

The Padre Julio Marrero Botanic Garden as an enhancer of female empowerment through microenterprises based on plant resources

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Currently, in Ecuador, the vulnerability of women is an issue that is yet to be solved effectively. This manifests itself in different ways such as poverty or inequalities in income, access to health, education and information. The Juan Eulogio Paz y Miño cooperative is the largest urban-marginal sector of Santo Domingo city in Ecuador, with about 60,000 inhabitants. Here, women do not participate in the development of the community under conditions of equality and social justice, a situation that has become even more acute since the pandemic. The Padre Julio Marrero Botanic Garden, located in this cooperative, as part of its substantive functions, seeks to serve as a catalyst in the comprehensive development of the community with which it is linked, since the preservation of the environment cannot be separated from education and local well-being. Therefore, the developed project pursues the generation of microenterprises led by women at risk of social exclusion based on natural plant products that contribute to socioeconomic empowerment and also environmental awareness. Three consecutive phases were proposed: train women through multidisciplinary workshops on skills, tools and processes for the creation, design, management and monitoring of micro enterprises, establish an agroecological garden for plant production that nourishes the production of their enterprises, and develop an environmental education program focused on the sons and daughters of women that contributes to reflecting uses of natural resources. Of a total of 45 women who started the project, 24 of them are developing their commercial brands based on condiment plants in three different companies, which represents an encouraging future for them and their families and contributes to closing the inequality gap in opportunities.