacarare and surrounding areas.

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