

Original article

## Impacts of the gender strategy in the agricultural sector, through the Local Agricultural Innovation Project (PIAL)

Bárbara Benítez-Fernández<sup>1\*</sup> 

Anaisa Crespo-Morales<sup>2</sup> 

Caridad Casanova<sup>3</sup> 

Aliek Méndez-Bordón<sup>4</sup> 

Yaima Hernández-Beltrán<sup>5</sup> 

Rodobaldo Ortiz-Pérez<sup>1</sup> 

Rosa Acosta-Roca<sup>1</sup> 

María Isabel Romero-Sarduy<sup>6</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Instituto Nacional de Ciencias Agrícolas (INCA), carretera San José-Tapaste, km 3½, Gaveta Postal 1, San José de las Lajas, Mayabeque, Cuba. CP 32 700

<sup>2</sup>Policlínico Docente “Pedro Borrás Astorga”, Calle Comandante Cruz # 70, La Palma, Pinar del Río, Cuba

<sup>3</sup>Universidad de Cienfuegos “Carlos Rafael Rodríguez”, carretera a Rodas, km 3 ½, Cuatro Caminos, Cienfuegos, Cuba

<sup>4</sup>Universidad Las Tunas, Centro Universitario Municipal “Jesús Menéndez”, calle 28 # 33, El Cenicero, El batey, Jesús Menéndez, Las Tunas, Cuba

<sup>5</sup>Universidad de Sancti Spíritus “José Martí Pérez”. Comandante Fajardo S/#, Sancti Spíritus, Cuba

<sup>6</sup>CEDEL. Centro de Estudios de Desarrollo Local y Comunitario, Lombillo # 904 e/ Panorama y Bellavista, Nuevo Vedado, Plaza de la Revolución, La Habana, Cuba

\* Author for correspondence. [bbenitez@inca.edu.cu](mailto:bbenitez@inca.edu.cu)

### ABSTRACT

Undoubtedly, women and men are important pillars in development processes; however, participating in conditions of equality requires having the same level of access to opportunities, responsibilities and rights. The Local Agricultural Innovation Project (PIAL according its acronym in Spanish), in its third phase, works in 10 provinces and 45 municipalities in Cuba. The priority intentions are to improve the food security

and sovereignty of producer families involved, to increase the efficiency of the integrated production systems, to improve the life quality with gender equity and to enhance female leadership, creating new spaces for interaction between different actors. Hence, the objective of this paper is to show the work of PIAL's gender axis and its social impacts, in the period from September, 2013 to October, 2015, presenting its main results in the economic, productive, sociocultural, management of the female knowledge, participation and leadership areas. The main results are at generating new jobs aimed: In 2014, 5337 jobs were generated, benefiting 739 women and in 2015, 24 762 jobs were generated, benefiting 2393 women; which represents 31 % of the total. The income was around 500.00 CUP as a monthly average. Substantial changes are observed in the recovery of agrarian culture at the level of families and with children and young people; 117100 women were trained in topics related to their interests; what represents 30 % of the total; greater autonomy, empowerment and leadership of women in the communities is achieved.

**Key words:** female leadership, empowerment, transversal gender

## INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, women and men are important pillars in development processes, however, participating under conditions of equality requires having the same level of access to opportunities, responsibilities and rights, therefore the female gender empowerment is one from the most desired objectives from grass-roots organizations, unions and companies, to member states and intergovernmental bodies <sup>(1)</sup>.

In Cuba, throughout history, women have played an important role accentuated by the Triumph of the Cuban revolution, which promoted the creation of conditions for equity in social development, creating the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) in 1960. An organization set out to transform the discriminatory mentality towards women and make them active subjects of social transformation <sup>(2)</sup>.

Laws in Cuba prohibit discrimination against women and today there are no restrictions on their civil status. The Constitution of the Republic, in Title V, chapter I on rights, duties and guarantees states that the Cuban State recognizes and guarantees to the person the enjoyment and the inalienable, imprescriptible, indivisible, universal and interdependent exercise of human rights, in correspondence with the progressiveness, equality and non-discrimination principles. The State fosters the integral development of women and their full social participation <sup>(3)</sup>. In the Cuban economy context, women make up an important reserve of productivity, particularly in rural areas, but the deployment of all the productive potentialities of women will not be effective if the gender inequalities that persist in the world are not taken into account localities and stop their full participation. For their part, rural women in Cuba make up 11.5 % of the total population and 23 % of the total women in the country <sup>(4)</sup>

The lack of importance in the agricultural sector in the Cuban economy has been reflected in female employment. The 2002 Population and Housing Census recorded that female employees in rural areas represented 13.7 percent of all Cuban women engaged in paid work and 22.8 percent of all rural women. Meanwhile, they were 67 percent of the non-economically active population in those areas, according to data from the ONEI in 2002. It is estimated that for every 100 men employed in rural areas, 30 women are <sup>(5)</sup>.

As part of the efforts carried out in the country in favor of gender equality and with the intention of socializing results in this regard. This work aims to show the work of the gender axis of the Local Agricultural Innovation Project, in the period from September 2013 to October 2015 and the social impacts generated from the insertion of the gender perspective in the project.

Since 2011, groups of rules have been implemented in Cuba aimed at updating its economic and social model. In this scenario, food security is a top priority for the State; however, it has been exposed to a set of critical factors including insufficient national food production, limited access to food in the international market, degradation of fundamental natural resources (water, soils, and forests) and biodiversity loss, among others. In this sense, it has been expressed, it must go much further, use more resistant and productive varieties, techniques that are less aggressive to the environment and better exploit the resources we have <sup>(6)</sup>.

On the other hand, diverse social situations influence local agricultural development. The mobility of young people towards development areas with higher economic remuneration and social recognition, which affects the labor force reduction in agriculture. Also, the population aging, the income from salaries and pensions insufficient to assume the increase in food prices. The agricultural sector masculinization and insufficient participation and leadership of women in agricultural production scenarios, the need for peasant training who access to land in usufruct for its proper use and conservation. The growing need to prepare governments to face the decentralized management challenge of the municipality and take on the local agricultural innovation challenges <sup>(7)</sup>.

Although the aforementioned changes constitute opportunities for women, their access is a minority, firstly because they are a minority in this sector, an example of this is that the ANAP has 4.331 grass-roots organizations, which group 331.874 associates, of which 35.971 are women, representing 11 % and due to the subsistence of the sexual division of labor in the productive systems, as well as the permanence of sexist prejudices and stereotypes also in family spaces, which limit their participation in specific tasks of agricultural production <sup>(5)</sup>.

In the Cuban agricultural context, however, multiple efforts have been developed in favor of gender equality in a strategic alliance with the FMC, evidence of this is that the National Association of Small Farmers

(ANAP), the Cuban Association of Animal Production (ACPA) and the Cuban Association of Agricultural and Forestry Technicians (ACTAF) have gender strategies.

In search of local alternatives to stimulate food production, both in volume and diversity and in this way contribute to the population quality life, the Local Agricultural Innovation Project (PIAL) is contributing, led by the National Institute of Agricultural Sciences (INCA) is developed in 10 provinces and 45 municipalities of the country. In each of these municipalities, Multi-stakeholder Management Platforms and more than 290 groups of producers and other innovators involved in the change are formally recognized. Since 2007, the PIAL outlined within its objectives, mainstreaming the gender approach in production scenarios, through pilot gender projects, which led to the reflection of taking affirmative actions with women who were associated with the production or playing traditional roles in households. This suggests that what mainstreaming is trying to do is not only the participation of women in a previously established development program, but also includes that both women and men participate in the definition of objectives and in planning, so that development fulfills with the priorities and needs of both.

Between 2013 and 2016, It worked with indicators that aimed to generate jobs for women in order to guarantee their economic autonomy; create local agricultural innovation groups made up of women; strengthen productive and managerial capacities in women; products of agricultural innovations marketed by women; sensitize and commit to gender equality local actors and decision-makers, among others.

Thus, from the gender axis, it is intended to reveal and transform prejudices and stereotypes typical of patriarchal culture, which place women at a disadvantage in the different action areas: the family, the cooperative, the community, among others and they limit their full participation in development processes, offering ways to transform this reality.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The work was developed in 10 provinces of the country: Pinar del Río, Artemisa, Mayabeque, Matanzas, Cienfuegos, Villa Clara, Sancti Spíritus, Holguín, Las Tunas and Granma, within a radius of 45 municipalities in the period 2015-2017.

The gender approach, as a transversal axis, aimed to offer equal opportunities to both women and men who are in the rural context. The intervention strategy focused on Women in Development (EMD) approach (an approach that proposes eliminating gender inequalities, empowering and empowering women) which has predominated in the projection of work. However, as of 2013, this approach shifts towards a Gender in Development (EGD) perspective, which aims not to focus exclusively on women, but rather on the need to modify the relationship patterns between some and others. All this with the objective of visualizing the

existing gender gaps in the agricultural sector and being able to offer equal opportunities to women and young people in the sector. The women are associated with the Federation of Cuban Women. The results in this sense correspond to studies carried out <sup>(8)</sup>, in the strengthening of national capacities to mainstream the gender perspective in public policies and institutions and in public and private companies.

The descriptive analytical research result was used for the study, taking into account that qualitative methods start from the basic assumption that the social world is built of meanings and symbols. Hence, intersubjectivity is a key piece of qualitative research and a starting point to capture social meanings reflectively, it is necessary to delve into the meanings provided by the people under study <sup>(9)</sup>. For this purpose, an intentional sample was formed that included agricultural producers and agricultural producers, families from some municipalities and provincial and municipal gender referents.

The investigation instruments were the following: bibliographic review, document analysis, interviews with families, workshops with provincial and municipal gender referents.

### **The categories studied were:**

- 1) Economic and productive results (jobs generated for women, income generated by innovations, economic initiatives. They are sources of female employment, micro-actions that stimulate local agricultural innovation).
- 2) Female participation and leadership (women leading provincial and municipal GIALs and MMPs (multi-stakeholder management platforms), GIALs made up of women, women managing seeds in their conservation, processing and marketing, women leaders of productive units).

## **Main results**

### **Economic and productive results**

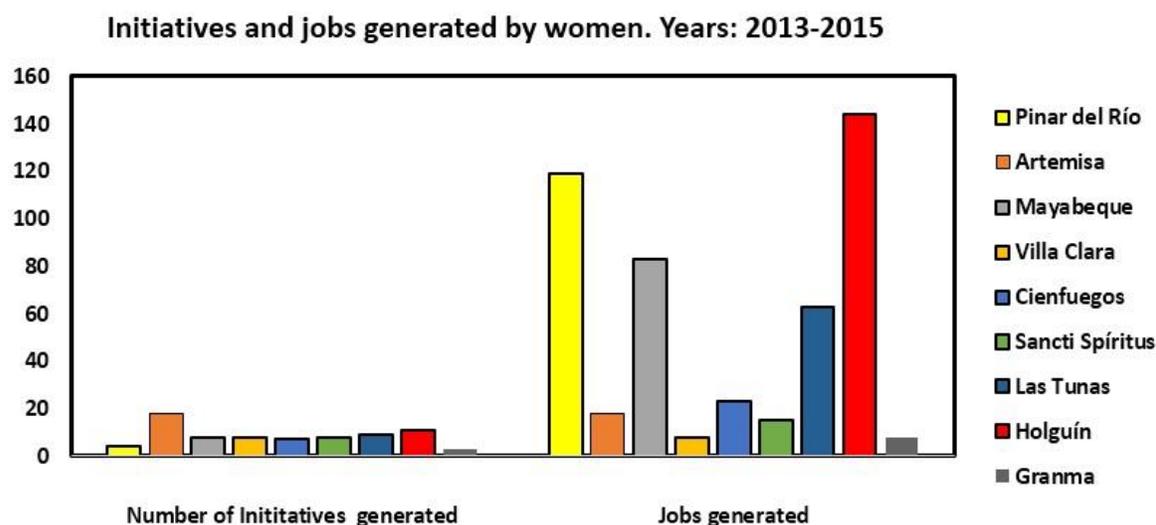
Among the economic and productive results driven by the Gender axis, jobs and income for women stand out. (Table 1), note that in general the average income per woman is around 500.00 CUP per month, which denotes an opportunity to join new jobs, as well as an improvement in the women life quality and her relatives, standing out Artemisa and Holguín provinces, followed by Pinar de Río province. The PIAL Local Agricultural Innovation Program, since 2007, develops a group of actions aimed at offering opportunities to women in rural contexts of the country to reduce the existing gaps in the agricultural sector, despite the programs and policies outlined. In a study carried out it was found that in the cooperative sector only 17, 22 % are women and that in other economic activity branches women have a low presence, which is why specific actions are carried out, with the aim of providing opportunities for participation <sup>(10)</sup>.

**Table 1.** Number of women accessing Jobs and monthly income in provinces where PIAL operates

Provinces	Total Women (%)	Jobs	Base line (CUP)	Average income (CUP)
Pinar del Río	54	119	500.00	500.00
Artemisa	25	18	500.00	1200.00
Mayabeque	55.3	83	500.00	600.00
Sancti Spíritus	16	15	500.00	500.00
Granma	7	8	500.00	550.00
Holguín	63.7	144	500.00	1000.00
Las Tunas	35	63	500.00	600.00

The Generation of economic initiatives by provinces are inserted in the work of the Local Agricultural Innovation Project that are shown in Figure 1. Among them, Artemisa and Holguín provinces stand out in the generation of economic initiatives. These are the preservation of fresh food, the points of sale of natural juices, making flower arrangements and handicrafts, making wines and vinegars, using energy with bio-digesters, oilseed production, mini-industries, medicinal plant production, Jamaica flower, for making wines, vinegars and sweets, seed production, goat milk, cheese and yogurt production, pig production, family gardens, rabbit production, seed conservation, among others.

As can be seen, the generation of new jobs and opportunities for marketing is a result achieved in the work stage, with the provinces of Holguín, Pinar del Río and Mayabeque standing out in this regard.



**Figure 1.** Economic initiatives and jobs generated by women in eight provinces of the country

It is found that the income of women and men who work on farms linked to the project have doubled their average monthly salary to 1200 CUP/month. An increase in the income of men and women is estimated from the products generated from the 42 mini-industries that operate in the project, as well as the income generated by service provision on farms.

These achievements in the Bahía Honda municipality illustrate the generation of 18 jobs, 11 of them for women at the end of 2014. In this regard, the installation of a juicer at the Manuel "González Díaz" Hospital stands out. All the products offered are at prices between 1.00 and 2.00 CUP and offer a great variety of natural juices made from fresh fruits and goat milk yogurt. This initiative has been valuable because it uses the fruit productions of agricultural producers in the territory that did not find a destination for them and today they are used for the population welfare.

The increase in productive initiatives developed by women, including: making and marketing of floral arrangements, wines and vinegars, handicrafts, textiles, ornamental plants, farm and yard animals, goat milk (distributed in wineries), oilseeds (oil and cakes), use of energy with bio-digesters, fruit trees and grains, are the result of the training received by women and men. Women systematically exhibit handicrafts, crafts, flowers, culinary, agrobiodiversity fairs, and they are marketed with the population participation and income is received from sales (Figura 2).



**Figure 2.** Women and men participate in PIAL innovation festival, 2019

Address a study carried out in communities in Chile <sup>(11)</sup> programs with a gender focus request in their strategies that issues related to commercialization and the legal initiation of activities, in order to enable activities to last over time.

The family economic activity diversification has been another notable result (Table 2). Interviews with eight families from the San José de las Lajas municipality, Mayabeque province, show changes in this regard. Among the new activities carried out by the families are food preservation, the vinegar production, ornamental plants, the raising of rabbits, flower arrangement elaboration, the dry condiment production;

activities learned by women and men in the GIALs and by children in the Interest meeting <sup>(12)</sup>. However, there is a group of agricultural work and activities in which the incorporation of women is the majority even their participation is still limited. It is due to several factors such as tradition, weight of housework, underestimation, among others <sup>(13)</sup>.

**Table 2.** Diversification of family economic activity

Family	Family's economic activity	
	2007-2010	2013-2015
1	Agricultural production	- Flowers and ornamental plant Production - Food preservation - Flower arrangement preparation
2	Fruit production	- Food preservation - Elaboration of cooking recipes - Vinegar production
3	Production of flowers and ornamental plants	- Food preservation - Bird breeding
4	Agricultural production and crafts	- Food preservation - Flower arrangement preparation - Rabbit breeding
5	Pension (of the deceased husband)	- Ornamental plant production
6	Pension (for retirement)	- Food conservation
7	Pension (for retirement)	- Dry condiment production
8	Employment (Poultry farm)	- Ornamental plant production - Flower arrangement preparation

Regarding the age composition (Table 3), adults predominate in all families, with the majority of women (50 %) being in the age group of 21-60 years. In the case of men, those over 60 years of age predominate (45.4 %), which shows that the highest percentage of people are in the most advanced ages, which is why it is necessary for the intervention of development projects in the communities, work with a diversity of age groups with a view to reducing inequities. Hence, the intentional work importance with youth and children in order to strengthen the traditions of the country's agricultural culture.

**Table 3.** Age composition by gender of the families studied

Family	Members		0-20 years		21-60 years		Over 60 years	
	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H
F-1	4	3	1	1	2	1	1	1
F-2	1	2	-	-	-	1	1	1
F-3	2	1	-	1	2	-	-	-
F-4	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
F-5	3	1	1	-	1	-	1	1
F-6	1	1	-	-	1	1	-	-
F-7	1	2	-	-	-	1	1	1
F-8	1	1	-	-	1	-	-	1
Total	14	11	2	2	7	4	5	5
% (1)	100.0	100.0	14.3	18.2	50.0	36.4	35.7	45.4

(1) Percentage respect to the total of each genre

These results show that, although the productive initiatives generate economic autonomy for women, the activities carried out continue to reproduce traditional roles for their gender, an aspect on which the project must continue working. In the same way, the performance of reproductive, productive and community roles assumed by them overloads them, hence the importance of analyzing with women and men the construction of masculinity and its impacts on intra and inter-gender relationships in order to share the tasks that, due to the traditional sexual division of labor, women are expected to perform.

### **Development of micro-actions as a stimulus to the processes of Local Agricultural Innovation (IAL according its acronyms in Spanish)**

The micro-actions or micro-scholarships are generated initiatives, which can be accessed by all people interested in implementing actions of Local Agricultural Innovation and Local Development focused on agroecological agriculture, where residents of any municipality linked to the project, beyond their

educational level and origin have the access possibility. These have been convened by the provincial and national coordinators of the project with the aim of promoting women participation in local agricultural innovation processes. Besides, diversifying sources of income in families to reverse the women situation in rural communities, generating ideas and proposals for action that enrich the cause of female empowerment and gender equality, identify interests for economic initiative development linked to agricultural production led by women and multiply knowledge.

In 2014, 11 micro-scholarships convened by the national coordination were accepted, which express the growth in women from the training received, which had a positive impact on the development of the municipalities and provinces where they were executed. A result it is evident that it is the issue of improving the conditions for flower seed production on the farm of a flower producer in Mayabeque province, which increased species diversity on her farm and trained more than 20 women with her municipality experience.

In addition to this, the results were disseminated in different local media and other women join the floriculture activity in the municipality and increase new varieties on their farms. This activity is carried out in conjunction with another producer who decides to apply to share the plants in her garden with women in her community. It had an adequate social impact, because spaces were created for experiences exchange, reflection on the care of plants in the gardens and the creation of unused spaces in the community for ornamental plant development, which results in the community benefit.

Flower arrangements was another initiative developed by women from Mayabeque province and which in a very short time spread to the ten provinces where the project is inserted. To evaluate the impact of this action the experience was systematized, resulting in the opening of sale new points for ornamental plants and flowers, which generate new jobs in a non-traditional activity and obtain an average income of more than 550.00 CUP per month.

Another initiative that is being developed is rabbit farming led by women, having a positive impact, accompanied by another in Las Tunas territory, based on fresh condiment production in orchards and the mini-industry for the production and commercialization of dry condiments. Families in Artemisa province develop initiatives dedicated to the creation of a space for food conservation and another to artisanal production with the use of wild plant seeds. All the actions responded to the demands of the municipalities and had a positive and direct impact on local development and the families involved.

## Results linked to participation and female leadership

Female participation and leadership is one of the ways to change the women position in power relations, which is expressed through indicators as shown in Table 4.

The result is a gender strategy aimed at women who lead Innovation Groups (GIALs), and at women who hold management positions in the organizations, institutions and productive units to which they are linked. GIALs are constituted to work based on the articulation of allied actors in the face of development demands, with common challenges and interests, that innovate to generate solutions in the socio-economic and productive sphere <sup>(14,15)</sup>. These groups are made up of men and women; as a gender strategy, it reports a growing participation of women (5.314 for 41 %), in processes and spaces for innovation organized by the GIALs. Currently they are 34 % of the leaders in GIALs, 43 % in the platforms and 50 % of the provincial teams. When counting women leaders in the municipalities (women in management spaces or other leaderships, example: Points of sale, micro-industries) the figure was 245, all thanks to the specific actions that are carried out to contribute to improving the indicators related to gender equity.

**Table 4.** Behavior of gender indicators in seven provinces of Cuba

	Pinar del Río	Artemisa	Mayabeque	S. Spíritus	Las Tunas	Granma	Holguín
Nu. GIALs women	4	53	56	13	5	15	34
% GIALs led by women	30.8 %	37 %	27 %	100 %	100 %	40 %	100 %
% of women leading multi-stakeholder management platforms (MMP)	42 %	67 %	50%	3	71 %	57 %	25 %
Women managing seeds in their conservation, benefit and commercialization	71	35	9	12	24	30	29
Women leaders in productive units	22	5	67	9	5	96	210

Source: Gender Strategy Implementation Workshop for SDC in Cuba and Regional Workshops on Municipal and Provincial Gender Referents

As has been maintained, the GIALs carry out different productive activities such as: rabbit farming, handicrafts, ornamental plants, making flower arrangements, grains, art and agroforestry, industrial symbiosis, fruit tree nurseries, meliponiculture, home gardens, pig production, conservation of seeds, coriander production, cassava flour, among others.

Agroproducers and cooperatives of Gibara municipality emphasize on director board, there are nine women presidents of cooperatives and 12 vice-presidents of 62 cooperatives. There are also women in sales points, artisans, veterinarians and direct workers in agricultural production. More work has been done on involving women in decision-making. There are many women leading and generating income.

Similarly, trained women are now at the helm of the cooperatives, such as the gender benchmark in Güines municipality and the existence of women who, because of the axis work, direct the gender axis activity in San José de las Lajas and represents this activity in the ANAP of Mayabeque province.

Likewise, members of Manicaragua Platform agree that before the project many women were housewives and now participate in productive spaces and agricultural innovation: The project has empowered women leaders who are in charge of the GIAL of food conservation. These leaders have convening power and have radiated knowledge in their community, in the family and in other communities, for example: Comunidad del Vaga.

Although the insertion of women in productive scenarios has been favored, national statistics reveal the masculinization of the agricultural sector and this causes a minority presence of women in productive work and in management positions; aspects on which work should continue. A recent study in the province of Matanzas confirms the invisibility of women in the rural context and gender barriers to strengthen food sovereignty in Cuba <sup>(16)</sup>.

On the other hand, the presence of labor traditional social division in the agricultural context means that women are not considered for certain activities such as the management of agricultural machinery or the management of productive entities, which affects less access to these opportunities. In the same way, the agricultural implements that are bought (machetes, hoe, gloves, clothes, and boots) are designed for men; the productive sites lack bathrooms, the meeting hours exceed the working hours, all of which is limiting for the participation of women in productive work.

These challenges indicate the relevance of moving towards a Gender approach to development, centered on power relations, which implies working with men and women with a critical look at the social construction of femininity and masculinity that naturalizes asymmetries between genders and places women at a social disadvantage. Hence, the need to broaden the debate that has been promoted in the country on the cross-sectional approach to gender and the theory of masculinities since the 1990s. It comes to introduce the idea that the culture of gender equality does not It only has to do with a change in the situation of women but rather in the power relations that are generated between men and women in society and in the family <sup>(17)</sup>.

These inequalities were also reported in Ecuador when a study was carried out on the women participation

in the tourism labor market, where the unequal women incorporation into the activity of the sector was visualized, compared to men <sup>(18)</sup>.

On the other hand, it is a complex job, since multiple mediations affect this disadvantage: territorial origin, skin color, income, age, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, among others, existing in all spaces of Cuban society. In Villa Clara province <sup>(19)</sup>, a study carried out shows that gender and age show disproportionality in the social distribution of agricultural innovation, since only 7.69 % represent women and 5.13 % represent women. In young people under 35 years of age, such vulnerabilities favor poverty vulnerability and threaten agrarian culture sustainability.

That is why working with the gender transversal approach is of utmost importance, since the efforts made in the country are still not enough to reduce the existing gaps.

## CONCLUSIONS

- There is a greater presence of women in leadership roles and in decision-making spaces in local agricultural innovation groups, in multi-stakeholder management platforms and in the boards of directors of cooperatives, all of which indicates progress in empowerment female.
- Beyond the progress and impacts that are evident from the work carried out, gender relations are anchored in conceptions, customs, values, traditions and producing changes in this regard requires motivation, time and perseverance. The challenges identified in this work constitute the compass to continue working and move towards a more dignified, just and equitable society.
- An essential way to enhance the autonomy of women has been attention to strategic gender interests based on knowledge management. The actions carried out have been multiple: awareness-raising workshops for men and women, participation in exchanges of national and international experiences, the offer of varied training topics favoring women in order to encourage production and production diversification, the insertion in events, the prizes obtained, the publications and theses defended, and the communicative products produced. All of this is a sign of the personal growth and social impact of the work of women linked to the gender axis of this project.
- There is a greater presence of women in leadership roles and in decision-making spaces in local agricultural innovation groups, in multi-stakeholder management platforms and in the cooperative director boards, all of which indicates progress in empowerment female.

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