



Research Article

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Empowerment of Women in Rural Populations Through a Social Responsibility Program

Ana Elizabeth Paredes Morales

Mabel Ysabel Otiniano León

Tatiana Isabel Álvarez Becerra

Fausta Elizabeth Alburuqueque Arana

Pablo Valentino Aguilar Chávez

Emma Verónica Ramos Farroñán

Universidad Cesar Vallejo branch Chepen,
North Pan-American Highway Km 695,
Chepen, Peru

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Abstract

The aim of the research was to work on the empowerment of women in rural populations through a University Social Responsibility Program applied by a private university located in the northern part of Peru. A quantitative study of quasi-experimental design with pre-test and post-test was carried out in a single group, where 35 women participated between 18 and 65 years of age from the rural areas of the provinces of Chepen and Pacasmayo. The "T Student" statistical test was used and the results show that before the application of the USR program, 89% of women reached a medium level of empowerment and 11% a high level, and after the application of the USR Program the 43% achieved a medium level and 57% a high level. It was concluded that the empowerment of women improved with the application of the USR Program regarding the dimensions of participation, recklessness, independence, equality, social satisfaction and security, as well as with the management of computer tools; contributing to the improvement of the quality of life of women, the role of leadership and the achievement of social justice. It was also determined that the economic, political.

Keywords: Empowerment of women, Equality, Security, Participation, University Social Responsibility Program, Rural development

1. Introduction

The empowerment of women, a term that was born at the IV World Conference on Women in Beijing (Beijing, 1995); involves the autonomy of women and the recognition of their contributions in the development of communities; it implies their active participation in all sectors and levels of economic

activity to build strong economies, just and equitable societies; achieve the objectives of development, sustainability and human rights, and improve the quality of life of families. Likewise, the empowerment of women is key to development, considering that by participating under equal conditions in all areas, including decision-making and access to power, they are essential to achieve peace, equality and development (Cediel *et al.*, 2017a).

On the other hand, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, approved by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 establishes a set of objectives related to the eradication of extreme poverty, the reduction of inequality, economic growth, among others. Goal 5, gender equality, proposes to end discrimination against women and girls, eliminate violence, trafficking and sexual exploitation, ensure women's participation and equal opportunities, rights to economic resources, improve the use of information and communication technology, to promote the empowerment of women (Sanhueza *et al.*, 2021). Regarding gender inequality in health, empowerment and labor market indicators, they have been decreasing from 2013 to 2020 (Pacukaj, 2020).

In the United States, entrepreneurship is considered a means to address poverty, due to the generation of economic income that strengthens the economically active society. (Welsh *et al.*, 2023a). In Zambia, the economic restructuring of 1993 resulted in the collapse of publicly funded rural finance enterprises, affecting women's economic development and poverty reduction in low-income rural households. (Mukendi and Manda, 2022a).

In Colombia, rural women generate their own income and have control over it, since they decide its destination and use, which is reflected in the opportunities for women's empowerment as managers to achieve the SDGs: economic growth, better nutrition, greater access to education and entrepreneurship that they generate for their family and community (Cediel *et al.*, 2017b). Likewise, their entrepreneurial capacity is aimed at reducing unemployment, increasing innovation, improving competitiveness and favoring gender equality; assuming positions of power and making decisions (Ordoñez *et al.*, 2021a). In addition, associative participation, the strengthening of capacities for decision-making in rural women and productive projects can improve the family economy, food, health and nutrition. (Suárez *et al.*, 2018a).

Moreover, in Mexico, women who participate in government training programs enter into a process of empowerment and personal growth; generating her own economic income, self-confidence and security when making decisions, generating social and economic value (Robinson-Trápaga *et al.*, 2019a). On the other hand, the economic empowerment of women from their perceptions, challenges and obstacles indicates a positive reaction in Saudi Arabia with a view to 2030. This implies substantial opportunities for economic empowerment that considers greater employment, a greater number of women leaders, gender equality in social security policies, facilities for small and medium-sized companies (Noha *et al.*, 2022).

In Peru, according to the National Institute of Statistics and Informatics (INEI), there are 16 million 640 thousand women, who make up 50.4% of the total population. The 31.3% of the rural population is poor, of which 35.9% of households in poverty were led by women, 28% have Internet access, 91.9% have a cell phone, 15.1% are illiterate and 44.3% de women constitute the Economically Active Population (EAP) (INEI, 2022). These statistical data show the presence of gender gaps and inequalities that limit the development and empowerment of women in rural areas.

The empowerment of women is associated with gender equality, 68% of companies worldwide assume this commitment; according to the report Women's Empowerment and Business: 2020 Trends and Opportunities of the United Nations Organization. Sima Bous, executive director of UN Women, affirmed that hunger and insecurity increase inequality and gender discrimination, and warns that there are only a few years left until 2030 and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, since significant progress has not yet been achieved.

Thus, 41 countries worked on gender-related actions; 35,000 women achieved political leadership, 44 countries where 1.6 billion women and girls live approved policies for the economic empowerment of women; 4,357 private companies work on the empowerment of women; 69 countries where 2.7 billion women and girls live, strengthened support for those affected by gender

violence. However, 57 countries representing 2.5 billion women and girls raised discriminatory norms that led to gender violence.(Nations, 2020).

Besides, education is essential to strengthen the behaviors and attitudes of rural women through the implementation of educational programs aimed at savings, financial independence and self-sufficiency (Ebrahimi *et al.*, 2022a). Education also influences fertility and the effects on decision-making regarding it (Samari, 2019a). But, in Indonesia, the training in business initiatives, marketing and logistics, added to the support of the family in the management of social networks, makes the woman seek to obtain less income than her spouse, limiting her level of empowerment to maintain family cohesion(Augendra *et al.*, 2016).

In this sense, universities, as Higher Education Institutions, have the main purpose of training professionals committed to society, generating projects that are oriented towards the economic, social and cultural development of the population; in that regard, this research had the participation of a private university located in the northern part of Peru, whose area of intervention was the provinces of Chepen and Pacasmayo; aiming to work on the empowerment of women in rural populations through an USR program. The research had the objective of working on the empowerment of women in rural populations through an USR program. Also, contribute to the goals of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5: ensure participation, equal opportunities for leadership and the use of information and communication technology; through concrete actions that improve the quality of life of women and their society.

2. Literature Review

In some countries, despite the efforts to achieve the empowerment of women, there are limiting situations such as domestic violence considered a serious problem in the hands of the partner or another member of the household, which sets back the fulfillment of the SDGs(Decker *et al.*, 2022a). Three quarters of married women in the 28 countries of Africa disagree with the mistreatment of the wife, which is why the commitment of government agencies is required to generate employment, capacity for decision-making, actions to reduce the abuse and an attitude of social acceptance(Zegeye *et al.*, 2022a).

Violence produces feelings of worthlessness and dehumanization in women, while the support of family and social networks generate feelings of empowerment.(Naghavi *et al.*, 2019a). Pragmatic intervention programs are necessary to eradicate violence, reduce maternal and child mortality, and promote the autonomy and empowerment of women.(Imo *et al.*, 2022a). In addition, gender violence at the couple level presents four types: physical, emotional, sexual and economic abuse; the latter significantly affects the lives of women and their children; and, although economic empowerment programs have been inserted in Puerto Rico, it is important to unify financial education and biopsychosocial support, in order to create protection networks for victims based on economic empowerment(Silva and Vázquez, 2019a). In Mexico, there is the highest rate of violence against women, since they live in genetic oppression while men have supremacy and feel entitled to violate them. Through the State Council for Women and Social Welfare (CEMYBS) a program is being developed with two types of attention, one that prevents and the other that attends; In this sense, the program assumes a large demand from women who want to be in the shelter because they consider it an opportunity to live, free from their aggressors and experience changes in the control of their lives.(Buendía, 2018a).

Regarding the autonomy of women, it is related to decision-making in the home and sexual autonomy is greater, but not in fertility(Forty *et al.*, 2022a). Decision-making on domestic and personal issues at home have a causal effect on the nutrition of 5-year-old children in Colombia, with greater empowerment, malnutrition decreases. The best form of female empowerment is given by the increase in labor participation and the decrease in wage discrimination(Chatterjee and Dubey, 2018a). Likewise, it must be taken into account that economic abuse is accompanied by psychological, physical and sexual abuse.(Silva and Vázquez, 2019b). Also, in the Afar region of Ethiopia, women

have little autonomy in decision-making, lack control over resources, have limited participation in socio-economic practices and experience forced early and child marriage, as a consequence they are exposed to the worst sexual and reproductive health outcomes(Dessalegn *et al.*, 2020a).

Regarding the empowerment of women, power and politics, Rowlands (cited by Rincón *et al.*, 2017) classifies power as: Power over, controlling power; Power to, productive power; Power with, synergy effect and Power from within, inner spiritual force. In this sense, in Italy, the participation of women in the political space has so far focused on gender quotas, which are not always effective and that the double preference vote would be better for gender equality.(Baltrunaite *et al.*, 2019a). On the other hand, in Ecuador positive actions have been incorporated for the inclusion of women in the political arena; however, the true representation of women in elected positions has not been reached, so there is a glass ceiling or social and cultural background that influences the problem. Ecuador continues with the idea that women are less apt to occupy these spaces, preventing their political empowerment (Navarro *et al.*, 2022).

Regarding University Social Responsibility, society challenges higher education institutions and their authorities to generate inclusive communities that allow the full development, interaction and influence of all members in the social, institutional and personal spheres.(Solis-Grant *et al.*, 2023a). However, there are certain USR programs that are not understood by their interest groups.(Gamboa *et al.*, 2022a).

On the other hand, the requirements for national and international accreditation demand that universities comply with quality standards associated with university social responsibility. In public universities, the perception of USR that the educational community has is positive in its dimensions: organizational management, training and social participation; while in the research dimension it is negative; which shows the need to have USR policies(Condori *et al.*, 2022a). In addition, USR is important for institutions in order to obtain a competitive advantage in the market in aspects such as: training, research, management and extension, which allow a better identity, communication and image with their target audience (Cruz-Arango and David, 2022).

In Colombia, there is a lack of implementation of USR policies because there is no methodology on how to do it. USR must be part of the strategic actions of universities and have a professional team in charge of its implementation for the benefit of the institution itself and of society as a whole.(Forero-Jimenez, 2019a). Likewise, USR practices are not being perceived in their full dimension by students, teachers and officials. The university must comply with the training of competent professionals, committed to responsible dynamics to optimize the quality of life of society.(Rubio *et al.*, 2020a).

Additionally, the USR creates connections with non-governmental entities when there are common interests. The USR model in Peru proposes to manage the educational impact, articulating the academic part; the cognitive impact related to research and the social impact that stimulates extension, transfer, labor impact and environmental impact. It is important for the student to build a socially responsible environment so that she can share her experiences.(Lugo and Lucio-Villegas, 2022a). In the same way, it is stated that at the beginning the USR began to be managed by philanthropy that was based on listening to the interest groups and working with them, currently the USR is based on the Sustainable Development Goals(González *et al.*, 2022a).

At present, societies require the responsible and timely intervention of public and private universities, in solving problems detected in the communities and that through viable USR projects can be addressed; in order to reduce gaps and inequalities. Within higher education it is important to include this type of commitment in the following aspects: academic training, socio-environmental linkage, research with a social focus and transformative management; that allow the design of strategies, policies and programs that contribute to the solution of needs in society(Flores-Fernandez *et al.*, 2022). In this sense, the USR allows the dissemination of the values of the universities and thus ensures their economic, environmental and social sustainability, the same one that is committed to the demands of its various interest groups; through training, research and the transfer of knowledge and technology, as well as education for sustainability(Meseguer-Sánchez *et al.*, 2020).

3. Methods and Materials

The research was of an applied type, a quasi-experimental design with pre-test and post-test in a single group; understanding as design the set of strategies that the researcher takes on the type of data to take to guarantee the internal validity of his research. In this design there is researcher intervention, but with minimal control of extraneous variables. (Hurtado de Barrera, 2012). According to Hernandez and Mendoza (2018a) there is a:

Pre-test and post-test design with a single group

G: O₁ X O₂

Where:

G: Group

O₁ and O₂: Unit measurements

X: Program based on USR strategies

Furthermore, the research was of a quantitative approach, since data was collected to test the hypothesis supported by numerical measurement and statistical analysis in order to establish behavior patterns and test theories, it is sequential and evidentiary (Hernández and Mendoza, 2018b).

Regarding the population, Hernández and Mendoza (2018c) consider it as the universe of study of a research on which it is intended to generalize results and it is made up of characteristics that make the subjects well defined from each other, in this case it was made up of 35 women from rural areas, sampling was not used. The selected technique was the survey and as an instrument a test to measure the level of empowerment before and after the application of the University Social Responsibility Program. Empowerment was measured through dimensions such as: participation, recklessness, external influences, independence, equality, social satisfaction, security; the management of computing tools was also included. The instrument was validated by a group of experts obtaining an Aiken V of 86%, and for reliability the Cronbach's alpha method was used, which resulted in a coefficient of 0.835, which indicates that the instrument is highly reliable.

The data was analyzed with descriptive statistics through frequency tables, evidencing the level of empowerment in the pretest and posttest. Regarding inferential statistics, the parametric "T Student" test was performed to measure the effect of the University Social Responsibility Program on the empowerment of women in rural populations.

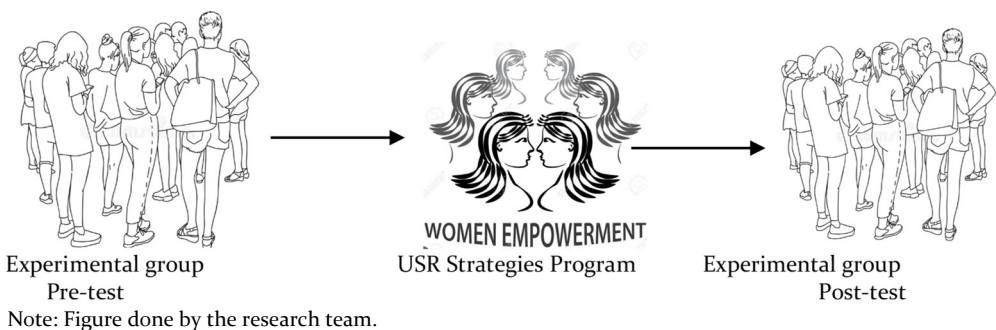


Figure 1: Design with pre-test and post-test

The University Social Responsibility Program for the empowerment of women in rural populations was aimed at women from the provinces of Chepen and Pacasmayo; in total forty-eight hours were spent to develop workshops in the use of computer tools and twelve psychological sessions of three hours each for personal development and empowerment.

Table 1: Activities of the University Social Responsibility Program for the empowerment of women in rural populations

Activities	Duration	Approach
Psychology Workshops		
I am unique	3 hours / week 1	Confidence -Valuation
Freedom! is to live out in fullness.	3 hours / week 2	Tolerance and adaptation
My opinion counts	3 hours / week 3	Personal validation
I want to, I can	3 hours / week 4	Economic and emotional autonomy
Yes, I can.	3 hours / week 5	Economic and emotional autonomy
What do you like about me?	3 hours / week 6	Self-esteem and valuation
We can	3 hours / week 7	Socialization - gender perspective
How do I look? How do they see me?	3 hours /week 8	Self-esteem - recognition
Personal development	3 hours / week 9	Emotional intelligence
I am priceless	3 hours / week 10	Gender equity
Empowering yourself = Daring yourself	3 hours / week 11	Inner power
The graduation of my dreams	3 hours / week 12	Motivation
Computer Tools Workshops		
Microsoft Word Workshop	4 hours / 6 weeks: 24 h	Theoretical - Practical
Microsoft Power Point Workshop	4 hours / 6 weeks: 24 h	Theoretical - Practical

Note: University Social Program Activities developed during 12 weeks.

The University Social Responsibility Program for the empowerment of women in rural areas was aimed at women in the provinces of Chepen and Pacasmayo; eight sessions were developed for the use of computer tools and four psychological sessions for personal development and empowerment.

The University allocated a budget for the expenses of the program, including the roundtrip transportation of the participants from the rural areas to the computer lab. Each participant had a PC and the workshops were developed by a teacher specialized in the subject. In the same way, in the auditorium, personal development sessions aimed at empowering women were carried out by an expert. The development of the program lasted three months and 35 women between 18 and 65 years of age, residing in the provinces of Chepen and Pacasmayo, respectively, participated in the study. The call was made through the Women's Emergency Center in each zone and registration was made through a file where the data and informed consent of the participants were recorded.

4. Results

Table 2: Effect of the application of the University Social Responsibility Program for the empowerment of women in rural populations

Paired differences	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (tailed)
Pre test - Post test	18,257	12,503	-8,639	3. 4	0.00

Note: The significance of the test is at 0.05.

Table 2 shows that the significance value (p value=0.000) is less than 0.05, this means that the score in the phase obtained from the post-test evaluation is significantly higher than the score obtained in the pre-test phase. There is a significant change, because the empowerment measured in the pre-test is low level, then when applying the program with an USR approach, the participants manifest a change in their attitudes and skills, such as self-confidence, which allows them to say that the goal of the program was successful.

Table 3: Level of empowerment of women in rural populations before and after the USR Program

Level	Pre-test		Post-test	
	n°	%	n°	%
Low	0	0%	0	0%
Middle	31	89%	15	43%
High	4	11%	20	57%
Total	35	100%	35	100%

Note: Data obtained by the researchers.

Table 3 shows the level of empowerment in women from rural populations, before the application of the USR program, 89% reached a medium level of empowerment and 11% a high level, and after the application of the program of USR, 43% achieved a medium level and 57% a high level, demonstrating the program's functionality.

Table 4: Effects of the application of the University Social Responsibility Program according to dimensions of the empowerment of women in rural populations

Pretest - Posttest	Paired differences					
	Mean	Deviation	t	df	Sig. tailed	Decision
Participation	1.05	2,838	-2,204	34	0.034	Yes
Recklessness	1.2	4,021	1,766	34	0.006	Yes
Independence	0.229	2,745	0.493	34	0.025	Yes
Equality	1,057	3,067	2,039	34	0.005	Yes
Social satisfaction	0.2	2,386	0.496	34	0.023	Yes
External influences	0.171	2,036	-0.498	34	0.062	No
Security	0.543	2,133	-1,506	34	0.014	Yes
Computing tools	0.334	2,542	-2011	34	0.002	Yes

Note: The significance of the test is at 0.05.

Table 4 shows that significant differences were found at a significance level of 0.05 in almost all dimensions, since they have a significance value of less than 0.05. With the exception of the external influences dimension, which turned out to be insignificant. Significance is being understood that the results are due to the application of the USR program with 95% confidence and that the difference is possibly due to other factors not considered in the study, demonstrating that the USR Program empowered rural women who participated in the research.

5. Discussion

The effect of the application of a USR Program on the empowerment of women in rural populations was evaluated, using the Student's T statistical test, it is evident that there is a significant difference (p value = 0.000) between the post-test score compared to the pre-test. of empowerment. Likewise, in the dimensions of participation, recklessness, independence, equality, social satisfaction, security and management of computer tools, there was a significant effect on the empowerment of women.

These results agree with those obtained by Cediél *et al.* (2017c) who affirm that the empowerment of women improves when there is gender equality in all aspects, including decision-making and access to power; They found that rural Colombian women generate their own salary, they have control over it, making them managers of their economic growth with access to education and entrepreneurship. In this regard, Robinson Trápaga *et al.* (2019b) consider their own income important because it generates greater self-confidence and security in decision-making, likewise for Ordoñez *et al.* (2021b) entrepreneurship reduces unemployment, increases innovation, it develops competitiveness and favors gender equality when women assume positions of power; associativity

and the strengthening of entrepreneurial capacities through productive projects stand out as keys to contributing to the improvement of the family economy. In addition, Ebrahimi *et al.* (2022b) argue that education is essential for the empowerment of women through programs aimed at financial independence and self-sufficiency, to which Suarez *et al.* (2018b) agree that when there is higher income in the home, women can make decisions about food, health and nutrition. In Rwanda, the use of health insurance and the empowerment of women are associated with independence and security in decision-making (Kawuki *et al.*, 2022); however, in Malawi women's autonomy is related to decision-making in the home and sexual autonomy is greater, but not in fertility (Forty *et al.*, 2022b).

Samari (2019b) affirms that education influences fertility and decision-making, also highlights the importance of training in business issues, social networks and family support for empowerment. In Mexico, the woman who participates in government training enters a process of empowerment generating social and economic value, above all, it causes social satisfaction in women by feeling independent and productive; for Walker *et al.* (2022) social connections for health and shared experiences are the most valued supports to encourage healthy behaviors, coinciding with Imo *et al.* (2022b) who affirm that these situations favor compliance with the SDGs; the opposite occurs in Afar Ethiopia where women have limited autonomy and control over resources, producing poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes (Dessalegn *et al.*, 2020b).

In relation to the participation of women in the political space, the results found are consistent with Baltrunaite *et al.* (2019b) who state that in Italy, this is focused on the gender quota but that it is not effective. For Chatterjee and Dubey (2018b) the best form of empowerment is given by the increase in labor participation and the reduction of salary discrimination. In the United States, women's entrepreneurship is considered a means to combat poverty (Welsh *et al.*, 2023b). Likewise, micro credit and cash transfers are important to eradicate hunger and poverty, however, they differ with respect to violence against women (Leite *et al.*, 2019). However, in Zambia the financial economic fall generated crises in rural households, so the empowerment of women and the reduction of poverty were scarce. (Mukendi & Manda, 2022b).

Regarding the external influences dimension, the research showed that there was no significant result since political, social and cultural factors limit the empowerment of women in the political space and in public office; despite the existence of laws in this regard. One of the limitations is domestic violence, according to Decker *et al.* (2022b) they see it as a serious problem. In Mexico, there is the highest rate of violence (Buendía, 2018b); in Africa, 28 countries disagree with family violence (Zegeye *et al.*, 2022b) and in Iraq sexual violence generates feelings of disempowerment and dehumanization creating emotional obstacles (Naghavi *et al.*, 2019b).

Regarding USR, the community requires higher education institutions to create spaces for social inclusion (Solis-Grant *et al.*, 2023b), although they are often not understood by interest groups (Gamboa *et al.*, 2022b). The USR must be part of the strategic actions of the universities in order to be implemented in its full dimension to favor the improvement in the quality of life of the community (Rubio *et al.*, 2020b), avoiding being seen as philanthropy, since USR is aligned with the SDGs (González *et al.*, 2022b). On the other hand, national and international accreditations require universities to comply with the USR (Condori *et al.*, 2022b), this purpose is not fulfilled in Colombia since policies have not been implemented in higher education institutions because they do not have a methodology on how to do it (Forero-Jiménez, 2019b).

It is concluded that one of the causes of the non-implementation of the USR is that there is no methodology or a model of how to do it, as well as the little interest shown by the universities; This is because there has been no awareness of its importance and how favorable it is to contribute to the reconstruction of the social fabric.

Besides, Lugo and Lucio-Villegas (2022b) they consider important that the student grows in a socially responsible environment in which he or she can share experiences. In this sense, the USR program applied in the research demonstrates its effectiveness in empowering women in rural populations, despite the limitations during its development such as the indifference of the

cohabitant, lack of support from the family environment, paradigms of the participants to change, moving costs, material and labor costs, USR Program's limited budget, remote living locations to the University, among others.

6. Conclusion

The empowerment of rural women in the provinces of Chepen and Pacasmayo, improved with the application of a University Social Responsibility program, where aspects such as participation, recklessness, equality, social satisfaction, security and the management of computer tools stood out. However, the contribution of external influences was not significant.

It was evidenced that the empowered woman is a subject of change and a starting point for the socio-economic development of their homes, community and country. However, training in entrepreneurial culture, self-employment, use of computer tools, health, nutrition is important; among other aspects, that promote the economic, social and cultural development of women; as well as their inclusion in political and labor spaces.

The programs with the best results to eliminate violence against women, reduce maternal and infant mortality, promote the autonomy and empowerment of women are the pragmatic ones, this requires the commitment, serious and determined work of governments; generating public policies that ensure the participation of women, equal opportunities, the leadership role, the use of information and communication technology, employability, the capacity for decision-making, the reduction of abuse; all this added to an attitude of social acceptance that has an impact on the empowerment of women in the 21st century.

Finally, to suggest that universities, together with entities committed to the work of gender equality, assume a leading role so that, from their management and planning documents, they consider University Social Responsibility activities with the objective of achieving the empowerment of women in rural populations, since they are the most vulnerable and with few possibilities for development; and thus contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals.

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