

# WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH A FINANCIAL CULTURE: BETTER PRACTICES THROUGH GENDER-AWARENESS AND ACCESS TO MONEY



## SIEMBRA FINANCIAL TRAINING MANUAL CHAPTER 3

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### **ABOUT SIEMBRA: BACKGROUND TO THE MANUAL**

SIEMBRA (Mexico) started operations in 2000 with financial and non financial services in different indigenous communities. They promote community banks self-managed by women through GEMS (Groups of Entrepreneurs in Microcredit and Savings). GEMS are community based occupational groups with 15-20 members each. Each GEMS has its own board and is headed by women. Here, men and women are members and both have access to credit. Savings is mandatory. The GEMS are also organized in a network of rural and indigenous women. 92% members are women.

One community where Siembra works is Otomi women entrepreneurs. Men immigrate to the large cities for jobs because of high unemployment in rural areas. So women are heads of their household with migrant husbands. The women are organized in 150 GEMS brought together into a Women's Centre constructed by the NGO but managed by these women. Women are given training. Marketing through the centre is managed by them.



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<sup>1</sup> For more information on Siembra, see Siembra's website !!Address

Other non-financial services provided by the organization are research, education, training, human rights, indigenous rights, citizenship, self-esteem, sexual and reproductive rights, violence, leadership, business plan, marketing, governance and advocacy.

## **Manual of microfinances and women's empowerment**

Siembra is responsible for all the ideas and opinions in this educational material, we want to share contents of Chapter 3 with members of gender and microfinance network.

Siembra's manual can be used as methodological guide of didactic so as to contribute to women's empowerment. It has some themes to reflect, as well as a conceptual and methodological scheme to develop didactic techniques.

The manual has been designed as a simple training instrument easy to assimilate. Its purpose is to respond to the necessities of women's empowerment. Part of the premise is to empower women through training to develop knowledge, abilities, capacities and change attitudes we want to promote social change in power relations between women and man. As well as to contribute to conciliate equal rights and opportunities for both. This manual has been structured in four different chapters and themes.

Eventhough in recent times many women participate in microfinancial programs and have access to credit, most of them are not empowered, because many of these programs lack of gender training opportunities. Siembra is confident that this work may be of help to microfinance sector organizations as well as to persons in charge of training and to consultants who are interested in promoting women's empowerment.

The elaboration of this manual was sponsored by Ford Foundation, Women's Institute of Mexico City, Ashoka to these institutions our great appreciation for their interest in the advancement of women's rights and democracy.

## CHAPTER 3

### **“ACCESS TO MONEY THROUGH MICROFINANCE PRACTICE AND GENDER AWARENESS”**

At the beginning of this chapter the reader will find some comments on the condition and position of women in society which has to do with social power relations between women and men that must be transformed

Contents of chapter 3 reflect the obstacles that women encounter so as to have access to all type of resources, but makes specific remarks on money control. It also mentions how social power relations between women and men have to do with inequity. This chapter intends to make the reader reflect on how access to money and control of it. Which is strictly influenced by these social power relations.

Chapter 3 also presents the characteristics of an innovative financial culture that introduces training through gender awareness as an alternative for microfinancial organizations to promote knowledge together with access to credit as an aim to achieve women's empowerment.

The contents, educational resources and techniques Siembra presents in Chapter 3 for training purposes may help readers, consultants, facilitator and microfinance organizations to reflect about women entrepreneurs reality as well as to think of new ways to transform social power relations to promote women's empowerment.

This chapter may also propitiate and encourage participative processes to develop and consolidate capacities as a contribution to women's empowerment .

Facilitators who use this material to give workshops must take into account that they are a very important factor to promote change in social relations between women and men.

## WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH A FINANCIAL CULTURE:

### SIEMBRA FINANCIAL TRAINING MANUAL CHAPTER 3

**OBJECTIVE:** To analyse and interpret the social causes that produce unequal development conditions amongst women and men, to discuss the obstacles that women encounter in the process of empowerment as well as gaining access to and managing money, and to describe the characteristics of a gender-equal financial culture in which women achieve empowerment and personal autonomy for decision making, economic independence and a better social position.

#### 1. Background on the lack of access to economic development that women have experienced

To begin this analysis it can be plainly said that at the present time the social and cultural structure promotes a system of individual and collective ideas, values, beliefs, practices and conducts that produce specific and distinct conditions of unequal development for women and for men.

This practice is related to the social structure and to cultural tradition, though one also has to look at the structure of the family and the ways this structure is affected by the social and economic political policies the government runs, which marginalize a majority of women from the economic process and in general keep them from obtaining and controlling all type of resources, excluding them from the realms of power and decision-making and from development.

With respect to the exclusion of women from the social, economic and political environments, a representative of the United Nations affirmed:

*"More than one billion people, a majority of them women, currently live in unacceptable conditions of poverty and of social, economic, political and gender inequality. It has been shown that women contribute to economic development not only through their remunerated work; even today the immense majority of women contribute to the economy through the expansive task of domestic work, a job that is invisible and un-paid. Therefore, it is important to note that within social, political, economic, financial, monetary, and commercial practices women play a marginal role in decision-making processes and in orchestrating public policy that would benefit them. Achieving economic, social and political equality is currently a matter that occupies our time and bothers our conscience, as the inequality that prevails among women and men is born out of social structures and cultural tradition, things that perpetuate themselves by imposing upon us individual and collective ideas that endorse the laws and practices formulated by, and which function on behalf of, men exclusively. Today I invite all present to analyze and reflect on the new rules of the game in order to achieve agreement on the basis of equality and of equal opportunity."<sup>18</sup>*

Comment:

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<sup>18</sup> -United Nations, Official Discourse read at the IV International Woman's Conference, mimeographed document, Beijing, China, 1995, pg. 5

## 2. Money

### a) DEFINITION OF MONEY

Money based in metal has an exchange value through which people who possess it acquire a value of use or the ability to exchange it for a determined product. That is, money buys commodities for self-sustainment, or buys other commodities through which more money can be generated.

#### *Different uses of money:*

- Money earned individually by people who work and generate income to satisfy basic needs of themselves and their family.
- Money that circulates in general as a means of payment.
- Money invested in the process of production of commodities in order to make transactions in the market, with the intended desire to earn and consolidate capital.
- Money invested in the process of production of commodities requires the remunerated labor of a worker, as an income in the social division of work.
- Extra money that is converted into savings.

### b) SOCIO-CULTURAL BARRIERS WOMEN FACE IN ACCESSING AND MANAGING MONEY

Currently, through social, political, legal and economic changes in Mexico, women that have incorporated themselves into remunerative work represent 32.3% of the active economic population.

However, the number of women that participate in the formal economy in decision-making positions is still small, a fact that limits their participation in the realms of power and money. This number is especially small when compared to the participation of men in positions of power in different areas of the economy: in industrial, business, financial sectors, etc., in the private labor force, and in decision-making positions in politics and the public sector.

A focused way of analyzing this situation is by thoroughly examining the problem of social gender inequality that, in general, causes women to remain in the house and assume the work of reproduction, work that cements the role of the woman to that of daughter, wife, mother and more broadly, housewife.

Social beliefs and cultural practices establish reproductive work as separate from money and income. This means that it is not an economic indicator: it's an invisible job with little or no cultural value, nor is it recognized as a female contribution to social and economic development. For this reason, women are disfavored economically and socially even as they comprise and lead a majority of the world's poor.

It can therefore be said that culture promotes and imposes on women a practice of identifying their femininity through others: they are daughter of, wives of, mothers of, grandmothers of.

The scale of values with respect to gender in traditional society, gives rise to ideas and beliefs that condition them to contain egotism, to be conformists rather than individuals, and to develop a spirit of self-sacrifice and suffering. Socially women are oriented towards the serve others and towards satisfying the needs of others specifically their husband, children, and to take care of elder people of the family and the sick, a reality that leaves them with few options to take care and make plans for themselves as well as to be empowered.

An example of the aforementioned concept is the situation in Bangladesh:

*It has been verified, in practice, that the scale of values for men are completely different than that for women: children are not an absolute priority for them. If a father that lives in misery begins to earn money and augments his income, he is worried first about himself. If a woman in the same conditions begins to earn a little money, that money is destined to serve her children first, to put the food in the table and later the house: to buy various utensils, fix the roof, and better the living conditions of the family.<sup>19</sup>*

That is to say, the social and cultural structure and its ideology generate practices that keep women constrained to a wide range of dependencies. Thorough investigations into this fact have revealed that these dependencies are bound to a patriarchal culture and to cultural models and stereotypes that favor beliefs and social practices that affect the psychological, economic and sexual spheres, among others.

*The sole solution to this problem is women's empowerment so that women may change their way of being, feeling, thinking, acting and do thing, to achieve personal autonomy to participate in public life, working, doing decision making, all this won't be able to happen as long as women lack their own resources, economic independence, and decision making, all of which are needed in order to achieve autonomy and consolidate a process of empowerment: power in herself, power with others and power to do things. Gradually, women need to learn to depend less on others in order to satisfy their own needs and interests. Economic independence and autonomy should be a daily practice and way of life, not a goal, and for this reason it's imperative that women achieve empowerment. They have to raise their self-esteem so as to have and adequate one, become more capable to learn new things to develop their abilities and capacities, to work and have income so as to be economically independent, and to legitimately enjoy the money they've earned themselves.<sup>20</sup>*

In the case of men, it is socially established as a cultural practice and custom that this sector of the population develop in the public realm and occupy a role in the world of labor, doing productive work that is economically remunerated.

Overall, the culture is oriented so that men assume the active role of generating, possessing, managing and dispensing money. As was already said, socially they are assigned the responsibility of being those who provide economic income for the sustainment of the family.

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<sup>19</sup> Muhammad Yunus, *Toward a World Without Poverty*, Ed. Andrés Bello, Santiago de Chile, 2000, pg. 13

<sup>20</sup> Marcela Lagarde, *op. cit.* (20), pg. 81

### c) MONEY AS PROBLEMATIC IN SOCIAL AND COUPLE RELATIONS

It is necessary to note that socially, money is characterized by its circulation in large quantities in the economic market and is associated with men, who personally develop and grow in and through productive work, which is situated in the public realm.

*Socially, money is considered a masculine attribute that symbolizes power and wealth, within which economic ambition is certainly implicit, as it is seen as influenced and endorsed by a cultural tradition with respect to sexual roles in the division of labor. According to Lagarde: "Money is a symbol of a transaction, but at the same time is a symbol of all the different kinds of power."<sup>21</sup>*

For women on the other hand, their social position ensures that they administer small quantities of money while remaining within the sphere of the private life, that they perform individual work and function in order to satisfy daily needs and, in the case of the marginalized poor, day-to-day subsistence.

Overall, social precedent ensures that women that participate in reproductive work (caring for husband, raising and educating their children, household activities, etc) have access to reduced amounts of money, so women are a sector of the population on the margins of the economic flow and of decision-making opportunities. Inequality with respect to access to and control of money by women makes more acute the conflict that is present day to day in the social relations that women and men establish.

The conflict rests upon the fact that only one member of the couple possesses money, and represents and gets to exercise power on behalf of the couple. The conflict is made more acute and complicated when the "patriarch" doesn't earn enough money for a family's well-being. Another problem that contributes to the conflict presents itself when the provider suddenly loses his job and no longer brings in income.

The socio-cultural tradition mandates that access to and control of money stay in the possession of the man, and this social conduct is seen as "natural" as a result. It is the men therefore who are responsible for and who have power over money, and are those who are obligated to:

- Find a productive job
- Bring in an income and support the family
- Decide on how income will be distributed
- Handle and control money
- Make important decisions regarding money and finances

These decisions have to do with the administration of the total amount of a person or family's resources, or how much money is set aside for daily expenses in the sustainment of the

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* Marcel Lagarde, *Key Feminine Things for Getting Power and Autonomy for Women*, Ed. Puntos de Encuentro, Managua, Nicaragua, 1991, pg. 81

family, how much for personal expenses and necessities, and if extra money remains, how much of, where, and how this money is spent or saved.

When investigations into the theme of finances and money analyze to who, within a family, the management of a budget is given, they clearly reflect a few key things. They show how this ability creates the dependency of some family members on other members and how managing a budget relates to overall decision-making, and they also detail the benefits that different members of a family obtain from this structure. Overall, they reveal that the amount of satisfaction given by management of a small amount of money is not the same as that given by management of a larger amount.

These investigations also reveal that in daily life, married couples in general fail to maintain a relationship that could be considered truly that of a couple or pair, as the culture gives rise to relational practices from a position of social, political, economic, and legal inequality.

In this respect, a study conducted by an American NGO <sup>22</sup> found that women have just recently starting acquainting themselves with difficult matters like money, which affect their lives and personal development in equal measure. What's more, it revealed that women have a manner of cultural perception that is in conflict with the question of money, as it generally furthers them from the possibility of obtaining money through their own account by performing remunerative work. This belief propitiates an attitude that prevents women from improving their **economic condition** and their social position.

#### \* WOMEN AND METHODS FOR SAVING MONEY

In the complex and contradictory relationship that women generally have with money, whether it be money designated by the spouse for familial expense or that obtained as a result of remunerative work, a practice has been identified of "guarding away" money.

This tactic consists of taking or hiding a part of the money designated for familial expenses or from a salary and saving it for oneself or putting it away for unforeseen events. Many women have this practice, even when their spouses are generous with the distribution of money.

According to researcher Clara Coria, *it is very important to emphasize the necessity for reaffirming for women the life-enhancing feeling that comes from feeling that money is really one's own. I refer to smaller quantities of money that a woman may hide away in a significant place. Now, money has an autonomy that is not socially legitimate, due to the fact that it expresses a contradictory battle that many women fight between the desire for autonomy that comes from possessing and controlling this resource and the limits the culture imposes on them as economic dependants or in the way it defectively administers to them minimal quantities of money that they see spent daily. To hide or store away money of course negates its availability for spending, as well as its enjoyment.*

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<sup>22</sup> The Global Fund for Women, Manual for Women Looking for Funds: Women, Money, and Empowerment, Ed. Bird Publishing, Palo Alto, CA 1995, pg. 2

It is also important to note that there are exceptional cases in which women enter into agreeable marital relationships, in which confidence predominates, and where traditional roles don't exist. In these occasions these women are the ones who control and manage part of the patriarchy in an efficient way.

### 3. Gender, Power, and Money

#### a) MASCULINE POWER AND FEMENINE "MICRO POWER"

The central presence of money in a couple's relationship foments the absence of equal of opportunity, and puts the economically dependant woman in a socially disadvantaged position. In turn she, through the hereditary culture, puts into play mechanisms for answering the influence and power of her husband, by means of a lesser feminine power.

These practices of gender with respect to money and power adopt certain characteristics that, following the studies of the theme, are reflected the following ways:

- Through masculine power
- Through the fact that the power men possess is socially accepted as something 'natural'
- Through a culture that encourages men to exercise power as a right in their private and public lives.

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Clara Coria, *El Sexo Oculdo del Dinero*, Ed. Paidos, Buenos Aires, 1996 , pg. 127

Socially and culturally, men are educated and oriented towards situating and establishing their rights to power in the private realm (the realm of family life), where are put into practice mechanisms for exercising their influence through authority and money, specifically with women and children, through the social hierarchy.

Some men not only exercise power and dominion with money, but also utilize as well the strategy of **-control**, of giving and assigning to their wife money for family expenses. This can be referred to as giving money "little by little" or "drop by drop"

This "little by little" strategy occurs in order to prolong the arrangement of family expenses already in place, and while money is distributed in small increments the decision-making ability of women is limited.

What's more, such financial strategies put women as well as young children and adolescents in a disadvantageous economic position. These money practices of men are aimed to control the wife, and family members as economic dependants.

## FEMENINE "MICRO-POWER"

Socially, women have been geared toward accepting their position in private life and are discouraged from showing interest in participating in public life where work, decision-making and politics take place.

This gives way to relationships socially oriented toward a traditional culture that promotes that a hierarchical power sustained by men prevail in a couple's relationship and in the family.

This social power is endorsed by the culture and functions so that many women tolerate abuse and violence of many types: psychological, mental, physical, sexual and economic.

A majority of women find themselves inhabiting a position of social inequality, existing on an unequal plane from that of men.

Some women comfortably accept the benefits of economic dependence which, through the culture, promote overprotection. These women tend to be unaware of the fact that such dependence implies social, economic, and political discrimination, nor are they conscious that through the form in which the culture orients the sexual division of work, women remain excluded and at the same time exclude themselves from participation that would give them social, economic and political leverage. For these reasons many women fail to strive to place themselves in legitimate places of power in the realm of public life.

For a majority of women, remaining excluded from participation ensures that, socially and culturally, they find themselves in a position of vulnerability in their private lives; a vulnerability that generates conflict among the couple and leads in some cases to threats and later violence. These familial conflicts generally emerge from disputes among the couple over the matter of money, a situation that generates conditions of mutual oppression.

On the one hand, a kind of feminine power emerges amidst these conflicts that is a reaction to masculine power, and that manifests itself as a resource for "micro-power": through ancestral practices and mechanisms like manipulation, reproach and demand.

One of these mechanisms is the strategy of blaming another for the personal or familial economic situation as a means of blackmail immersed in this "micro power."

Another mechanism or recourse utilized by women is to assume the maternal ideal with their spouse, to claim love, attention and respect: "I who have given you everything", and to claim to their children, "I who have sacrificed myself....".

This feminine power is exercised as a way of counter-acting power or of hiding power within the family, in the private sphere, and has proved itself rather effective.

In this feminine power that serves as a counterbalance in the couple's relationship intervene also other ancestral mechanisms of power like seduction, altruism, and the famous syndrome of abnegation, which are orchestrated, as was already said, through feelings of guilt.

## b) GENDER ANALYSIS IN RELATION TO MONEY

Reflecting on gender analysis contributes to the transformation of the social mandate for women and men with respect to money. It helps people analyze critically and reflectively the implications of money in the couple's relationship; it raises the level of consciousness with

respect to a person's individual situation and makes them more aware of how power generates and controls money and information: "He who pays is in charge."

Analysis of gender helps women obtain consciousness of their economic marginalization and of the lack of autonomy for decision making derived from this situation, and also reveals to them the importance of obtaining and controlling economic resources as a mechanism for achieving economic independence and to pursue activities that guarantee autonomy and full citizenship for women.

With respect to the situation for men, the analysis of and reflection on gender prompts them to acquire an awareness of how the socio-cultural system has imposed on them an identity that makes them equate their masculinity with money. It also invites them to reflect in a scrutinizing way the consequences of not letting women bring in another stable and sufficient income that would help them sustain their family and consolidate their inheritance.

The changes and transformation that has been achieved in the last fifty years are fundamentally based in the questioning of old and conservative established values and the promotion of innovative values that are intimately linked to equality, we are speaking of: values that promote change and dismiss cultural patterns and conservative beliefs and stereotypes previously ingrained in patriarchal society.

These changes are reflected in the growing acceptance and participation of women in labor activities that help to improve work opportunities for women,,: payment of equal work for equal salary; reduced work hours; childcare services and expanded school hours for the children of women workers (where children can eat and do home work and cultural activities at school), etc. These cultural changes also influence overall social acceptance of diverse familial arrangements, such as single-parent households headed by women (of which there has been a significant increase 4 of each 10 in recent decades in Mexico), or those that reflect other types of agreements like free union of couples who both work and both take care of the household and both raise the children they have.

Such advances can be observed in homes where income is elevated by the integration of women in productive work and where roles have been redefined so that greater cooperation and communication exists between the couple.

From a gender-aware perspective, this innovation and change in roles contribute to the achievement of agreement in order to make genuine changes and solidify the redefinition of roles in familial relations. All of this relates to a greater culture of equality between the sexes.

Men benefit from these changes through diminished tension and greater harmony in the couple's relationship because both have economic responsibilities. The man no longer must assume the bulk of responsibility for the whole expenses of the home; upon procuring additional economic income conflict is smoothed over and women obtain economic independence, more authority and power.

Women benefit through the sharing of the responsibility of the division of work in the house and through the now expected delegation of domestic work to all the members of the family, including her husband and children.. Such delegation should lead to the disappearance of the "double workday" women endured as the sole laborer of domestic chores and their work responsibilities.

What's more, women that engage in productive work generally enjoy elevated self-esteem, as well as manage to modify how they see themselves--to adapt themselves to a new role through the acquisition of economic independence, greater leadership and the freedom to make important decisions. Mothers are able to give more quality time to their children and can raise them in a more liberated, less overprotective manner.

In order for all of these things to occur, it is necessary that a fundamental change in the gender perspective of the political system take place. This change would have to happen by means of positive action to produce government programs that see beyond the beliefs and practices that have been rooted in the culture for centuries, and that are responsible for the gender stereotypes that have discriminated against women, who make up slightly more than half of the population.

The commitment of the State needs to be the promotion of a social and public politic concerned not only with equal opportunity as a right for the female population but that also puts into practice a strategy for helping families accomplish qualitative changes based in a culture of equality. The ultimate goal is that women become empowered and therefore economically independent so that shared responsibility of domestic life becomes necessary, and so that they themselves gain access to and control over means.

### C) AUTONOMY: INDISPENSABLE FOR THE ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE OF WOMEN

With the goal of transforming beliefs and practices, women need to construct a process that lets them assume autonomy.

*"Without autonomy for women, freedom for men is not possible either, as with a lack of female autonomy men remain trapped in a web of mutual dependence."*<sup>24</sup>

Autonomy is defined as the capability of making decisions on different aspects of one's life. In an economic sense it refers to the capacity and freedom to decide and utilize economic resources gained or administered, using one's own criteria, and the possibility to choose convenient alternatives.

It is important to analyze what, over time, empowerment and autonomy has entailed, obtaining to conditions of each individual in society, to the culture and to structures of power. Autonomy is constructed on an individual's identifying themselves as an autonomous person, or in other words, on a woman's self-identification of herself as her own, autonomous person, and not as belonging to another person. Only when a woman recognizes what she really needs and requires, she will awaken the desire and will to be autonomous person, a profound change takes place; a change will occur in her traditional gender identity, a process of transformation of her subjective worldview begins, and she becomes capable of breaking habits of dependence.

In order to construct new paradigms that empower women and bring her into positions of autonomy, outdated social models must be done away with old values changed, as must be discarded established customs, traditions, and ideas about the patriarchal world and about traditional way of life. They must be replaced by new democratic values of equality that will let

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<sup>24</sup> Clara Coria, *ibid.*, pg. 129

women achieve a process of autonomy. For this to happen women must be empowered by developing here abilities and capacities for decision making and through gender awareness.

With the goal of constructing and, over time, achieving empowerment and true autonomy that is based in freedom, that is without guilt, a woman must achieve:

--*cultural autonomy*: have access to and the power of decision-making as a person confronting what is already socially established

--*physical autonomy*: the capacity to have mobility in order to move from one place to another; the power of decision over her body, respect of her sexuality and reproductive capacity

--*economic autonomy*: the power of decision about resources, productive benefits and micro-finances as the right to possess goods and resources and enjoy them.

--*political autonomy*: power of decision as a citizen on the different levels of civic participation, social representation, and construction of democratic spaces that empower women and allows them to participate on an equal political plane with men in terms of ability and citizens' rights; to generate new paradigms and to contemplate, modify and innovate to create new norms, regulations and laws that truly benefit her.

Autonomy must be recognized and socially supported so that women find mechanisms of empowerment that allows them to act and function autonomously, and for this reason it's necessary to create an indispensable floor of social conditions that lets them empower themselves, involve themselves, develop themselves and become autonomous beings.

To achieve this equality with respect to money requires that a woman recognize the importance of achieving economic independence, by acquiring the responsibility of generating her own income and of relying on her own money, and also that she exercise her decision making on who she will spend it. Empowered women have to begin to see money as an entity and responsibility that has as much to do with themselves as with men. From this standpoint comes the necessity of a new financial culture that considers money a shared responsibility.

#### 4. A Financial Culture with Gender-Equality

This financial culture must have as a general objective the instigation of practices that will make achievable a form of *sustainable development*<sup>25</sup> that not only satisfies the basic necessities of the population but that makes way for a different kind of culture, one that deals with the strategic interests of the people that benefit from a savings and microcredit program. In other words, it must promote practices that encourage financial and social relationships between women and men that are based in equality.

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<sup>25</sup> According to the Brundtland Commission (1987) "sustainable development is that which adresses the necessities of the present without compromising the capacity of future generations to adress the necessities of their time." Silvia Vega Ugalde, "Gender and Environment: What Kind of Sustainability Are We Talking About?", in Marcela Rodríguez (comp.), *Women in the Nineties, Scenarios and Challenges*, Ed. Centro Municipal de la Mujer de Vicente López, Buenos Aires, 1998, pg. 202

The social financial culture that SIEMBRA promotes looks at sustainability with a gender perspective. Development from a gender perspective allows people involved in this microfinancial culture to be conscious of their own reality.

In this sense, the social financial culture will satisfy the basic needs of its participants or clients but, at the same time, encourage practices that address the condition of inequality of women in society and foment beliefs that respect diversity and promote empowerment. Such practices are not always taken into account by the financial culture that prevails in the sector.

In this respect, the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and the International Center for Research on Women reveal:

*"The civil society organizations in the micro finance sectors dedicated to economic and social development have the responsibility of incorporating into credit programs parallel components that offer integral services of capacitation and assesment focused on improving the lives of their clients."*<sup>26</sup>

#### A) CHARACTERISTICS OF A FINANCIAL CULTURE WITH GENDER EQUITY

SIEMBRA promotes a program of microfinancial services to beneficiaries so as to help them learn and practice savings and credit, count on the liquidity of their business practices, and develop economic activity that allows them to generate income to satisfy basic needs. At the same time, these services promote a financial culture with gender equity which incorporate into its beliefs values that recognize woman's contribution to the family, to society, to the economy, and to the political system, and it goes further more than the distribution of economic resources and materials. It is a financial culture that seeks to end inequality and asymmetry among services and people. It's a culture that favors situations of greater social justice, as well as personal and economic well-being, promotes participatory democracy for its beneficiaries. It is also a culture that promotes the continual participation of many people at all levels of society.

As Linda Mayoux states it has to do with a financial culture that spurs and stimulates women's empowerment, through participatory learning, participatory action of the women in the community and also access to credit. This way empowered women may be prepared to demand a fair distribution of social goods and also ready to promote public policies based in positive action and, it does this beneath a standard that guarantees equality of distribution based in equal opportunities.

This financial culture is founded upon three thematic axes:

- participatory learning in finances and gender empowerment
- participatory business training
- participatory action

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<sup>26</sup> INSTRAW and ICRW, "Credit for women: Why is it so important?", Ed. INSTRAW, Washington, 1995 pg. 34

The financial culture with gender equity encourages women to assume the responsibility of elevating their self-esteem and confidence. This begins with participatory learning for women's empowerment through gender awareness, which translates into a self-awareness that allows participants learn to value and recognize the talent, ability and creativity they possess as individuals. This contributes to better understanding and to an ability to distinguish between what are basic necessities and what are strategic interests.

This culture provides participatory financial learning that not only promotes access to credit and to money management for women, it gives them liquidity with their assets, but that also prompts control and the ability to make important decisions that will impact their own lives.

## B) OBJECTIVES OF A GENDER-EQUAL FINANCIAL CULTURE

- 1) To rely on the program of social finances that offers a wide range of products and services and which provide to the whole community personal and economic security and the right conditions for social development, things which in turn benefit SIEMBRA.
- 2) To provide an incentive to women and men to participate in activities of social finance with the end of supporting social and economic development through the creation of savings, credit and to create or develop businesses.
- 3) Empower women and involve women as well as men in gender analysis that helps them identify the causes of inequality so that they act to realize changes and transform gender relations to a place of equality.
- 4) To promote a **financial ethic** that gives an incentive to women to recognize the fact that she has the right to borrow, earn, possess and control money. This will ensure that women don't feel guilt upon earning, possessing profit or investing and spending this money, because these actions will be a product of their personal effort and work.
- 5) To instigate an **ethic of earning** with the goal that the benefits of feminine labor serve not only to satisfy basic needs of the family but also a to improve woman's personal needs, such as rest, hours amusement and entertainment, healthcare and relaxation, things which create her own well-being.
- 6) To favor the practice of beneficiaries demanding quality services of SIEMBRA's programs that satisfy in a parallel integrally basic necessities and also strategic interests for women.
- 7) To cultivate transparency in the ultimate use of the resources that are managed through plans and programs that indicate for what, how and when money will be used, to produce clear information and objectives.
- 8) To rely on techniques in informational systems that allows reliance on countable registers of the day to gain accountability before others.
- 9) To promote individual and group responsibility of participants of SIEMBRA's programs through attendance to training workshops and to savings and credit meetings of GEMS (groups of entrepreneurs in microcredit and savings) members and through the timely payment of credits.
- 10) To achieve women's empowerment and greater general equity of participation in th project of social finances by giving women leadership positions.

11) To propel economic independence and autonomy in women.

### C) THE BENEFITS OF A GENDER-EQUAL FINANCIAL CULTURE

In general, a gender-equal financial culture must promote the distribution of social goods as resources and services between women and men beneath a standard that guarantees equal distribution of these goods based in equity and equal opportunity.

It would also favor the understanding of equity as more than the distribution of economic resources and materials. The term also refers to the integral well-being of individuals, where satisfaction exists in all realms: intellectual, personal, familial, spiritual, laboral, social, economic, judicial and political.

## Glossary

**Economic Condition:** refers to the financial life situations of people, and to the necessities that are basic for their survival.

**Ethic of Earning:** has to do with a woman's enjoyment of the benefits of her job without guilt, and that she learn to invest in personal pleasures, in her personal health and in participation in cultural activities and recreation.

**Financial Ethic:** proposes that a woman gain access to money, that she use it efficiently and that she control it.

**Social Position:** relates to how one is recognized in society and to what place they occupy in society, indicates the social position assigned to women in relation to men by tradition.

**Subjectivity:** concerns an idea that varies with judgement, feelings, customs, religion, etc. for each individual. For example, a religious celebration is a subjective celebration as it depends on the religion of each person or on the decision that person makes on whether or not to celebrate, whereas an objective idea, like a law, doesn't hinge on religion or on the criteria or outlook of the people to which it is applied.

**Transform the gender perspective:** Promotes the idea that constant attention should be paid to the process of creating equality among men and women in politics, and that doing so requires careful strategy and development intervention. At the same time, men and women should participate in the determination and planning of action in such a way that established development responds to one's own priorities and necessities.

**TECHNIQUE NO. 1 FOR WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS**

\* For accessing money

**Money and Me**

**Objective:** To become acquainted with and reflect over the access that women and men have to money.

**Time:** 50 minutes.

**Materials:** Butcher paper, markers, masking tape and a list of phrases.

**Procedure:**

- 1) Prior to the start of the session the facilitator will write on a piece of butcher paper the word 'YES' and on another, the word 'NO'
- 2) These pieces of paper will be put up on the wall in two different locations, where they will be visible and where they will be surrounded by sufficient open space.
- 3) The group of participants will meet in the center of the room. The facilitator will read a statement from the suggested list, at which point each one of the participants will place themselves beneath the paper that contains their personal response to the statement. If the response is negative they'll stand underneath the sign that says 'NO', and if affirmative beneath the one that says 'YES'.
- 4) Once the participants place themselves next to their selected response, the facilitator will ask the groups that were formed why they answered the way they did, if they are satisfied with that answer, if there is something they would modify about their answer, what advice they would have for other women, etc. Active participation should be encouraged; ideally a majority of the women should participate, though the facilitator should take care that the activity doesn't become tedious for the group.
- 5) Upon finishing a discussion of their responses to the statement, the group should re-convene in the center of the room and wait for the next phrase to be read, at which point they'll then assume a new position.

**Comments**

\*It's important that after each response to a phrase the group return to the center of the room, so that there isn't the problem of the participants staying in the same position the whole time.

\*This technique has been designed for groups that don't know how to read or write, and the wording of the statements can be modified for greater understanding.

**Suggested Phrases for the 'Money and Me' Exercise**

1. I earn my own money.
2. I have a paid job.
3. I have my own business
5. I only manage the money that I spend.
4. I consult my spouse to find out how much money should be spent.
5. I regularly put away in safe-keeping a portion of the spending money.
6. With the money that I have I buy myself clothes or take care of my health.
7. With the money that I have I only buy things for the house or for my children.

**TECHNIQUE NO. 2 FOR WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS**

\*For financial decision-making practice

**Lola's Decisions**

**Objective:** To get acquainted with and reflect over the access that women and men have to money.

**Time:** 60 minutes.

**Materials:** copy of "Lola's story", a notebook or butcher paper for recording the results of the exercise, markers or pencils and masking tape.

**Procedure:**

- 1) The facilitator will encourage the group to form a circle and join the circle themselves.
- 2) To start, the facilitator will read "Lola's story", asking the participants to listen closely.
- 3) Afterwards, the group will discuss what they have heard using the questions included at the end of the story. The facilitator will write down the opinions of the group, grouping together opinions that are similar and separating those that are different.
- 4) The results of the discussion will be verbally presented to the group by the facilitator, and then together both the facilitator and the participants will try to arrive at a conclusion. This activity could be oriented towards women that don't have their own money and are always depending on the decisions made by their spouse, and could touch upon various issues such women face: the fact that women with little money put their own health last, that some of these women are afraid to search for problem-solving alternatives, that women often aren't aware of the range of services a community may offer, etc.

**Comments**

\*In order to encourage sufficient participation, it is recommended that the facilitator intervene in the activity from the beginning.

**Lola's Story**

Lola lives in the campo and has three sons and two daughters. She works in the home and her husband works a small plot of land. Once a week her husband gives her money for the family's expenses. Each week this money buys less, and now one of her sons is about to enter junior high. Lola has put away a part of the spending money for unforeseen necessities, though these savings will still just barely buy school supplies for her kids.

Lola has tried asking her husband to raise the amount of money he gives her a couple of times, but her doing this only led to arguments and her husband telling her that he couldn't give her more money for expenses. What's more, her husband asked her for records of her spending.

On a few occasions, Lola had the opportunity to work, selling small goods or tending a store in the mornings, but she didn't like leaving her kids alone. And when she did this her husband told her he didn't want her out in the street by herself.

A week ago one of Lola's molars starting giving her a lot of pain, so she went to see the dentist at the church clinic. The dentist examined her and told her that she had to undergo various treatments in order to save some of her teeth, but as the treatments would be complicated she would have to pay for part of them.

Lola didn't know what to do. She had to pay also for her son's uniform for junior high, her husband got angry every time they talked about money, and she would have to make a decision about her teeth.

- \* What should Lola do?
  
- \* What is the first thing that she has to pay for?
  
- \* What should she say to her husband?
  
- \* What other ways does Lola have of getting her own money?
  
- \* What advice would you give to Lola so that she can solve her problems?
  
- \* Has one of you (the participants) had a problem similar to Lola's? Can you relate to her experience?

**TECHNIQUE NO. 3 FOR WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS**

- \* For short and middle-term savings goals

**My Savings Plan**

**Objective:** To set savings goals within periods of four months and of one year.

**Time:** 60 minutes.

**Materials:** Sufficient copies of the handouts "My savings plan for the next four months" and "My savings plan for this year", and pencils.

**Procedure:**

1. The facilitator will distribute the handouts to the participants (one of the four month plan sheets and one of the one year sheets), and a pencil for each participant.
2. First the participants will begin with the four-month plan. Here the facilitator will ask the group to draw something that represents their response.
3. Before, fully, they will share their savings plans. This reflection over the results can be guided by the following questions:
  - \*Before this exercise were your savings goals already clear to you?
  - \*Which questions were easiest to answer? Why?
  - \*Which questions were hardest to answer? Why?
  - \*How was this exercise helpful?
  - \*Do you think you can achieve the goals you formulated?
4. Afterwards the exercise will continue using the same procedure for the handout for one year.

**Comments**

- \*In groups with a low educational level you can do this exercise over the course of two sessions.
- \*On occasion, some people may protest that they don't know how to draw, in which case the facilitator can motivate them to participate anyway by reminding them that drawing skill isn't necessary for the activity.

**My Savings Plan for the Next Four Months**

- 1) For what do I want to save money for in the next four months?
- 2) How much will I have to save?
- 3) How much time should I put aside to achieve this?
- 4) Where will I go to obtain the money for savings?
- 5) With whom have I shared my savings plan?

**My Savings Plan for the Next Year**

- 1) For what do I want to save money for in the next four months?
- 2) How much will I have to save?
- 3) How much time should I put aside to achieve this?
- 4) Where will I go to obtain the money for savings?
- 5) With whom have I shared my savings plan?