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BLOG

Partnerships between the public, private and civil society sectors are key to promoting women's democratic participation

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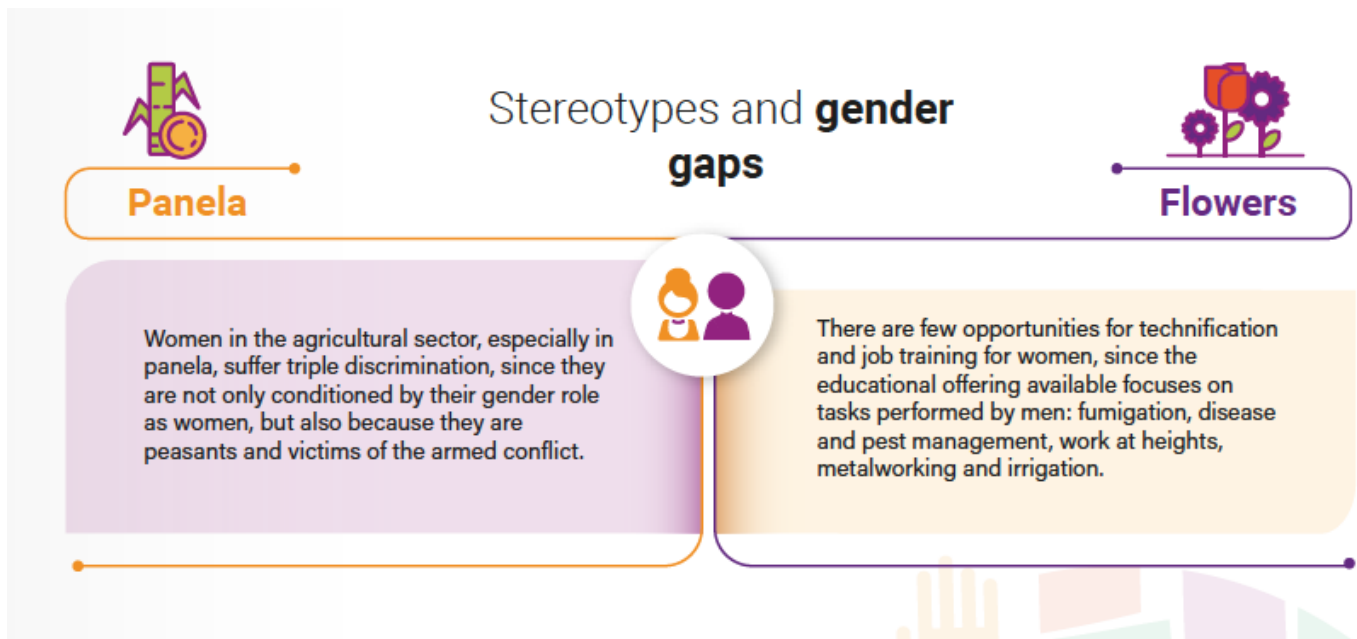


Liz Briggite, a woman worker of the cut flower sector who benefited from the "A las Flores en Bici" initiative developed between the private and public sectors and the Vamos Tejiendo project.

On International Democracy Day, we're highlighting the importance of recognizing and overcoming the barriers women face to equal political and social participation in Colombia.

It was less than 70 years ago that Colombian women gained the right to vote. Despite advances, Colombian women still currently face challenges to civic engagement and non-voting forms of political participation. Multiple issues prevent women from fully exercising their citizenship, some of which have become more acute in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Vamos Tejiendo project, implemented by Pact and funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, aims to promote decent work and economic autonomy for women in the flower and panela value chains in Colombia. While the cut flower sector is formal and the panela sector is informal, the women in the project's four target municipalities are facing similar situations: insufficient income, domestic and sexual violence, economic abuse (especially nonpayment of child support) and unwanted pregnancies. In addition, they have difficulty accessing security and justice services, and a low level of trust in public institutions.



During 2020 and 2021, the project carried out a **pre-situational analysis** to comprehensively understand the factors that influence the marked gender gaps between men and women in these agricultural sectors. Women who participated in the analysis said that the relationship with public authorities could be complicated and that they were skeptical of the effectiveness of their interventions, especially those related to access to justice.

So-called "women's issues" are often given lower priority on the public agenda because in some institutional spaces, discrimination on the basis of sex is not recognized. Further, often women do not have the time, knowledge or capacity to associate and organize themselves in a way that allows them to directly influence public decisions. The care crisis and the increase in women's unpaid workload during the pandemic are some of the many factors that keep women from participating in public economic and democratic spaces.

The Vamos Tejiendo project recognizes that women's participation in the public sphere is fundamental for the full exercise of their rights and, at the same time, is aware of the need to generate changes in the environment for women and societies to thrive. Joint efforts between civil society, the state and the private sector are crucial to guarantee women's democratic participation.

UNDERSTANDING THE GENDER GAPS

The cut flower sector in Colombia generates approximately 104,000 direct, formal jobs, especially for women heads of households, and close to 90,000 indirect jobs, making it an essential sector in rural areas. Many vulnerable families depend on the sector for their livelihoods. Colombia is the second largest panels, or raw sugar, producer in the world, and the largest in Latin America, responsible for close to 14.9% of the world's total production.

The **pre-situational analysis** revealed situations such as the "double shift" for women, caused by the overload of unpaid care work, the normalization of gender-based violence, the few opportunities for women in economic and labor terms, and the gaps in access to formal education.

The study identified economic inequality as the main factor that leaves women dependent on their partners, often causing them to remaining in violent settings for economic security. For this reason, women consider it important that projects provide improved access to economic opportunities.



The Vamos Tejiendo strategy proposes a governance model in which women and girls, local, departmental and national governments, civil society, and the private sector recognize their shared responsibility to mitigate gender inequalities and partner to achieve a shared goal: women's economic autonomy. If all stakeholders are aware of their co-responsibility in guaranteeing women's rights and work together to promote gender equality, women will not only gain economic autonomy but they will be able to fully exercise their citizenship and basic freedoms.

The project seeks to help women and adolescent girls grow their knowledge and skills while supporting private and public sector efforts to improve institutional services and working conditions. The work at all levels—communities, companies and governments—will support women and adolescent girls in attaining economic autonomy and will contribute to creating environments in which the risks of child labor, forced labor and other labor rights violations are reduced.

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