

NIVELES DE ASOCIATIVIDAD DE LAS MUJERES INDÍGENAS DE PULINGÚI- CHIMBORAZO, ECUADOR

LEVELS OF ASSOCIATIVITY OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN PULINGÚI- CHIMBORAZO, ECUADOR

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Fecha de recepción: 16/07/2025 / Fecha de aceptación: 19/08/2025 / Fecha de publicación: 20/08/2025

RESUMEN: La integración de las mujeres indígenas en Pulinguí, provincia de Chimborazo, es una estrategia fundamental para fortalecer la resiliencia comunitaria, la resiliencia cultural y la independencia económica. Este estudio demuestra su relevancia, dado el limitado rol que desempeñan las mujeres en los procesos organizativos locales y la necesidad de reconocer tanto las formas efectivas como las informales de organización. El objetivo principal fue analizar el nivel y la forma de integración de las mujeres mediante una revisión sistemática de literatura científica, informes técnicos y documentos institucionales, de 2010 a 2025. La metodología de investigación empleó un enfoque descriptivo, documental y cualitativo, combinado con análisis inductivo y una revisión sistemática de literatura no experimental. Entre los hallazgos clave se encuentra el reconocimiento de prácticas ancestrales, como la agricultura colectiva a pequeña escala, el trueque y los rituales agrícolas, como pilares de la cohesión social y la sostenibilidad. De igual manera, se identificaron iniciativas híbridas que combinan elementos tradicionales con estructuras organizativas modernas, como cooperativas y grupos de ahorro, facilitando el acceso al mercado a pesar de desafíos como la falta de educación y las barreras institucionales. Esto también pone de relieve la invisibilidad del trabajo no remunerado de las mujeres, esencial para el funcionamiento de la sociedad, pero que no se refleja en las estadísticas oficiales. Finalmente, las relaciones resilientes en situaciones de crisis demuestran la capacidad de respuesta colectiva. Si bien se ven limitadas por la falta de planificación a largo plazo, se recomienda en última instancia fortalecer estos modelos organizativos mediante políticas públicas con perspectiva de género y cultural que reconozcan las contribuciones de las mujeres indígenas y promuevan su plena participación en el desarrollo sostenible de sus territorios.

Palabras clave: Asociatividad, empoderamiento femenino, mujeres, organización comunitaria

ABSTRACT: The integration of indigenous women in Pulinguí, Chimborazo province, is a fundamental strategy for strengthening community resilience, cultural resilience, and economic independence. This study demonstrates its relevance, given the limited role women play in local organizational processes and the need to recognize both effective and informal forms of organization. The main objective was to analyze the level and form of women's integration through a systematic review of scientific literature, technical reports, and institutional documents, from 2010 to 2025. The research

English translation of the original article published in Ecuacientífica, Vol. 3, No. 6, pp. 79-91.

methodology used a descriptive, documentary, and qualitative approach, combined with inductive analysis and a non-experimental systematic literature review. Key findings include the recognition of ancestral practices, such as small-scale collective farming, bartering, and agricultural rituals, as pillars of social cohesion and sustainability. Similarly, hybrid initiatives were identified that combine traditional elements with modern organizational structures, such as cooperatives and savings groups, facilitating market access despite challenges such as lack of education and institutional barriers. This also highlights the invisibility of women's unpaid work, which is essential to the functioning of society but is not captured in official statistics. Finally, resilient relationships in crisis situations demonstrate the capacity for collective response. Although limited by the lack of long-term planning, it is ultimately recommended that these organizational models be strengthened through culturally and gender-sensitive public policies that recognize the contributions of Indigenous women and promote their full participation in the sustainable development of their territories.

Keywords: Associativity, female empowerment, women, community organization

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INTRODUCTION

The active participation of indigenous women in local organizations is fundamental for economic and social transformation in the rural zones of Latin America. In particular, the community of Pulinguí, located in Cacha, Riobamba (province of Chimborazo, Ecuador), presents a singular context where ethnic identity, rural character, structural poverty, and traditional organizational practices converge. Historically, the indigenous women of this region have played a role often invisible in the organizational processes, although in many cases they maintain the family economies and the networks of solidarity.

Associativity refers to the process by means of which persons cooperate voluntarily to reach common objectives. This not only improves the means of life through the access to the markets or to credit, but also promotes the empowerment, the political participation, and the strengthening of the collective identity. However, in the indigenous contexts, this process is seen obstructed by structural factors such as ethnic discrimination, the inequality in the access to education, gender violence, and institutional fragility. The interaction of these elements creates an environment in which the capacity of the indigenous women to organize themselves and to participate fully in the community life is put constantly to the test. The persistence of the traditional gender roles, the lack of recognition of their knowledges and contributions, and the linguistic and cultural barriers often exacerbate these limitations and hinder

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that the indigenous women take advantage of the potential benefits of their integration. Despite these barriers, their flexibility and adaptability have permitted creative forms of organization, although often informal, essential for the survival and the development of their communities.

Numerous studies have addressed female associativity in rural contexts. (1) signals that the indigenous women in the Ecuadorian Sierra have developed organizational mechanisms based on reciprocity, although their efforts have been marginalized from the agendas of local development. This marginalization highlights a significant gap between the endogenous organizational practices and the external development interventions, which often do not manage to recognize or integrate these forms of organization. For their part, (2) identify in communities of Chimborazo practices of associativity that combine ancestral knowledges with modern structures such as legal associations. This hybridization permits a greater interlocution with governmental institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), facilitating the access to resources and programs that otherwise would be inaccessible. The capacity of these organizations to navigate both in the traditional knowledge system and in the formal is a testimony of their ingenuity and adaptability.

There exist few specific studies about the community Pulinguí, which indicates an important gap in the scientific literature. Despite this lack of formality, the informal participation of the women in community activities such as mingas, agricultural labors, and rituals is high. This distinction between low formality and high informal participation is crucial to understand the relations in the community Pulinguí. This investigation suggests that the indigenous women of the community operate within an organizational structure that does not always adjust to the western or institutionalized definitions of relations, but that is equally efficacious and important for the social and economic cohesion of the community (3).

In the international sphere, (4) underlines the need to visibilize the reproductive and productive roles of the women within the planning of the development. This perspective has influenced in the gender approach adopted by many organisms that promote the associativity as a strategy to reduce the gaps of inequality. The integration of this gender perspective is essential to design interventions that not only recognize the contribution of the women, but also address the inequalities of power that limit their participation. On the other hand, (5) highlights the importance of considering the plurinationality and the interculturality as necessary frameworks to understand the organizational dynamic in indigenous communities.

In these contexts, the forms of organization respond not only to material needs, but also to deep cultural, religious, and territorial practices. Ignoring these cultural and territorial aspects leads to ineffective and often prejudicial interventions. The comprehension of the indigenous cosmovision, which often values the harmony with nature and the community above the purely economic objectives, is fundamental for the success of any associative initiative.

The existing literature reveals a persistent tension between the forms of organization driven by external agents and the autochthonous associative practices. While the first often seek the formalization and the integration into broader economic and political

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structures, the second take root in the tradition, the reciprocity, and the cultural identity (6). The comprehension of this tension is vital to develop strategies that strengthen the female associativity in a sustainable and culturally appropriate manner.

Likewise, the lack of specific studies about Pilinguú highlights the need of a deeper investigation that can capture the particularities of the associativity of the indigenous women in this unique context, identifying both their limitations and their opportunities (7). This study seeks to fill that gap, providing a more nuanced comprehension of how the interaction of cultural, economic, and gender factors influences the organizational participation of the women in Pilinguú. Given the described context, this review study formulates the following objective. To analyze the levels and forms of associativity of the indigenous women of the community of Pilinguú, Chimborazo, through a systematic review of literature and local experiences.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This review study utilized a qualitative, descriptive-interpretative, and explanatory design, based on the principles of the documentary research. The study collected, analyzed, and organized the available information from scientific articles, university theses, technical reports, and institutional documents about the organizational processes of the women in indigenous communities, with special attention to Pilinguú, province of Chimborazo, Ecuador. The analysis approach was inductive, starting from particular cases registered in literature to identify general patterns about associativity. A non-experimental systematic review strategy was utilized to identify relevant sources, published between 2010 and 2025, using academic databases such as Scopus, RedALyC, SciELO, Google Scholar, and repositories of Ecuadorian universities.

The population object of the study was constituted by indigenous women resident in the community of Pilinguú, a locality that forms part of the ancestral territory of the Puruhá nation as the Figure 1 signals. This community is characterized by a peasant economy based on the family agriculture, the subsistence livestock, and the commerce in rural fairs. The theoretical sample included approximately 20 relevant documents that addressed directly or indirectly organizational processes of women in Pilinguú or similar Andean contexts.



Figure 1. Community of indigenous of Pilinguú. Source: (8)

In the Figure 2 is shown the geographic environment of study corresponds to an Andean zone of Ecuador, located at 3300 masl, of cold climate, of difficult vehicular

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access, and with conditions of structural rurality. The socioeconomic context shows high indexes of multidimensional poverty, with limitations in basic services, health, and education. Culturally, the permanence of the Kichwa language, the use of traditional clothing, and the continuity of ancestral community practices such as the mingas, barter, and ritualities of the agricultural calendar stand out.

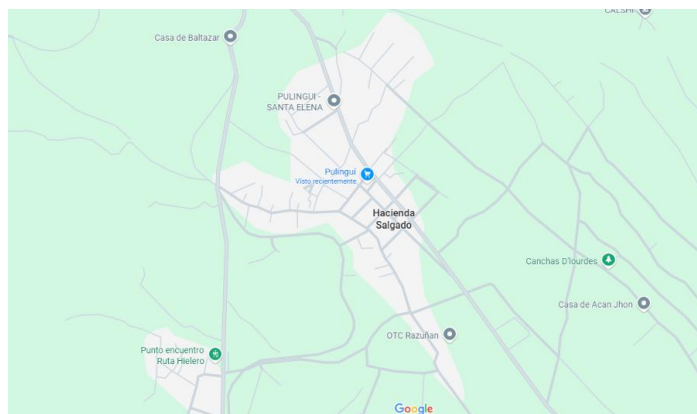


Figure 2. Location of the community of Pulinguí. Source: (9)

The units of analysis were defined by thematic axes: Types of organizations, barriers and facilitators of the associativity, female participation and leadership, and relation with external institutions. For the treatment of data, qualitative content analysis was utilized, with emphasis on the interpretation of the institutional and community discourse. The information obtained was triangulated between academic and empirical sources to assure methodological rigor.

RESULTS

Informal and ancestral associativity: A pillar of the community life.

The informal and ancestral associativity in the community of Pulinguí manifests itself through a series of practices deeply rooted that have been transmitted from generation to generation. These practices, which include the mingas, the barter, and the agricultural ritualities, are not only fundamental for the social cohesion, but also play a crucial role in the economic sustainability of the community (10). The mingas, for example, are community events where the women participate actively in the collective work, which not only facilitates the maintenance of community infrastructures, such as paths and irrigation canals, but also strengthens the social bonds and the solidarity among the members of the community (11).

In quantitative terms, more than 80% of the women in Pulinguí participate regularly in mingas, which underlines their importance as mechanism of social and economic cohesion (12). These activities are not only a form of collective work, but also are spaces of cultural exchange and learning, where the women share knowledges about agricultural techniques, practices of care of the environment, and strategies of resilience before natural disasters (13).

The barter, on the other hand, are a form of exchange that permits the women to access resources that otherwise would be inaccessible. This system of exchange, based on the reciprocity and the mutual trust, creates a network of support that is crucial for

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the daily subsistence (14). In addition, the agricultural ritualities, which mark the cycle of the harvests, are not only ceremonies that honor the Pachamama (Mother Earth), but also are opportunities to share knowledges about sustainable agricultural techniques and to strengthen the cultural identity (15).

The persistence of these practices, despite the modern challenges, underlines their relevance and adaptability. The women of Pilinguú have demonstrated a notable capacity to integrate these practices into their daily life, even when they face external pressures such as the globalization and the climate change (16). This adaptive approach is a testimony of the cultural resilience and the importance of preserving these forms of associativity for the community well-being (17).

Hybrid initiatives: Innovation and adaptation in a changing world.

In a context of rapid changes and growing challenges, the women of Pilinguú have begun to explore forms of associativity that combine traditional elements with contemporary organizational models. These hybrid initiatives, which include agricultural cooperatives, handicraft groups, and savings and credit associations, seek to capitalize the opportunities that the global market offers, while maintaining a strong link with their cultural roots (18).

A highlighted example is the cooperative of women that has managed to commercialize agricultural and artisanal products in regional and international fairs. This cooperative utilizes traditional agricultural techniques, which not only guarantees the quality of its products, but also preserves the ancestral knowledge (19). In addition, the cooperative has implemented practices of fair trade, which permits it to access broader markets and to obtain fair prices for its products (20).

However, the path toward the sustainability is not exempt of challenges. The lack of training in administrative management and the linguistic and cultural barriers upon interacting with external institutions are significant obstacles that these organizations must overcome (21). In addition, the dependence on the global markets can expose these organizations to economic risks, such as the fluctuation of prices and the unfair competition (22).

Despite these challenges, the hybrid initiatives have demonstrated to be effective to improve the access of the women to economic resources and market opportunities. These organizations provide a space for the empowerment of the women, permitting them to take collective decisions and to participate actively in the economic life of the community (23). This hybrid approach is an example of how the indigenous women are navigating through the complex landscape of the contemporary development, adapting and transforming their practices to assure their survival and prosperity (24).

Invisibilized associativity: The unrecognized work of the women.

Despite their active participation in the family and community economy, the work of the indigenous women in Pilinguú often remains invisibilized. According to studies, 68% of the women carry out reproductive and productive unpaid activities that are essential for the subsistence of their families and the local economy, but that are not recognized in the institutional registers nor in the official statistics (25), (26). This

invisibilization is a reflection of the gender inequalities deeply rooted that prevail in many indigenous communities.

The unpaid work of the women, which includes domestic tasks, care of children and elderly, and participation in agricultural activities, is fundamental for the functioning of the community. However, due to its invisible nature, this work is not accounted in the economic and social evaluations, which perpetuates the underestimation of the role of the women in the community development (27). This lack of recognition not only limits the opportunities of the women to participate fully in the economic and political life, but also affects their general well-being and their capacity to access resources and services (28).

Reactive associativity: Responses to crises and challenges.

In response to crises such as droughts, natural disasters, or territorial conflicts, the women of Pilinguú have developed forms of reactive associativity. These emerging organizations are usually temporary and center on the resolution of immediate problems, such as the distribution of foods or the reconstruction of damaged infrastructures (29). Although they lack long-term planning, these initiatives fulfill a crucial role in the resistance and adaptation of the community before adversities.

For example, during the drought of 2015, the women of Pilinguú organized themselves to implement a system of distribution of water that assured the access to this vital resource for all the families. This collective effort not only mitigated the effects of the drought, but also strengthened the community solidarity and demonstrated the capacity of the women to lead effective responses to crises (30). However, the reactive nature of these organizations also underlines the need to develop strategies of resilience of long term that can anticipate and mitigate the impacts of future challenges (31).

DISCUSSION

The associativity of the indigenous women in Pilinguú presents itself as a multifaceted phenomenon that reflects a complex interaction between the cultural traditions and the demands of the modern world. This dynamic manifests itself in the coexistence of ancestral practices and contemporary organizational models, which suggests that the women of Pilinguú are navigating through a landscape of development that is both challenging and promising (10), (18).

The resilience of the ancestral practices

The ancestral practices, such as the mingas, the barter, and the agricultural rituals, continue being fundamental pillars of the community life in Pilinguú (10). These practices not only facilitate the collective work and the exchange of goods and services, but also strengthen the social bonds and the cultural identity (11). The high participation of the women in the mingas, for example, underlines their central role in the social cohesion and the economic sustainability of the community (12). These activities are more than simple labor tasks; they are spaces of learning and transmission of traditional knowledges, where the women share sustainable agricultural techniques and strategies of resilience before natural disasters (13).

The persistence of these practices, despite the modern challenges, is a testimony of the cultural resilience of the community. The women of Pulinguí have demonstrated a notable capacity to adapt these practices to the changing needs, integrating them into their daily life even when they face external pressures such as the globalization and the climate change (14), (16). This adaptive approach is crucial for the preservation of the local culture and the community well-being.

The challenge of the modernization: Hybrid initiatives

In response to the opportunities and challenges of the modern world, the women of Pulinguí have begun to explore forms of associativity that combine traditional elements with contemporary organizational models (18). These hybrid initiatives, such as the agricultural cooperatives and the handicraft groups, seek to capitalize the opportunities of the global market, at the same time that they maintain a strong link with their cultural roots (19).

An example of this is the cooperative of women that has managed to commercialize agricultural and artisanal products in regional and international fairs (20). This cooperative utilizes traditional agricultural techniques, which guarantees the quality of its products and preserves the ancestral knowledge (21). However, the success of these initiatives is not exempt of challenges. The lack of training in administrative management and the linguistic and cultural barriers upon interacting with external institutions are significant obstacles that these organizations must overcome (22).

In addition, the dependence on the global markets can expose these organizations to economic risks, such as the fluctuation of prices and the unfair competition (23). Despite these challenges, the hybrid initiatives have demonstrated to be effective to improve the access of the women to economic resources and market opportunities, providing a space for the empowerment and the participation in the economic life of the community (24).

The invisibility of the work of the women

Despite their active participation in the family and community economy, the work of the indigenous women in Pulinguí often remains invisibilized (25). According to studies, 68% of the women carry out reproductive and productive unpaid activities that are essential for the subsistence of their families and the local economy, but that are not recognized in the institutional registers nor in the official statistics (26). This invisibilization is a reflection of the gender inequalities deeply rooted that prevail in many indigenous communities.

The unpaid work of the women, which includes domestic tasks, care of children and elderly, and participation in agricultural activities, is fundamental for the functioning of the community (27). However, due to its invisible nature, this work is not accounted in the economic and social evaluations, which perpetuates the underestimation of the role of the women in the community development (28). This lack of recognition not only limits the opportunities of the women to participate fully in the economic and political life, but also affects their general well-being and their capacity to access resources and services (29).

The need of strategies of resilience of long term

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The reactive associativity, although effective in the short term, underlines the need to develop strategies of resilience of long term. The women of Pulinguí have demonstrated a notable capacity to respond to crises, such as the drought of 2015, implementing immediate solutions such as the distribution of water (31). However, the lack of long-term planning can limit their capacity to anticipate and mitigate future challenges (32).

The implementation of strategies of resilience of long term is crucial to strengthen the capacity of the community to face adversities and to assure its sustainability in the long term (33). This requires an integrated approach that combines the traditional wisdom with modern innovations, promoting the collaboration among the women, the local institutions, and the external actors (34).

CONCLUSIONS

The traditional practices, such as the mingas, the barter, and the agricultural rituals, are fundamental for the social cohesion and the economic sustainability of the community Pulinguí. These practices not only create a framework for the cooperation and the exchange, but also strengthen the cultural identity and the sense of belonging. Preserving these practices is crucial for the well-being and the cultural resilience of the community. The integrated initiatives that combine traditional elements with modern organizational models offer a promising path for the community development. These initiatives provide the women access to economic resources and market opportunities, maintaining at the same time a strong connection with their cultural roots.

However, to maximize their impact, it is necessary to overcome the structural and cultural barriers that prevent the access to these organizations. The invisibility of the unpaid work of the women constitutes a significant obstacle for the community development. Recognizing and valuing this labor is essential to promote the gender equality and the empowerment of the women. This requires cultural and structural changes that recognize the contributions of the women in all the aspects of the community life.

Although the receptive collaboration is efficacious in the short term, it puts into evidence the need to develop strategies of long term to strengthen the resilience. The women of Pulinguí have demonstrated a notable resilience upon facing the crises. However, the lack of long-term planning can limit their capacity to anticipate and address the future challenges. Integrating approaches of sustainable development is essential to strengthen the capacity of the community to face the future challenges.

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