UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment
Case Study Collection*

Case Study Overview

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<th>Case Study Title</th>
<th>Fortalecimiento de Mujeres Emprendedoras (Strengthening of Women Entrepreneurs)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Implemented by</td>
<td>Vital Voices Costa Rica</td>
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<td>Funded by</td>
<td>Coca Cola Corporation in alliance with the Coca Cola FEMSA distribution systems.</td>
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<td>Location</td>
<td>4/7 provinces in Costa Rica: San José, Cartago, Heredia and Alajuela</td>
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<td>Focus Areas</td>
<td>Women’s entrepreneurship</td>
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<td>Budget</td>
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Abstract

In Costa Rica the income gap is documented at an 18.5% with a salary gap of 28% between rural and higher education communities. 30% of women outside of urban communities do not have their own income and many are also the single income in their homes.²

Coca Cola has a goal that by 2020 (with key partnerships from the private sector) they will support 5 million women in their value chain by providing them access to resources, financial services, training, leadership and access to mentors.

The “Fortalecimiento de Mujeres Emprendedoras” project was born in 2012 when Coca Cola along with FEMSA the packaging/distributor for them in Costa Rica proposed to create a plan to drive 100 women who were owners of a small grocery stores or locally called “pulperías”. These “pulperías” were located in 4 out of the 7 provinces in Costa Rica with the purpose of turning their businesses into more established and profitable ones. These women were owners or stores managers whose were already part of the Coca Cola FEMSA distribution system. FEMSA agents recruited these women by attending distribution routes, explaining the project to them and leading women into special sensitization meetings that would provide them with further details.

The commitment of women who joined the project was three months covering leadership, mentoring and economic development.

¹ The budget was allocated as follows: ~26% for Vital Voices (Mentoring); ~62% for Fundes (Economic Training); ~12% For AED (NGO that connects Public/Private alliances).

² Statistics 2010-2011 (CEPAL) Observatorio de Igualdad de Género de América Latina y el Caribe de la Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe.
Vital Voices methodology works based in three pillars:

1- **Knowledge**: With the main purpose to unleash their leadership potential through a process of mentoring/coaching design in learning their strengths through self-discovery, self-esteem and acquiring communication and stress management skills.

2- **Mentoring**: By providing one on one mentorship. This process starts with a leadership test that provides Vital Voices with the obstacles that need to be addressed by the mentee, and is tested again at the end of the process in order to measure the mentee’s advancement. This was considered one of the key success elements on this project. Actually this project won the American Chamber of Commerce Award that year because the mentoring effects were acknowledged.

3- **Networks**: Providing women with a structure to share their knowledge among peers and informing them of what is available in the business sector.

The trainings provided to them to enhance their knowledge were:

- **Leadership skills workshop** (4 hours): This includes training on self-knowledge, how to be proactive, have a personal vision, execute to that vision and seek mutual benefits for win/win agreements.

- **Communication skills and stress management** (6 hours): Learning listening skills, effective communication to drive empathy on how we relate to others and multiple techniques to lower stress levels.

- **Mentoring Workshop** (4 hours): Training on basic mentoring techniques.

- **Business skills** (~ 16 hours of class + 20hrs per group for on site visits): Class trainings on: Customer Service, Basic Administration, Merchandising and Family Economy

**Mentoring Process**: Mentoring was provided by having one mentor for each woman from the “Pulperías” and creating a personal development plan to evolve over 8 weeks with weekly one hour sessions.

Key partners were: FEMSA who recruited the women, “AED” the NGO of the private sector who promotes Sustainability through Corporate Social Responsibility and works with public/private alliances among cross sectors to support the program structure and plans. “FUNDES” a consultant company was in charge of the economic training. This consultant company specializes in developing corporate and government programs that seek to generate efficiencies, profitability, welfare and innovation throughout supply chains, economic sectors and other items that affect micro, small and medium businesses.
Problems Being Addressed

Female owners of these small “pulperías” were identified facing multiple gender challenges that block them from further economic expansion. These were lack of knowledge in their inventory management and at times a lack of organization on the already existing sales. This was addressed by providing them with training and FUNDES also made site visits to provide with specialized improvement plans.

The low educational levels generated challenges and were addressed in the way the methodology was shared, since it was simplified for the audience. These women encountered challenges in attending the trainings because they had double shifts where on top of the work shift they needed to go home and take care of children and sometimes the elderly. Many of the women that were part of the beneficiaries of the program were single mothers financially in charge of their households, child care was then provided to facilitate their attendance. Low self-esteem was observed to also be a barrier that was addressed by them in the mentoring sessions where many of them established personal goals to improve communication, self-esteem and other items.

The small grocery stores or “pulperías” were also located in regions of low-income areas where specific policies to help them have places to leave their children or to care for the elderly were not available.

Approach and Implementation

The problems were addressed in 5 phases, having multiple players partner for their success:

**Phase 1: Program Integration:** Women were taken to sensitization sessions to educate them on how they would benefit from the trainings and try and motivate them. They were provided with the optional voluntary decision to join the program. A generic line base was defined at this time with clear indicators. **Key challenge:** the economic line base was unclear from Coca Cola at the beginning and it was overcome by defining on how success would be measured. Here is where all key partners were involved: FEMSA for finding the women, AED for being the liaison between public and private entities and supporting project structure, Vital Voices for providing the leadership and mentorship trainings and finally FUNDES for the economic training and site visits. **Key challenge:** Some of the economic training required simplification due to some of the available educational levels. Initially the program was designed for 100 women but due to various family reasons, 90 of them finally completed the process.

**Phase 2: Initial diagnosis** of leadership and business gaps, Individual diagnosis and action plans were created for these small grocery stores. **Key challenges:** The forecasted mentorship time allocation was identified as an issue to take place in the small grocery stores since the women had constant visitors and also received deliveries. Mentorship sessions were therefore coordinated at a hotel.

**Phase 3: Training:** Training knowledge was transferred in the areas of: Workshops provided in Leadership, Stress Management, Mentoring and also through eight weeks of one on one mentoring sessions. The training also involved FUNDES with economic business value. **Key challenges:** Trainings were modified for transmitting educational economic concepts in order to be simplified since some women did not have a high educational level. There was also the challenge of women attending the sessions since sometimes they were caught up with the business or had to attend child or elderly care. Child care facilities were coordinated for those who required it.
Phase 4: Installation of key Business Practices: Here is where changes in leadership and business management changes reflect. The owners needed to apply what they learned and also drive action plans. Besides the workshops offered by FUNDES they also acted as consultants by visiting the “Pulperías” and helping them address strategic and tactical plans. Key challenges: Through the initial phase of the process some women required to open time to communicate changes to their family or staff or generate changes in their schedule. By the end of the program these issues had been addressed with the mentorship and the women got more organized.

Size, duration, and costs of program:

- 3 Groups of 33 women were managed at one time over a three-month period.
- Vital Voices charged ~ $26,000 for the following trainings which they provided three times, once for each group:
  - Leadership Skills workshop (4 hours)
  - Communication Skills and Stress Management (6 hours)
  - Mentoring basics (4 hours)
  - Eight weeks of one hour one on one mentoring sessions
- Fundes charged ~$62,000 for training and on site visits to implement learnings
  - Four training topics (4 hours per training): Customer Service, Basic Administration, Merchandising and Family Economy
  - Visits to the small “pulperías” to review how to implement the topics seen in the sessions (2-3 hour runs every 15 days) over the course of the training
  - Length of time to complete: Twelve weeks where the first eight weeks ran in parallel with Vital Voices
- AED charged ~ $12,000 for the coordination of key partners and program structure

Key partnerships: AED, FUNDES, Coca Cola (FEMSA), Vital Voices

Results

Concrete quantitative results measured in the small “grocery markets” or local “pulperías” can be measured through their overall average sales reflecting:

- 23% sales increase
- 24% increase in their profit margins
- 10% decrease in their operative expenses
- 20% increase in leadership competencies

Changes that came about as a result of the initiative:

Leadership test results showed a 20% overall increase from the initial baseline to the end of the program on average for all mentee women. The increase reflected that they had improved in their decisions or views in the categories of: Choice, Vision, Integrity and Execution and Mutual Benefit. Some examples of the initial and post survey is how the mentee chooses to see the future: If they are able to see it and plan, if it looks better or worse or if they cannot think of the future since they are so overwhelmed. Another example is in mutual benefit if the participants see that they are always losing, obtaining a consensus for mutual benefit or if they always want to win.
Mentees evaluated their mentors with a 94% as being excellent or very good. The survey results after the mentorship programs listed that their biggest improvements were in Motivations and Positivity. This includes being more confident, expressive and having improved relationships. They also provided the following results:

1) Top 5 improvements they saw were: Work motivation, Leadership, Relationship Skills, Ability to accomplish goals, Innovation.
2) Top improvements they obtained in their small grocery stores were listed as: Sales improvement, Innovation in the company, increasing the number of clients, increasing financial gains for the company.
3) Top four personal competencies they noticed that improved were: Self-esteem, establishing personal goals for both life and work; Effective use of time (Time for me, time off my routine); Relationship management (Family, friends and personal situations).

Who benefited from this initiative and how they benefited: Female owners or small grocery market store managers were the main beneficiaries from these initiatives, however their direct family was influenced through and increase in sales as well as their family through an increase in leadership and communication skills.

Potential for replicating/ scaling up or replicating this initiative: To replicate in Costa Rica with available budget will be a simple process. The scalability would be limited only to find one on one mentors for a larger group of people. However one could train mentors with an alternate methodology to be able to work with 4-6 women at a time which would make it easier to reach a larger group. The economic trainings are available and would require to be analyzed per region. All the methodologies used in this project are systematized and available in each organization.

Links for Further Information
- Alexandra Kissling  akissling@vitalnetwork.org; Plaza Tempo, Lobby B Escazú, Costa Rica
- Published studies where in relation to this case study:
  o http://www.comunicarseweb.com.ar/biblioteca/fortalecimiento-de-mujeres-empresarias-de-la-cadena-de-valor-de-coca-cola
  o http://www.femsa.com/es/countries/costa-rica

*Disclaimer: The case studies are written by implementing organizations. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Panel members.*