

PATRICIA MOLINOS RUPEREZ

Patricia.molinos@hotmail.com | +33 671 95 00 30

WOMEN'S ALTERNATIVE RESILIENCE STRATEGIES TO MACHISMO IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC:

BETWEEN DISCRIMINATORY SOCIAL NORMS AND POOR STATE GENDER-SENSITIVE PROVISION

POST-RESEARCH REPORT

This document summarizes the research project, research and volunteer successes, and the relevance of field-research to the conclusions of this thesis



Patricia presenting with Marina de los Santos (ADOPEM ONG) during a community talk on gender roles in San Juan



Acknowledgements

Research remains at the heart of progress and allows for the continuous development of societies. Conducting this field study in the Dominican Republic to examine the discourse around the empowerment of women and identify possible ways forward for the advancement of women's rights in the country would have not been possible without the support of the Margaret Gada Slosberg Charitable Foundation. As long as the curiosity and ambition of determined, motivated, entrepreneur, change-seeking youth is trusted by such influential development partners, we can only move closer to the world we want by 2030. On a more personal level, the opportunity of designing and executing my own research proposal, and the experience of the field visit itself, have substantially contributed to my professional growth. They also created a space and time for me to connect with myself in a time when decisions about future needed to be made. In fact, the experience further confirmed my passion for gender issues and my dedication to transforming socially constructed discriminatory stereotypes and advancing equality regardless of one's sex. For it all I emphasize my gratitude to the Margaret Gada Slosberg Charitable Foundation for the support.

I also thank the three selected Dominican organisations, *Asociación Dominicana para el Empoderamiento de la Mujer* (ADOPEM ONG), *Fundación Aldeas de Paz* and *Asociación Pro-Desarrollo del Limón* (ASODELIM) for facilitating access to their centres, files, workshops, meetings and most key informants to this work, and for taking me in as one of them, being "a la orden" at all times and always available to help and exchange.

The institutional support received from the American University of Paris, and particularly from Elizabeth Guinel and Doctor Susan Perry through their insightful inputs and guidance, have also been essential to the realisation of this work.

Description of the project

The Dominican Republic is among the countries with highest rates of gender-based physical violence against women in the Latin American and the Caribbean (LAC) region and an epicentre of machismo. Yet, femicides – as the most extreme expression of violence against women – are only the visible tip of a much greater and complex iceberg. A wide range of other more subtle ways of discrimination integrated in society lay under the surface but equally push women back from having access to equal opportunities as men. These include, for example, the belief that women are natural caregivers and ought to shoulder the burden of unpaid care and domestic work alone; the condescendence and paternalism with which women are treated throughout their daily lives and at work, even if they are far more qualified; the unequal distribution of power and decision making positions between the two sexes; or the persistent gender wage gap that results in women being paid less for doing exactly the same work as their male colleagues.

My thesis explores these issues and examines the conversation around women's empowerment through the lens of social stigma in the Dominican Republic. Field research had per aim shedding a light on the lesser obvious forms of discrimination such as the aforementioned, which were discussed with key informants to this work. Particularly, the research focussed on identifying what main approaches are in place to advance women's rights and gender equality, what challenges the selected initiatives face and why, and what are potential entry points to tackle obstacles and eradicate ongoing inequalities.

Evaluation of research and volunteer successes

The case study was narrowed down to the programmes of three local organisations: Asociación Dominicana para el Empoderamiento de la Mujer (ADOPEM ONG), Asociación Pro-Desarrollo de El Limón (ASODELIM) and Fundación Aldeas de Paz (FADP). These were selected before the field visit and after a rapid review of the main actors working to advance gender equality in the Dominican Republic that positioned them among the most relevant. Moreover, they present varieties in regards to focus and scope of their work. First, ADOPEM ONG has sufficient resources to bring its activities to communities across different

regions of the country, and puts the focus on the economic dimension of empowerment. Its main strategy is providing capacity building and professional training to direct women towards entrepreneurship and financial independence, as well as punctual workshops to raise awareness on the socially constructed gender roles underlying inequalities. Similarly, although in a more community-based level, ASODELIM creates opportunities for women to associate and start small businesses as a means to becoming financially independent, which they consider equal to empowerment. A more holistic understanding of 'empowerment' is found in FADP's programming, which put the focus on gendered social norms as one of the main drivers of inequalities, including economic dependence of women on their male partners. Hence, its strategy is deconstructing discriminatory social norms by educating both men and women on gender issues. Although having different entry points, the three share a common goal: achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, gender equality.

The collaboration agreement arranged with the selected NGOs facilitated easy access to key informants to this research. Through actively participating in the activities carried out in the frame of implementation, I was interacting with programme beneficiaries (most of which are mainly women) on a daily basis. Besides the interviews conducted, which allowed me to hear about their lives, backgrounds, stories, priorities, preoccupations and understanding of the world and relevant issues to gender equality, volunteering also allowed for a careful observation of staff in their working environment. NGO workers conform the second group of key informants to this work for their role as models and guidance providers to the women they work with. The messages they convey are crucial to 'programme success', understood in this research as 'raising awareness among the targeted group on situations of injustice, abuse, and discrimination to shape their integrated beliefs that might otherwise result in its normalisation; and contributing to the transformation of discriminatory social norms at a larger scale, in the media, music and social relationships" (key informant interview). Thus, a key assumption to this work is that the staff responsible for both the design and the implementation of programmes to advance women's rights in the country should master the relevant international definitions and conventions – including sustainable development goals, Agenda 2030, CEDAW, etc. – and, most importantly, they should integrate that in their discourse and own imaginary, or

at least align with it while they interact with the targeted group, since their vision on the matter substantially affects the women's. Additionally, they should not succumb to the risk of limiting their action to 'copy and pasting' strategies that worked in other scenarios, and take into account the particularities of the Dominican Republic and the concrete community they are working with.

Being present at the workshops organised by the three organisations facilitated an evaluation of the rationale behind their design, their content and how implementation plays out e.g. how workshop attendees received the material suggested and distributed for each activity. This allowed for an assessment of major challenges and elements that, I argue in my thesis, would need to be reviewed in order to achieve a positive, sustainable change, not only in the lives of the women involved, but also in societal relations at a larger scale.

Limitations

Although access to the three groups of key informants – programme beneficiaries, NGO staff and 'general public' – was not a problem, there were other limitations to this research, mainly concerning time and resources: it was only one researcher conducting the field investigations and in a period of two months, which make it impossible to cover the whole complexity of the issue in the country. Despite these limitations, however, more than sixty interviews were conducted, which set the base for conclusions and enabled generalisations to a certain extent after having established a pattern and axis upon which differences were identified.

Another major limitation was access to State officials and government-run projects relevant to the area of interest, denied after several attempts: meetings were arranged with representatives of both the Ministry of Women (MM) and the Gender Unit of the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Development (MEPyD) but cancelled with a very short notice. Clearance to access a State shelter home for survivors of domestic violence and their children was denied and postponed until it was no longer possible to visit the facilities (discussions started after my field trip finished), although I had followed the right official procedures.



Patricia during her workshop 'Tools to dismantle machismo and develop a feminist self-esteem' in the scope of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) led Project 'Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment and Participation in Valverde'





Patricia and Marina de los Santos (ADOPEM) with the attendees to the workshop on entrepreneurship and budget planning in El Seibo



Patricia, Marina de los Santos and Miguelina Oviedo (ADOPEM) with the attendees to the workshop on entrepreneurship and budget in Sánchez





Patricia and Marina de los Santos (ADOPEM) registering attendees to the community talk on gender roles in San Juan



Patricia visiting the Asociación de Mujeres Supervivientes a la Violencia de Género de Santiago, in Santiago.

