From local to "glocal" development: The empowerment of women through indigenous social enterprises

Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore enabler mechanisms for women's empowerment in a social enterprise and how they promote "glocal" development in an indigenous community. This paper follows a case study methodology, inductive approach and qualitative methods mainly through 70 in-depth interviews. Although the male-dominated culture slows down the democratic and political empowerment of women in the community, mechanisms such as job stability, low-interest microcredits and gender-equality policies in the organization have triggered economic empowerment. The result is that local development has allowed the social enterprise to compete globally, furthering the integration of local to global.

Keywords- Social enterprises, women empowerment, local development

Introduction

Globalization is understood as the integration of regions regarding economic, social, cultural and technological issues (Weber, 2007). This force is shaping the future of people around the world (Coughlin & Thomas, 2002). For example, the globalization of economies has increased the recognition of social problems, such as poverty. In addition, it has motivated entrepreneurs to make efforts to alleviate economic and social disparities through social ventures. "Social ventures are fast becoming the vanguards of social transformation, enhancing the quality of life and enriching human existence around the globe (Zahra, Rawhouser, Bhawe, Newubaum & Hayton, 2008, p. 129). Thus, social entrepreneurship focuses on finding sustainable solutions to problems of neglected positive externalities while adopting a logic of empowerment, which is somehow opposite to the search for control of self-interested actors such as corporations and commercial entrepreneurs (Santos, 2012).

Women are becoming important for local, national, and global development (Clark, 2013). They have participated in their local economies even though they live in poor rural communities. The female participation in workplace fosters a more human and cooperative work environment and it helps women to have a better status in their households and their communities (Coughlin & Thomas, 2002). In the context of social entrepreneurship, social enterprises "can sustain the empowerment of the weakest social sectors like indigenous women, who suffer a condition of double discrimination" (Giovanninni, 2012, p. 292).

Given the importance of women in achieving local development, academics have explored the barriers that women have to withstand in entrepreneurship activities, such as lack of flexible work arrangements, limited access to resources,

lack of training and experience, and personal barriers regarding family and children care (e.g., Mattis, 2004; Lockyer & George, 2012; Nguyen, Frederick a& Nguyen, 2014). Scholars suggest that entrepreneurship is "one of the best tactics within the strategic realm empowering women and elevating them to the equal status they are entitled to" (Coughlin & Thomas, 2002, p. 49).

This article seeks to explore enabler mechanisms for women empowerment in a social enterprise and how they influence "glocal" development in an indigenous community. This paper is structured as follows. First, the theoretical framework is provided in order to explain the dynamics within the organization. Next, the research methodology is presented followed by the context of the case and the findings. Finally, a discussion of the results is elaborated, along with practical implications.

Theoretical framework

Social enterprises and empowerment dynamics

The concept of social enterprise within management theory is comprised to the field of social entrepreneurship. Social enterprises are understood as "organizations seeking business solutions to social problems" (Thompson & Doherty, 2006, p. 362).They look for community well-being through its social purpose, the participation of employees in governance and the balance between social and financial returns (Thompson & Doherty, 2006). The main challenge that social enterprises face is to design governance mechanisms and structures that enhance the realization of equitable tasks in order to promote community well-being (Perez, 2013).

Empowerment is defined by the World Bank (2011) as the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. The empowerment of actors outside and inside the organizational boundaries seems to be one of the main characteristics of social entrepreneurship, which differentiates it from other fields. This implies that social entrepreneurs usually create mechanisms and tools that both reduce the stakeholders' dependencies on the organization, and increase the stakeholders' abilities to contribute to the solution and to their own welfare (Santos, 2012). Levander (2010) suggests a theoretical framework from neo-institutionalism to conceptualize the social enterprise as a method of empowering marginalized individuals or disadvantaged groups, such as women, while providing a long term solution to structural issues across society.

An analysis of the different definitions of social enterprises highlights six distinctive elements, which can be classified into three levels: nature, implementation and impact.

The nature of social enterprises has two elements: a social objective and a long-term solution oriented to social needs. The first refers to the entities' social mission as a main goal of the venture, superseding the pursuit of profit maximization (Campbell, 1997; Peredo & McLean, 2006; Yunus, 2010). The second element involves seeking for a solution to the issue addressed. That is, the business model is geared towards a permanent solution to a social problem, creating a new balance that guarantees enduring benefits (Bugg-Levine, Kogut, & Kulatilaka, 2012; Dees, 2007; Martin & Osberg, 2007; Sullivan Mort, Weerawardena & Carnegie, 2003). When faced by the dilemma between "problem solving" thinking and the culture of charity or philanthropy, the social entrepreneur chooses the first (Dees, 2012).

At the implementation level, social enterprises are characterized by two elements: social innovation and scalability. Social innovation, defined as a positive change at the conceptual, process, product or organizational level, implies a novel use of resources that contributes to the achievement of social goals (Borins, 2000; Mair & Marti, 2006; Megre, Martins & Salvado, 2012; Peredo & Chrisman, 2006). The scalability of social entrepreneurship refers to the ability to successfully replicate the business model in other places, in order to continue generating social benefits (Martin & Osberg, 2007; Yunus, 2010). The scalability of social enterprises is usually limited due to lack of resources, infrastructure and adequate policies (Dees, 2007).

The third level refers to the expected impacts of social enterprises: value creation and sustainability. Value creation implies that the benefits of engaging in a new venture exceed its costs, positively influencing the stakeholders involved (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006; Weerawardena & Mort, 2006). When value creation simultaneously generates economic, social and environmental benefits, the concept of sustainability is introduced (Elkington, 1994). The six mentioned elements, in addition to the logic of empowerment in social enterprises, are present in the organization documented in this article.

Foley (1997) developed a taxonomy where empowerment is divided into five dimensions: democratic, economic, political, environmental and cultural. The five dimensions contribute to a better assessment of the enabler mechanisms for women empowerment and their impact in "glocal" development (table 1).

Table 1. Empowerment Dimensions

Dimensions	Definition
Democratic	The degree to which the population increasingly participates in the way policies are formulated and put into practice.
Economic	The degree to which residents control the source of their income, what options they have, and how they are protected from market fluctuations.
Political	It refers to the process by which a minority group gains greater ability to influence

	outcomes in its favor. Essential values are social justice and a respectful, fair treatment
Environmental	How groups obtain the capacity to control the space and the environment in which they live.
Cultural	The development and reinforcement of cultural values as a source of strength and solidarity.

Source: Elaborated by authors with information from Foley (1997).

Methodology

This paper follows an inductive approach. The research strategy used is the case study. Given that social entrepreneurship is an emerging issue in management literature, research concerning social enterprises has been documented primarily through case studies (e.g., Anderson, Dana, & Dana, 2006; Hockerts, 2010) and grounded theory (e.g. Weerawardena & Mort, 2006; Khavul, Bruton, & Wood, 2009). Research in this field is incipient and mostly in exploratory stages; therefore, grounded theory and case studies are ideal research strategies to generate large amounts of information about the processes these organizations follow. This research uses the case study method as a research strategy mainly because: (a) it is complicated to decontextualize social enterprises without losing valuable information; case study is the method of choice when the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from its context (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003); (b) the understanding of indigenous worldviews requires qualitative tools such as observation and interviews instead of tools such as surveys or databases; (c) the early stage of development of the social entrepreneurship field may suggest the need to document in-depth cases to find relationships that could lead to quantitative studies; and (d) this research is based on elements and assumptions from social entrepreneurship theory; consequently, it does not conform to the principles of grounded theory.

Social enterprises in indigenous communities are recognized as highly effective, because the cultural characteristics of this type of communities facilitate the establishment of this type of enterprises (Giovanninni, 2012). The sampling strategy was determined by: (a) interviews with researchers and academic experts from the region; (b) interviews with the staff of financial institutions and developmental agencies focused on rural development; and (c) a search of events that promote social initiatives and competitiveness. The selected organization is been recognized both nationally and internationally as one of the most successful social enterprises (in terms of employment, growth, and stakeholder empowerment). It is located in southern Mexico.

The data collection instruments are: in-depth semi-structured interviews, and observation. Seventy people were interviewed from September 2011 to July 2012; 39 men and 31 women. The questions included social, economic and environmental aspects, with an emphasis on the first aspect. The criteria for selecting the interviewees were, in order of

importance, visibility, specialized knowledge, and recommendations. The transcripts account for more than 500 pages; the interviews range from half an hour to two and a half hours, the average interview is 50 minutes long. Observation included 120 hours inside the facilities of the organization and more than 200 hours with the community that surrounds it. The instruments allowed data triangulation, necessary to validate the process of information generation.

Data analysis followed the process of categorization, abstraction, comparison, dimensionalization, integration, iteration, and refutation described by Spiggle (1994). In order to verify the inferences made from the collected data, three informants were consulted. Two of them are former workers of the community (Enriqueta, a woman who worked for 20 years in the organization; and Manuel, who is also known as the historian of the community and currently a member of the advisory committee of the organization) and one of them is from outside the community, but with a deep knowledge of indigenous communities in the region. The limitation of this research is that it only considers one organization, which is highly influenced by its cultural background.

Context

The social enterprise Ixtlán Group is located in the community of Ixtlán, in the southern state of Oaxaca, Mexico. Indigenous communities represent 14.3% of the surface of the country (Freshwateraction, 2012) and they are mainly organized under communal property. This minority enjoys special protection of their customs and territorial integration under articles 4 and 27 of the Mexican Constitution. Zapotecs, the predominant ethnic group in Ixtlán, represent the third highest indigenous group in Mexico, after the Nahuas and Mayas, with over 440,000 people (Lewis, 2009). Ixtlán is one of the 570 municipalities of the state and a district seat, with a population of 2,718 inhabitants (INEGI, 2010). It covers 19,000 hectares and is located at an average of 2,030 meters above sea level. Ixtlán has a variety of climates and biodiversity, from oak and pine forests in the highlands, to evergreen rainforests at the bottom.

The governance in most indigenous communities in Mexico, including Ixtlán, is determined by a system called *usos y costumbres*. Under *usos y costumbres*, the governance of the community is usually divided into two separate but equally important assemblies: the assembly of *comuneros*[1] and the assembly of citizens, along with numerous subcommittees. The assembly of *comuneros*, under the elected leadership of the president and adjunct authorities composing the Comisariado de Bienes Comunales (CBC, Committee of Communal Resources), manages communal forests and other natural resources owned by the community.

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[1] *Comuneros* are usually the first dwellers of a community; they hold common land property of the community and its resources.

Forest-related activities are the main source of income for the community, but these are relatively new activities as inhabitants used to live in a subsistence economy based on agriculture and cattle. Timber exploitation in Ixtlán started in the 1940s when a concession was granted to a foreign firm. The only benefit that the community obtained from this concession was the creation of employment under poor conditions, but no other payment was given to the community for the exploitation of its natural resources (Rainforest Alliance, 2001).

In 1968, fourteen communities created an organization to increase the bargain power of the workers against the foreign entity, and also boycotting its operations and regaining control of their own natural resources. In 1974, the government finally agreed and created a new local organization to exploit the forest. Four neighboring communities formed this new entity: Ixtlán, Capulálpam, La Trinidad, and Santiago Xiacuí. The new enterprise was called Ixcasit and had around 60 workers. These four communities began to learn about sustainability and conservation strategies, as well as how to manage their forests and logging operations. They split in 1988; thus, the Unidad Comunal Forestal Agropecuaria y de Servicios (UCFAS) was established in 1988 (Ixtlán's group first enterprise) as an attempt to provide employment for the community. UCFAS remained the sole entity in charge of an increasing variety of industries and business opportunities that the organization exploited until 2007, when the *comuneros* decided to split the enterprise into seven entities. Nowadays, the organization has expanded to eight enterprises and over 200 employees (table 2).

Table 2. Ixtlán Group enterprises and number of workers by gender in 2012

Enterprise	Main activity	Women	Men	Total
UCFAS	Sawmill and furniture Factory	43	73	116
UNFOSTI	Timber exploitation	3	47	50
Servicios Técnicos Forestales (STF)	Forest sustainable management	3	17	20
Tienda Comunitaria Ixtleca	Building materials and hardware store	3	6	9
Gasolinera Comunidad Agraria	Gas station	3	6	9
Ecoturixtlán SPR de RI	Eco tourism park	4	7	10
Fideicomiso de Ixtlán	Productive micro-lending	1	2	3
Total		60 (28%)	158(72%)	217

Source: Elaborated by authors with data from Vázquez-Maguirre (2012)

Findings

Democratic dimension

The general assembly of *comuneros* remains the ultimate authority regarding any decision related to the enterprises. This body is composed by the 384 *comuneros* of Ixtlán, and they operate under the one-person one-vote premise. Elections are open, any *comunero* can recommend the person he or she believes is the best for the job and justify it. Enriqueta, one of the first women to have a managerial position in the organization, recalls that the general assembly was composed exclusively by men in the beginning, although no law prohibited women to participate. So, in the mid-90s a group of four women went to the assembly and enforced their right to be a part of it. Some men were surprised to see such initiative and opposed it in the beginning. However, most of the men agreed, since women had the right to be part of the assembly and the organization was also trying to help women in the community. Even though today there are only 28 female *comuneros* out of 384, women actively participate in decisions regarding land and Ixtlán Group issues. This is not frequent in nearby communities, where the general assembly is exclusive for men, or women take a secondary, more passive role. Rosario, SOFOM's general manager, feels that she participates in the general assembly freely and that her opinions are heard and respected by men. She also admits that the number of female *comuneros* is still low and men hold most of the managerial positions; but this is not a gender issue. She observes, "most women are not interested in taking those jobs or being a female *comunero* because they are married and have children, and that is very demanding". *Comunero*s usually hold assemblies at night, after work, or on Saturdays, and they are usually part of the subcommittees that oversee a specific issue or entity among the organization. Therefore, the responsibilities linked to being a *comunero* are very time-consuming, and women in the community tend to put more value in spending time with their children than men. This has become a barrier to a greater participation of women in the community and the organization's decision-making process.

At an operative level, workers are encouraged to make suggestions, observations, or complaints. The factory manager assistant argues that managers invite employees to express any comments they may have regarding work issues: "we are open to any comments; the supervisor is the first instance to make any suggestion, if he or she does nothing, the office is always open, they can come up and tell us". A former UCFAS' accountant remembers that she always asked employees about the best way to solve a problem: "workers have a lot of knowledge, I used to go and ask them how they would solve this or that, and many times it worked. I talked to them and then I made my own conclusions". A citizen from Ixtlán that works at STF admits that there is freedom to express any concern regarding work: "workers can say anything without expecting a reprimand, but we are not used to expressing our opinions directly or how we feel".

Economic dimension

Ixtlán Group has offered residents of Ixtlán the opportunity to have a formal job with every benefit mandated by law, which provides certain economic stability for the families in the community. Every worker has social security, housing credit, a pension, paid vacations and a Christmas bonus. Social benefits are extremely rare in this region, as work is usually informal or business owners simply do not register their worker on the national security system (IMSS). In the same sense, *comuneros* are entitled to a small annual dividend, a pension when they reach the age of 60 years old, and access to credit. Additionally, there are no-interest loans which every employee has the right to take for emergencies or planned activities. This benefit constitutes an empowering tool, as employees can finance productive projects to complement their income. They also constitute a source of economic relief in case of emergencies or when celebrating a festivity, like a wedding or a baptism. For example, a former worker of the organization built a small hotel with 10 rooms, which she financed with the loan provided by the organization. Now she has an Internet café and a grocery store on the main floor, and she was planning to build more rooms, as the economic activity in Ixtlán is increasing and so does the demand for lodging. As the community has opened to a more global environment, some female workers have invested their no-interest loans to open restaurants, stationer's shops, grocery stores, or for improving their homes (building more rooms to rent or for the children). The SOFOM also provides productive micro-lending to workers and the general community. The interest rate is 2% per month[2], and seeks to promote commercial ventures and job creation by lowering the cost of capital and building trust networks. The scheme has proven successfully since the SOFOM reported a historic default rate of less than 1%. Ixtlán Group tries also to promote local entrepreneurs by buying most of its inputs from local suppliers. The manager of UCFAS commented: "If the money stays in the community, I believe it will strengthen the economy and generate more ventures and jobs".

Entrepreneurial activity in the community is more intuitive for women than men. One member of the community commented that women have a better understanding of the community's needs, so they may be more prone to satisfy those needs with new enterprises. The SOFOM´s general manager, a woman in her 30s, expects they can increase the available resources in the near future so credit can expand to more citizens and people from other communities: "There are a lot of pending applications for productive credit, hopefully there will be even more resources in the future." New ventures have foster local development by generating more jobs, competition, innovative products by seeking differentiation; in sum, a stronger, fertile economy that has become attractive for global actors seeking to open new markets and gain first mover advantage by promoting local ties.

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[2] A study of the Inter-American Development Bank established that, on average, microcredits in Mexico have an interest rate around 74% annually, the highest in Latin America (Granados, 2014).

Ixtlán Group has the implicit policy of buying every input from local suppliers if available. The people in charge of purchasing inputs in Ecoturixtlan comments: "*I was telling the new manager that we usually buy all the provisions from small local business… so the money stays in the community and triggers further development*". Ixtlán Group has become the main client of many local businesses, allowing them to survive. As the economy grew in size, local business diversified and consolidated, building a stronger local economy.

Women have become specially benefited with the economic empowerment of the employees. They have gained more independence and economic certainty, since one of the policies of the organization is not firing a single worker. One of the managers of the organization analyzes this policy: "*if the objective of the organization is creating jobs to increase people´s wellbeing, it makes no sense to fire a person*". Although this policy may deter productivity, since a worker cannot be fired no matter what he or she does, the opposite has happened in the organization. The policy has increased the workers' level of commitment with their job, especially women. One of the female workers at the sawmill states: "*If we don´t do our job properly, this organization can go bankrupt, and if that happens, what are we supposed to do? Where can women find jobs around here? Nowhere*" The only alternatives they had in the past were to migrate to a city to work as household servants, or try to illegally cross the border with the United States searching for a distant relative that could help them find a job. As a result of the economic empowerment triggered by the organization, women are now the main economic provider in 211 of the 675 households in the community (INEGI, 2010), one of the highest percentages in the State.

Political dimension

Political empowerment (social justice and a respectful treatment of citizens with equal rights) is promoted by giving equal opportunities to women and young, inexperienced people. Women are given the same salaries as men, and they constitute almost one-third of the total employees. Besides, three out of eight enterprises are led by women. Most women are thankful to have the opportunity to work and support their families, they are aware that if Ixtlán Group had not been created, they probably would not have had the chance to work somewhere else. One of them, the general manager of the SOFOM, states: "*it's challenging and allows me flexibility in the decision- making process. The SOFOM is just starting, so managing a project like this one can be very rewarding*".   Indigenous women in that region have traditionally performed activities within their households, such as raising children and cooking. This organizational policy of equality among men and women has translated not only into many households that are led by women, but also into a community where women are more independent and more participatory in politics and social events. Ixtlán Group is also well-known for giving job opportunities to young people and women. Four of the enterprises of the group are managed by people under

the age of 40 years old, one man and three women. Ecoturixtlán's former manager, who is in his early thirties, says that when people from other communities visit Ixtlán, they ask why there are so many young people in managerial positions, and he answers: "*they are people from the community, how are they supposed to gain experience if we [Ixtlán Group] do not give them the opportunity to work?*"

Ixtlán Group has developed particular mechanisms to empower its stakeholders; one of the most visible is a policy of continued training and opportunities for promotion. There are countless stories within the enterprises about workers who have been promoted to better positions due to their effort and ability to learn. The gas station's general manager explains that she began working there seven years ago as an accountant assistant. She remembers that many *comuneros* opposed her being offered a higher position because she had only finished high school, but they gave her the opportunity anyway. She now has two years as head of the gas station and she has turned it into one of the most profitable entities. She also comments that if this organization had not existed, she probably would have migrated to New Jersey, where her sisters work as housekeeper. Similarly, UCFAS' human resources assistant recalls that she was assigned to a very demanding area initially, managers used to send new workers to that area in order to test them. She was then moved to the varnishing and polishing areas, which demand less physical effort. Later on, she was promoted to an administrative position at the sawmill, where she manages the raw materials inventory. Finally, she achieved a second promotion that led her to her current job.

Equal gender opportunities are also promoted by the Ixtlán Group. According to the Forest Management Program (1993-2003) in the early nineties 12% of the employees were women. At the time of the study, as table 2 indicates, Ixtlán Group had 217 employees, of which women account for 28%. A former female worker, who experienced firsthand the inclusion of more women in the organization, comments about how women started gaining job opportunities:

"*When I started working (in 1986) I noticed that managerial positions were exclusively for men. Two facts that played against me were that I did not study accounting and I was a woman. Therefore, when I got involved in administrative issues and was left in charge of the organization when the manager traveled, employees did not want to receive orders from a woman… as time went by and more women started working at the enterprises, especially in the sawmill, and men realized women can also do the job, more and more started working at Ixtlán Group*".

A former manager of the sawmill remembered that a few years ago some male workers used to protest because women got the same wage as them. So each time this happened, he organized two teams (men vs. women) to measure

productivity throughout the day. He commented: "every time women beat men's team in productivity, they wanted to prove themselves as capable as men, and they achieved it every time, leaving protests unfounded".

Although women presence has increased in Ixtlán Group, around 70 jobs are kept exclusively for men due to their nature. The lack of technology in timber extraction and forest management causes the related jobs (most of them in STF and UNFOSTI) to be physically demanding: therefore, the community has reserved these tasks exclusively for men. Additionally, these jobs demand workers to stay at least two week nights at the forest, since the areas of extraction and conservation are sometimes located deep into the woods. This situation also keeps women from taking these jobs, because they have to take care of their children, and many of them are single mothers.

Environmental dimension

Since the creation of UCFAS in 1988, *comuneros* have democratically determined every issue related to the environment: forest exploitation, forest conservation, water conservation, the use of fertilizers, how to combat fires, protected areas, urban zones, and areas destined to agriculture and rising cattle. Ixtlán Group is the main instrument through which *comunero*s perform such activities, mainly those related directly to the forest. In this sense, Orozco-Quintero & Berkes (2010) argue that indigenous social enterprises seem to be serving an empowerment goal, as they gain control of their natural resources through these enterprises to build local economies under local political control.

Ixtlán Group organizes diverse activities to promote environmental education among the community. Women have a special role in these events since they are encouraged to bring their children to activities of reforestation and cleaning of small rivers near the community. The president of the CBC comments: "*the community needs to know how we manage the forest sustainably; they can see the results in the reforested areas. This should be done especially with children, since what we do is mainly for them, the future generations*". In this sense, Ixtlán Group's operations and forest management activities are certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). The project leader of the certification's process narrates that obtaining the distinction was somehow easy, since most of the requirements were already covered by the organization. She believes that Ixtlán Group has a natural tendency towards environmentally responsible operations. For this reason, almost a third of the profits are reinvested in the forest (path maintenance, reforestation, forest rangers, fire brigades, etc.).

Cultural dimension

Many of the barriers that women face lie ingrained in cultural norms (Nussbaum, 1995). In cultures characterized as male-dominated ("machismo culture"), women feel these cultural pressures and they have become accustomed to being

treated as inferior to men. The creation of Ixtlán Group and the development it has promoted are contributing to a change in the community's lifestyle that is generally perceived as satisfactory (e.g. gender equality) but also challenges its traditions. Ecoturixtlán's former manager notices: "*some things get lost as economic development intensifies, people have access to employment and suddenly you can go and study a career in Oaxaca City; children now have cellular phones and Internet.*" The increasing trade with foreign entities has led some people in the community to realize that they need to be prepared for global activities. For example, children now learn English at school instead of Zapotec. "*Our language is destined to become extinct*", adds an employee.

Most employees at Ixtlán Group are supportive with the enterprises, a cultural value that seems to be well developed in Ixtlán. An UCFAS worker expresses proudly that when she notices that there is a lot of work in the factory, she prefers to postpone her vacations until it's a more convenient time for the enterprise: "*I like to help very much… I like my job, I have vacations scheduled in March but I will not take them because we still have work to do.*" In this sense, at least for the people from Ixtlán, working at Ixtlán Group is also a form of contributing to the community, a way of building a stronger society. The director of the legal department at UCFAS believes that his parents taught him the values that made him want to contribute to the community; that is why he decided to come back after college and take a job at Ixtlán Group.

The receptionist of Ecoturixtlán, one of Ixtlán Group's enterprises, who once lived in a nearby community located in the Mixes region, explained the differences in "machismo" culture: "*Over there [Mixes region], people tell female children to quit school, to learn how to cook, stuff like that… but here [Ixtlán] there is not a "machismo*" culture, maybe a little bit… maybe that is because some people practice different religions or that is just the culture". According to the older people in the community, Ixtlán has evolved from a male-dominated culture into a more gender-equal society. Ixtlán Group played an important part in the new role women have achieved in the community. Women are no longer afraid or cultural constraints to participate in economic and political activities. They economically withstand almost one third of the households of the community. They actively start new ventures financed by no-interest loans provided by Ixtlán Group or by the SOFOM, which charges a flat 2% percent interest per month. Women can be single mothers and not be stigmatized, as it usually happens in neighboring communities.

The evidence presented regarding women empowerment has transformed their role in the community; which will transform her status in the future. Most of the interviewers believe that women will play an essential part in the future of Ixtlán Group, some even think mostly women will lead the organization in the years to come. One of the examples that make them believe in such a scenario is Guadalupe, who works at STF. She is a recently-graduated forest engineer who studied in a newly-created state university campus at Ixtlán. She is mainly focused on finding alternative productive

projects for Ixtlán Group with the main purpose of taking pressure off the forest. She is currently developing a project to determine the forest's potential to absorb CO_2 according to the guidelines provided by the United Nations Collaborative Program on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries. This program provides resources to developing countries for building capacities to reduce emissions, and she is analyzing how to obtain resources from this program once STF has met all the requirements. She also leads a project funded by the National Forest Council (CONAFOR) with the objective of determining what fungal species can be commercially exploited by the entity. If any of these projects become viable in the future, she may be leading a new enterprise. She is currently studying a master degree on sustainable forest management in Oaxaca City during the weekends. Ixtlán Group also let her take some classes on weekdays; she may become the first employee in the organization with a master's degree.

From local to "glocal" development

One of the first steps towards competing globally was increasing productivity, so the forest-related entities took actions to increase differentiation, expertise, and their technology level. UCFAS and UNFOSTI obtained the FSC certification, an internationally renowned differentiator that has granted them access to new markets and higher profit margins. The largest project included the building of a new, high-tech sawmill. To this end, the project included a long-term alliance with the technology supplier, a Spanish firm. Additionally, a group of managers traveled to Brazil, sponsored by a federal trust that promotes primary activities, in order to explore the methods employed by Brazilian forest enterprises. Finally, the greenhouse was renewed with high-tech Swedish equipment, increasing its productive capacity to growing half a million pine trees simultaneously. These allowed Ixtlán Group to achieve, in 2012, a complete reforestation of its annual logging. Similarly, in 2012 UCFAS was building a new polishing and painting plant in a community nearby Oaxaca City. Weather conditions are not optimal in Ixtlán for these activities, so the assembly approved to move this plant to that region. Managers are using the same approach initially taken in Ixtlán, building strong ties with the local community, to assure the creation of shared value. These actions for increasing productivity have taken a toll on the numbers of jobs created, which have not grown in the last five years. But managers and *comuneros* are convinced that, in order to compete globally, they need to build better quality products with fewer resources.

Other strategy with global implications is the scalability of the business model. Ixtlán Group is trying to replicate its business model in other Mexican communities by organizing community to community seminars. Indigenous communities travel to Ixtlán for a week to learn how the organization works, how it is managed, and how they can start their own community-based enterprise. The Ministry of Economy covers all the expenses, hoping that this successful organization can be replicated in every region. The ultimate goal for Ixtlán Group is to find partners that will provide it

with more bargaining power and economies of scale to enter international markets. A manager responsible for the trading area explains the idea: "*We want to export our fine furniture to developed countries where they pay extra for green, sustainable products made by indigenous social entities.*" Ixtlán Group has made partnerships with two nearby communities to achieve the scale that some clients demand, such as the State government. The managers believe that, in order to compete globally, they need to find more partners and collaborate. It's even better if those partners are communities with similar interests and purpose.

At the community level, the statistics show a remarkable reduction of poverty rates. In 1990, Ixtlán had the highest level of marginalization in the scale made by the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development (CONEVAL). In the most recent study, taken in 2010, the marginalization level was categorized as "very low", the lowest category in the index scale (CONEVAL, 2010a). At a household or individual level, living conditions in the community are higher than the national average. In 2010, 74% of people in the community had social security, while the national average was 39%. At a household level, 99% of them had access to electricity, clean water and drainage, which only occurs in 79% of Mexican households (CONEVAL, 2010b). Furthermore, 93% of the households have at least one television, 39% have a car, 34% have at least one computer and 18% have Internet, all of these indicators are above national average (INEGI, 2010). José, who has a small pension from his years working at Ixtlan Group, mentions: "*people from other communities come here because we pay better wages, in their communities they are paid 25 pesos a day [~2 USD], while they can earn 200 pesos here at Ixtlán [~16 USD].*" The increase in wellbeing has translated into a stronger, larger economy that is starting to be attractive for foreign firms.

Retail stores and other businesses are starting to open branches at Ixtlán, fostering the integration of the community to global tendencies. One of these tendencies is banking; national and international banks have recently started operations in the community. They are introducing financial services that were unknown by the inhabitants until recently. Most of the people have never had a banking account, a debit card, or even a savings account. One of the main promoters of banking is Ixtlán Group, which now pays most of its payroll through electronic transfers to a savings account. "This is just the beginning" says the head of the human resources department at UCFAS, "through your savings account you can obtain a great portfolio of financial instruments, bringing more benefits to the employee." Foreign firms are realizing that Ixtlán's economy has grown substantially in the last decade and may keep growing steady. Even more, they have come to understand that, in order to succeed in indigenous communities, the main strategy should focus in building win-win relationships with local agents."

Discussion and conclusion

Social entrepreneurship theory (Santos, 2012) helps to explain the dynamics that originated this organization and its main attributes. Evidence suggests that a male-dominated culture in this indigenous community have initially deterred the democratic and political empowerment of women, but different mechanisms are changing this situation. Political and managerial decisions are still mostly taken by men; nonetheless, in 2012 three out of eight entities were led by women who climb the corporate ladder and prove to be efficient workers. The role of women in assemblies and committees is incipient but rapidly growing; and gender-equality policies in the organization are also starting to provide women equal ground to participate in decision making. Further, economic empowerment has triggered female wellbeing and local development. The main mechanisms for this achievement are job stability, low-interest microcredits, social benefits, and entrepreneurial activity. The creation of the social enterprise has allowed the community to prosper and increase its general wellbeing. Women have particularly benefited since the organization has given them the opportunity to work, empowering them to create micro-enterprises and changing the prevailing culture towards a more equalitarian society. Increasing control of their source of income has improved women's willingness to participate in political and managerial decision-making, inspiring more women in the community to work at the organization.

Ixtlán has turned from a net exporter to a net importer of labor, with people from nearby communities coming every day to Ixtlán to work. Some stay for the week and return home on weekends. Around 20% of Ixtlán's total workers are from other communities, even from Oaxaca City and other Mexican states. The goods and services that these people demand, along with those that frequently visit the community for diverse commercial activities, have helped Ixtlán become the most prosperous community in the region and its main trading center. The economic boom has awaken the interest of foreign firms wanting to participate in this promising market with the hope of gaining new clients and the advantages to be first movers. Ixtlán Group, once it acted locally, strengthening the economy and creating jobs, is now taking actions to act globally. This social enterprise is helping other communities to replicate its business model so it can find partners to export fine furniture; it is also moving part of the production to other region to improve quality; and it has developed informal partnerships with foreign suppliers to increase productivity.

This paper contributes to the extension of social entrepreneurship literature from a gender perspective, exploring the mechanisms that allow women to succeed in highly marginalized indigenous communities. It also illustrates how private entities, such as social enterprises, can foster local development and contribute to supersede poverty, marginalization and emigration. This case also shows a series of opportunities for governmental action to help these entities act globally, replicate successful business models, and promote Ixtlán's story of success as inspiration for other communities that are facing similar social exclusion and are immersed in activities that add little value to the economy.

Although "glocal" cases mainly focus on corporations that combine large scale operations with local development around their own branches and subsidiaries, this case shows how an indigenous social enterprise in a highly marginalized context can trigger local development and build strong local relations in order to take its operations to different contexts under the same formula. At the same time, Ixtlán Group has been the main actor in building a more open, strong community that is starting to participate in the global economy.

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