Who has the power, men or women?

A qualitative study about womens’ farmers’ cooperatives in Nicaragua and women’s power
ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the power relations in women’s farmers’ cooperatives in Nicaragua, and to see if the women feel that they have power over their decisions and if they feel that their power has changed after joining the cooperative. The theory used in this thesis is postcolonial feminism theories of women empowerment and frameworks on development efforts to women. The method used to gather data has been semi-structured one-on-one interviews. The investigated cooperatives are part of the umbrella organization Femuprocan. Femuprocan has received development funds from We Effect (formerly Swedish Cooperative Centre) and other aid agencies in order to form cooperatives and for capacity building. Previous studies show the importance of involving women in the decisions about how the development funds should be used.

The interviews showed that the women have been involved in the decisions within the cooperatives such as how the funds should be used. Most of the interviewed women perceived an increased sense of power after joining the cooperative, and can exemplify this. However, the change is slow. The women have identified that capacity building, meeting other women and gaining more money have been crucial in the empowerment process.

Keywords: Nicaragua, Cooperative, Women, Decision-making, Power, Postcolonial feminism, Farmers, Empowerment, Development, We Effect, Femuprocan
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1. INTRODUCTION

Development efforts and aid that focuses on gender equality is a question that has been much debated in Sweden in recent years. On the international women’s day in 2013 a group of debaters, including We Effect’s CEO, wrote in the Swedish newspaper Svenska Dagbladet and demanded an investigation regarding aid to women and to what extent the Swedish aid reached women in developing countries. The same day a survey was released that showed that 73% of the Swedish citizens wanted an investigation about Equal aid (Rogeman et al, 2013).

We Effect is a development cooperative organisation that has worked with a long-term approach since 1958 in order to affect change. We Effect mainly runs projects in Latin America, Asia, Africa and Europe and always in collaboration with local organisations. The local organisations often work with women empowerment. The collaboration with Femuprocan in Nicaragua is an example of this. We Effect is nonetheless in the process of phasing out its collaboration with Femuprocan. (We Effect, 2015). This organisation has become so well functioning that We Effect has estimated that they do not need their support anymore. The partner organisation, Femuprocan, is an umbrella organization for various women’s farmers’ cooperatives in Nicaragua.

Rural women in Nicaragua tend to do a lot of the work in the agricultural sector, but they tend to be less visible because the role of women is seen to be to take care of the family and the house (Gonzalez Manchón & Macleod, 2010, p. 373). According to Femuprocan, women's labour in the farms amounts to about 80 % of all activities. Around 65 % of rural women in Nicaragua do not own the land that they use (Gonzalez Manchón & Macleod, 2010, p. 374). In Nicaragua the men own almost 80 % of the land and the women own about 14% of the land, the rest of the land is jointly owned (Femuprocan, 2011, p. 10).

Almost all kinds of development efforts have been criticised in almost all kinds of ways, and researchers have evaluated over 100 types of aid. However evaluations of development aid at the macro level has showed that the development has not always been bad and many evaluations of development aid at the micro level have shown positive effects (Gibson an al,
Development efforts targeting women has been an issue in many research papers and has been a critical contribution to the field of development studies (Marchand, 2009, p. 921). Thousands of articles and papers have been written about this issue (Ray, 2007, p. 421).

I have not found an article or research written about aid to women cooperatives that studies the power relations within the cooperatives, and how the women feel about them. I consider this a lack in the research field. The research that has been found tends to look at what is seen as bigger issues such as women representatives in the politics. However for a cooperative to be sustainable I believe that it is crucial that the women feel that they have power, therefore also this thesis looks at an important power dimension. I furthermore believe that if one learns to have power over one thing it is easier to have the courage to take power over other things, such as the family. Obviously women feel that they have more power when they can vote and decide regarding important issues. One needs the capacity to be able to make decisions, to actually take the step forward and make life-changing decisions (Kabeer, 2000, p. 438).

It is interesting to study how the women farmer’s feel about their power and to see if they feel empowered because We Effect sees Femuprocan as a well-functioning organisation. If the thesis shows that the women feel empowered and that Femuprocan has helped them this would be a way of showing that We Effect has contributed to women empowerment in Nicaragua.

This thesis was written with the support from Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) through their Minor Field Studies Programme. The fieldwork was conducted in the area around Ciudad Dario, Nicaragua in March and April 2015.
2. AIM

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the decision-making processes in the women’s cooperatives. It is also to investigate if the women feel that they get a say in how the resources are used and look at if the women feel that they have been empowered, with emphasis on the individual experiences of the women.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Drawing upon earlier research on empowerment, especially Kaabers three dimensions, do the women describe that they have been empowered? In what way?

- How do the women farmers describe the decision-making processes in their cooperatives and do they feel included in the decisions about the development efforts?

3. THEORY

In this part of the thesis the chosen theory is presented. The theory used is postcolonial feminism. Postcolonial feminism is used because the women I investigate are women in a once colonized country and the theory focuses on those women (Kumar Mishra, 2013, p. 129). Postcolonial feminism offers theoretical attention to power relations and is therefore well suited for my thesis that focuses on power relations (Deepack, 2011, 781). I also look at frameworks for development efforts to women and women empowerment. The interviewed women have received aid and one of the aims with the aid is the women’s empowerment. The theories therefore complement each other. The theories are used to see if the women feel that they have been empowered and how they feel about their decision-making power in the cooperatives.
3.1 POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISM

Postcolonial feminism (also called “third world feminism”) emerged in response to western mainstreaming feminism and rejects western feminism since it is considered to have a eurocentric view. Postcolonial feminism theory has aimed to radicalize mainstream feminism and insert feminism concerns into conceptualizations of colonialism and post colonialism. Postcolonial theories highlight the complexity of imperialism and underlines that it involves more then just foreign rule of one nation over another. Postcolonial theory aims to explain the complex structure of the colonized and the colonizer and believes that colonialism is a process that affects all the institutions of the colonized. Feminism is a critical perspective that aims to identify and change the power structures that are attached to gender. Postcolonial feminism emerged because the western tendency to homogenise and universalise women from the developing world and their experiences. Postcolonial feminism takes into account things that western feminism did not, such as differences due to class, race, feelings and the settings of women in once colonized territories. Postcolonial feminism has become an increasingly important theory in for example social science research. An important aspect in postcolonial feminism theory is freedom for all women in social, cultural, economic and religious issues (Kumar Mishra, 2013, p. 1129; Donaldson & Pui-lan, 2002, p.100-103; Lindén & Milles, 1995, p. 9; Plain & Seller, 2007, p. p. 285; Lewis & Mills, 2003, p. 3).

Chandra Talpade Mohanty, one of the most well known postcolonial feminist writers, points out that women in once colonized countries experience double colonization, as a colonized subject and second as simply being a woman in patriarchy (Kumar Mishra, 2013, p. 132). The theory focuses on women in once colonized countries and promotes the empowerment of these women. It is relevant to study the change of power relations both inside the cooperatives and in relation to the external environment using a theory that focuses on the double oppression of the women. This thesis focuses on frameworks on women and development and women empowerment. These two frameworks are best suited to help me answer my research questions.
3.2 WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

Ranges of development programs have been launched to promote social and economic development in rural areas. Women’s participation in these programs is crucial for their success (Pandey, 1998, p. 339). Andrea Cornwall (2003, p. 1325) also points out the importance to involve marginal voices in development efforts, or they will appear rather empty.

Gina Koczberski (1998, pp. 399-405), has further looked into the problems with development efforts specially aimed at women. In her analysis, she takes into account sex, race and class and I would therefore classify her view as postcolonial feminist. Koczberski studies have resulted in her localizing three problems with development efforts aimed at women. These problems will now be presented, the problems that are most relevant for this thesis.

Firstly, we have the institutional construction of integration. Many of the development agencies assumed that the women were not part of the development process in the country and did not take into account the fact that women were part of informal political and economic decisions. This resulted in the fact that a large part of the women’s daily life was neglected. Secondly, we have the categorisation and portrayal of third world women. The development agencies had a tendency to homogenise and standardise all the women in developing countries. This meant that they thought all the women had the same advantages and disadvantages, independent of country, culture and class. The women have been portrayed as universally unproductive, economically inactive, housebound, tradition-bound, lacking skills and perceived to be relegated to lower-status tasks than men and with little to contribute to development planning. Lastly, we have the effect of integration. Few have seriously questioned the planning techniques used to promote the integration of women, or critically examine the benefits of integration (Koczberski, 1998, pp. 399-405).

Anne C. Deepac (2011, p. 790) writes about the importance postcolonial feminist theoretical frameworks have in challenging the inequality in the world. She furthermore emphasises the necessary to take this into account with the development efforts that are aimed at gender equality. She writes about the importance of talking to the people that the development efforts are aimed for, and says that it is crucial to do this, to be able to first help them with their
immediate needs as well as hearing their ideas for how to improve their lives. Postcolonial feminist will help in development efforts because it enables us to move away from the saviour-victim narrative.

3.2.1 OPERATIONALIZATION OF WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

To operationalize the theories about women and development efforts the interviewed women have been asked questions about the decision-making process and if and how they feel involved in it. (See appendices p. 41) The information gained from the interviews have afterwards been compared to the theories to identify to what extent the women have experienced the problems identified with development efforts to women and if they feel involved in the decision-making process.

3.3 WOMEN AND EMPOWERMENT

The definition of empowerment used in this thesis will be The World Bank’s definition of empowerment: “expansion of freedom of choice and action to shape one’s life” (Do & Kurimoto, 2012, p. 23). Women empowerment is hard to measure, and one can look at it in different areas: economic, sociocultural, familial and interpersonal, legal, political and psychological (Do & Kurimoto, 2012, p. 24). I will focus on the economic, familial and interpersonal aspects of empowerment. The familial and interpersonal aspects of empowerment are complex and can be measured in various ways such as domestic decision making, here preferably to be empowered in joint decisions or decisions alone by the woman. The economic aspect also investigates how the decisions about the economy are made, and the same goes for these decisions as the domestic decision-making (Do & Kurimoto. 2012, p. 25).

Syed M. Hashemi and Ann P. Rilly have identified six dimensions of empowerment based on activities that women have identified as important to their day to day functioning. These dimensions are: 1. Sense of self and vision; 2. Mobility and visibility; 3. Economic security; 4. Decision making power in the household; 5. Participation in non-family groups; 6. Interact affectively in public sphere (William, 2005, p. 10).
Naila Kabeer (2000, pp. 435, 437), sees empowerment as the ability to make strategic life decisions. Empowerment entails a process of change, from not having the power to make decisions, to having the power to make decisions. To be empowered one has to be disempowered first. This means that if one has a lot of power but has always had it one is not empowered, one has to be without power first to be able to become empowered.

Kabeer (2000, pp. 437-438) deals with the ability to make choices looking at three useful dimensions; resources, agency and achievements. Resources are not only material resources such as money; it also includes various human and social resources. Human and social resources make up a society, family, market and community and included. Norms and rules give certain people authority over others. These people are in charge of the decisions about the resources.

Agency is about the operatized decision-making. This includes bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation. Collectives or individuals can exercise this, and it can have both positive and negative meaning in relation to power. Positive meaning refers to people’s capacity to define their own life choices, pursue their own goals and even face opposition from others. Negative meaning refers to the sense that one agent has the power over other agents. This can be thru violence, coercion and threats (Kabeer, 2000, p. 438).

Kabeer (2000, p. 440) suggests that achievements are a critical factor for understanding women’s empowerment. To be able to identify achievements one can measure basic universally valued functions such as survival and well being, and see if there are gendered differences. A problem here is that it the basic measurements might not show that there is a gendered difference. It is also important to look further and look at more complex achievements such as women’s representation to see if there are gendered differences.
3.3.1 OPERATIONALIZATION OF WOMEN AND EMPOWERMENT

Kabeer’s tree dimensions and Hashemi and Rilly’s six dimensions are useful for this thesis in understanding the different aspects of empowerment to be able to investigate how the interviewed women feel about their power.

To operationalize the theory the interviewed women were asked questions about the decision-making in the families and economically. They were also asked questions about how their power had changed since they joined the cooperatives (See appendices p. 41). This was to see if the women had actually gained power and therefore been empowered and that they had not always had the power. The result was compared with Kabeer’s tree dimensions and Hashemi and Rilly’s six dimensions.

4. METHOD

This chapter describes the method that has been used to gain the data in this thesis. Women have been interviewed because this is a relevant method to be able to compare reality with the theories and the research questions. In this part I will touch on issues such as ethical issues with the method, how the selection of the participants has been done, the data analysis used, and strengths and weaknesses with the method.

A case study focusing on five women in women’s in several farmer cooperatives in Nicaragua that are part of the umbrella organization Femuprocan and one woman that is part of Femuprocan’s management group has been conducted. A qualitative approach has been used in order to be able to go deeper into how the women feel about the decision-making process and their power. Qualitative interviews are used to understand the world from the subjects view and see the meaning of their experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 1). The research focuses on the subject, the persons from Femuprocan, and their different experiences. The aim is to obtain a deeper understanding about the experiences, opinions and feelings of the interviewed women.
4.1 ETHICAL ISSUES IN RESEARCH

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, pp. 87-92) discuss issues that are important to think about if one uses interviews as a research method: informed consent, confidentiality, the role of the researcher and consequences. When it comes to informed consent, this is a very important aspect for me to be able to use the material in my research. Before the interviews were conducted the subjects were informed about the thesis and what the data will be used for. I informed them that they could choose to stop and not be part of the research whenever they wished to or choose not to answer certain questions. I made sure that they were fully informed and that they were not pushed into doing the interview against their will, before I asked them if it was ok to start the interview.

When it comes to confidentiality I informed them that they will be anonymous in the thesis and that I am the only person that will have access to the data. With the person from the management group I chose not to include her title in my thesis. This is because the management group is a small group and if I would have shared her title one would easily have been able to identify the person in question.

The role of the researcher is important to always have in mind. I as a researcher have to act professionally and show a great integrity to ensure that the data holds a high standard. Decisions regarding ethical aspects have to be done along the way, and the competence of me as a researcher is critical to maintain ethically standards. The two main objectives are to take responsibility of human values and to produce high quality science (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 90-91).

Consequences mean that one has to measure the consequences of the thesis, both negative and positive (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 90-91). It is important that there is a balance between various interests (Vetenskapsrådet, 2011, p. 9). Before the interviews were conducted I talked to Femuprocan in order to involve them in the decision-making regarding the interviews to strengthen the interview design. It is good to do this to strengthen the design in this way (Ritchie et al, 2014, p. 75). I felt it important to do this because the theory that I use in this thesis points out the importance of involving the women in the decisions (Koczberski, 1998, pp. 399-405). It would have been contradictory for me not to involve them.
4.2 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

One interview was conducted with one person from the management group. She was interviewed because she knows the formal way of how the decision-making is supposed to work, and what aims they have with the work of the women in the cooperatives. Five women form the local level cooperatives were also interviewed. These are the women that are most important to interview because they are the ones who take part of the decision-making processes in the local cooperatives. The women in the management group do not take part in these decisions. The women from the local cooperatives have been of different ages and are part of cooperatives that are of different sizes and have been in their respective cooperatives for different amount of time. All the interviewed women have been part of Femuprocan for some time, so they had a deep insight in how the cooperative works and how they work with women empowerment. Femuprocan helped me choose the women to interview; this will be discussed further down in critic of the method. Femuprocan chose the women that they thought were representative and that they were able to take me to. Some of the women were part of their cooperatives management group, and some were not.

4.3 THE INTERVIEWS

An interview guide (see appendices p. 41) was constructed to make sure that I asked the same kind of questions in the different interviews. It is also good to have an interview guide because I was more prepared and it made me feel more secure and able to conduct better interviews. Having the same questions for the different women was important in order to compare them with one another. The interviews were conducted in Spanish, the respondent’s first language, and the interviews were recorded and some notes were written. I speak fluent Spanish and conducting the interviews in Spanish meant that I eliminated all the problems that can occur if one uses an interpreter. Potential threats of reliability can occur at various stages of the interview if one uses an interpreter, to minimize these threats the interpreter should not only have linguistic abilities but also be trained in the research field (Kapborg, Berterö, 2002, p. 52). Such an interpreter would probably have been hard to find and would probably have been a lot more expensive than I could have afforded. Part of the reason that Femuprocan accepted me to come and conduct interviews is because I am able to do them in Spanish. It is therefore definitely a strength that I have been able to conduct the interviews without an interpreter.
It is important to think about where the interview should take place and how it should be, depending on different cultures (Kvale, 2007, p. 65). I believed that it was better that I travel to the women than that they would come to me. In this way I believe that they felt more comfortable and hopefully felt that they could share more information with me. I talked with my local supervisor before I started doing the interviews in Nicaragua and asked her what I should think about while interviewing the women. I tried to adapt my clothes and my view on the time. For example in Nicaragua most of the women wear pants, even if it is 35 degrees hot, and so did I. As for time I made sure to be flexible. As mentioned above I also involved Femuprocan in the process of constructing my interview guide so that I for an example would not ask too offensive questions and to ensure that the questions were understandable for the women. I for example changed the questions were I used the word power; I instead used decisions, because the women understood this better.

The first thing I did before starting the formal interview was to inform the subjects about my thesis and to inform them that my research is supported by SIDA. I informed them as mentioned above that they could stop whenever they wanted to and choose not to be part of the research and that they are anonymous. I then asked some background questions, to make sure that they were willing to give an interview for my research but also to make them feel more comfortable.

The interviews have been semi-structured and have allowed some dissipation. As the interviewer I did not want to control the interviews too much, therefore a semi-structured method was used. I used this kind of interview model to be able to understand the subjects better and to be able to understand their context. I used the interview guide (see appendices p. 41) to have something to start from and to use if the conversation floated too far away from the main questions. I made some statements to make sure that I had understood the women’s meaning (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 266-271). I did one on one interviews with all the women, both from the management group and from the local cooperatives. I believe that this make them feel more comfortable with saying what they wanted to say. If I would have done group interviews with the woman from the leading group some of the women might have been afraid to say what they actually thought because their boss was in the same room. The
same thing goes for the women in the local cooperative, but here it might be the problem with informal leaders.

The interviews varied a lot in the amount of time they took, from 15 minutes up to one hour. This varied mainly because some of the women wanted to tell me everything about themselves and some only wanted to answer the questions that I asked. As mentioned above I asked the same questions to all of the women from the cooperatives on base level (see appendices p. 41).

It was good that I did the interviews during dry season, because they have less to do and they can spare time for an interview without harming their harvest. Furthermore it would have been impossible to travel to some of the women in rain season.

4.4 DATA ANALYSIS

I both took some notes and recorded the interviews. After the interviews I transcribed the most relevant parts of the interviews as soon as possible after the interview both in Spanish and English. I wrote down the narratives as soon as possible so that I would not forget important things, or misinterpret. It is important to be able to do a good transcription, to be able to do this I tested my recorder beforehand and tried to interview in a quiet place (Kvale, 2007, p. 65). I did the transcription into Spanish to be able to ask the women if I had understood them properly and in English for the thesis. The English transcript version is the data for my interview information.

The initial analysis was made after the first interview, in order to adjust the interview guide when needed. This was a good way to make sure that the responses were comparable with the theories used. The interview information gathered where compared with the theories and analysed and discussed.

The narratives from the interviews were used to compare the findings with the theory. Citations with focus on how the respondents described their feelings were used to make the
material comprehensive. The citations were slightly modified, taking away “ehrm” and making the language more understandable and more suitable for written language (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 301).

4.5 CRITIC OF THE METHOD

I found that being white and looking like a foreigner was a disadvantage. My interviewers noticed this at first sight and might because of this have chosen not to share certain things with me and treated me differently. I told them that I was from Sweden, so that they would not think that I was from the USA. A lot of people in Nicaragua have hard feelings towards people from USA. The language barrier was also a problem. I do speak Spanish and I do believe that it was much better to do the interviews by myself then using an interpreter, but I had not been to Nicaragua before and I was not used to their dialect nor do I know all of the slang words they use and special terms. My thesis will be influenced by the fact that I am a woman from a developed western country, this is one of the most important things to criticise, because of the theory I use. I do not have a great knowledge about women farmer’s living conditions and I have different experiences and I do have an eurocentric view whether I want it or not. My findings may be incomplete and this would result in analyses that are incorrect. I might have misunderstood the women or they might not have told me things that are obvious for them, but not for me. To minimize this risk I asked the women if I had understood them right by saying what I thought they meant and letting them answer yes or no. I believe that it was positive that I am a woman; women tend to be more open with emotions and share more in interviews than men, in particular with other women (Dindia & Allen, 1992, p. 106).

I had the great opportunity of working in the office of Femuprocan while doing the data analysis. This made it possible for me to ask the women if there were certain things that I did not understand.

A weakness of the method is the fact that I had to translate the interviews from Spanish to English. Translating may always bring errors and some information may be lost. This is something that I have had in mind when translating the interviews and I have tried to make the citations and findings as accurate as possible.
Another weakness is that Femuprocan choose which women I would interview. I also travelled to the women with representatives from Femuprocan. This might have made the women unwilling to say bad things about Femuprocan and want it to sound better than it might be. Femuprocan might also have chosen women who they thought would say good things about Femuprocan. One of the women ended her interview with saying that she hoped that I would talk to the people in Sweden and tell them that rural women in Nicaragua always need more help. This shows that they might have altered their responses so that it suited their purpose better. Unfortunately this was the only way for me to be able to meet the women. I told the women that I was not part of Femuprocan and that they would be anonymous, I hope that this helped a little bit. I also made sure that the representatives from Femuprocan were not in the same room that us when the interviews were conducted.

5. INTERVIEW INFORMATION

Below the information gathered during the interviews will be presented. The interviews were conducted with one woman from Femuprocan’s management group and five women from the base cooperatives that have Femuprocan as an Umbrella organization. I interview women in once colonized countries, the women that postcolonial feminism researchers investigate. The interviewed women have received help from Femuprocan and Femuprocan has received money from We Effect, in order to promote the women’s empowerment. Therefore the gathered information will further down be analysed using the help of earlier research on aid to women and women empowerment. I have chosen to name the women from the base cooperatives: Anna, Sofía, Julia, Maria and Susana. They are all part of different cooperatives, and the names mentioned above are not their real names. I will use quotations to show some gathered information and furthermore show combined picture given by all the interviews.
5.1 WOMAN FROM THE MANAGEMENT GROUP

The interviews that I had with the management group gave me a better understanding about how the cooperatives are supposed to work.

5.1.1 THE COOPERATIVES AND DECISIONS

Most of the cooperatives in Femuprocan do not use a common land, the women use their own land, and they work together to sell the products but and not all of the women in the cooperatives own their land. When the cooperatives are founded Femuprocan helps with their organisation and gives education about what a cooperative is.

“Femuprocan doesn’t just give the money and tell the cooperatives to work, no, they offer organisation and capacity building, and education about for example activism.”

When the cooperative is founded they elect a local board for the cooperative that only consists of women. The board consists of five women: the president, the vice president, the cashier, the secretary and one more. The board does not make the decisions, all the women in the cooperatives make them together. The cooperatives are sometimes very big and it is hard to gather them all to make decisions. When the board decides that they should vote about something and the board travels to the women and inform them about the question and the women decide what they want to vote for. Sometimes some of the women are not interested in some things, it might be that the cooperative has received help to construct irrigation systems, but some of the women do not have enough land for that, then they can decide not to be part of that. The women in the cooperative are diverse; they have different amount of land and resources, and want to do different things. Therefore they need different kind of help. Femuprocan tries to help the women with what that they need depending on this.
“Some of the women like to be out in the land; growing and producing the food, but they don’t like to travel to the cities to sell their products. ... Some of the women like to travel to the cities and sell the food and they don’t like to grow it. Then they work together, some sell and some produce. Some call themselves producers and some call themselves sellers.”

The women can always choose to not be part of a decision and to leave the cooperative. The women from the management group emphasis that the women are free and that there is a big diversity in the cooperatives. When Femuprocan or someone from the local board propose to let a woman from outside the cooperative to join, the cooperative makes a decision if they let her join or not, they also decide this with double majority, 75%.

The woman from the management group told me that she had worked with mixed cooperatives before, and that it had been a lot harder to involve the women in the decision-making and to make them say what they thought about a question. She said that she sees a big difference in these women’s only cooperatives and that the women take more space and say what they think in front of the other women.

5.1.2 POWER IN THE COOPERATIVES

The women from the management group emphasis that the women do have power in the cooperatives but that there are always women that are shy and occupy less space and women that take a leading role and therefore have a lot of power. However they always have power when the decision takes place and as mentioned above they can always choose what decisions to be part of and leave the cooperative if they want to.

“The women in the cooperatives decide what they want to do, Femuprocan doesn’t come and tell the women what to do, and we give them recommendations.”
5.1.3 POWER IN THE FAMILIES AND OVER THE ECONOMY

The part about power in families and over the economy has been a long struggle and still is, but things are changing the women from the management group tell me. The man has for a long time been the person that decides everything. But a lot of the women do have power, but they do not let it show and do not say that they have the power. In Nicaragua the man has for a long time been the head of the family, so this is a slow process.

“There are women that do everything in the land, but they don’t call themselves producer, they call themselves helper (of their husband). When somebody comes to their house to buy products, the husband tells the person to go to the woman and ask her if they are selling.”

The woman from the management group tells me that she thinks that some of the women in the cooperatives do feel that they have authority and show it, but this is not most of the women. Most of the women, she thinks are as the citing above, they do have power but do not show it and do not say that they have. It has also been a struggle to make the men say that they work together with the woman and that they both decide. The men do not want to surrender their power. But things are changing a little bit. In most of the families in the cooperatives now the women and men decide together.

5.1.4 CHANGES IN POWER-RELATIONS

The woman from the management group says that they have seen a change in power since the women joined the cooperative. She says:
“For example there were women that at the first meeting that the woman went to didn’t say anything, they went more to say here I am. Today they talk and have opinions about different things. ...They change. Another thing is that before they didn’t talk in front of a lot of people, they were afraid to even say their name, now, not all of them, because we are not going to say 100%, then we would be lying. But now there are a lot of women that talk in front of people with a paper in their hand to tell their opinion and explain.”

As expressed by the woman from the management group the women did not talk in front of a lot of people in the beginning. In the beginning they talked in smaller groups but now they do talk in bigger groups. Femuprocan has capacity building with the women to work on these issues, about talking in front of people, about being afraid, about gender, etc. to make all the women part of the cooperative. This helps the women change. The change also has to do with how the husband treats the women and how much power they are able to take. This is an example of this:

“In the beginning the women had to ask their husband if she was allowed to go to the meetings with Femuprocan, and she had to beg him and beg him for permission, now the husband asks were she is going and she says that she’s going to a meeting with Femuprocan.”

5.2 WOMEN FROM THE LOCAL LEVEL

The interviews that I had with the women from the local cooperatives gave me a better understanding about how the cooperatives work in reality. Furthermore it gave me an understanding about how they feel about their power, both inside and outside the cooperatives.

5.2.1 THE COOPERATIVES AND DECISIONS

The women from the cooperatives confirm what the management group from Femuprocan said about how the cooperative works. Every woman has a different kind of work, some own
their land, and some do not. Most of the women that do not have land sell the goods that the other women have farmed. A couple of women in some of the cooperatives sell tortillas, they buy the maíz from the other women in the cooperative and sell the tortillas at local markets. There are other women that do not own land and do not sell but own animals. Some women rent land that they use, they then have to give some of the money that they earn to the landowner. The land and the goods are not collectively owned. Sofia and Julia tell me that the women in their different cooperatives are working towards collective selling, in the future they hope that they will be able to sell all the products from the cooperative together. They have counted on it and realized that they would earn a lot more if they sold the product together.

The women that I talked to from the different cooperatives explained to me that they make different kinds of decisions in the cooperatives. Someone from the local board puts forward a proposition to the board at their board meeting. If a woman in the cooperative that is not part of the local board wants to put forward a proposition she first needs to talk to the board and let them put it forward. The board or the president of the cooperative then joins the cooperative and talk about the question and sometimes they vote about it. Maria points out that they take decisions in the cooperative, however the women that do not want to be part of the decisions do not have to be part of them. Susana identifies a problem with these meetings; all women do not show up to the meetings. This means that the women that do not come to the meetings are not part of the decision making process. She thinks that the women are responsible of going to the meetings, and she likes to go to the meetings to be able to show her opinion.

Anna says that they have mostly voted for if new members should be allowed to join. The women that want to join are informed about the cooperative and how it works that the women fight together to make things better, and that they will not just get things for free from Femuprocan. Femuprocan helps the different women with different things, because they have different needs the women tell me. The women that have received help have to give a part of the money that they gain back to Femuprocan, so that Femuprocan can help other women. Then they ask if she still wants to join and ask her questions about why she wants to join, what her goals are etc. The members that are part of the cooperative discuss the matter and
then they vote. According to Anna, if about 60 to 70% want her to join, she will be allowed to join.

Sofia and Julia talk about the annual plans. In the annual plan the cooperative specify what they will do next year, for example how much and what they will grow. In the end of every year they revise the annual plan, they look at what they have achieved and what they have not achieved. The women tell the management group how much they have grown last year and how much they want to grow next year. They join all the presidents from the different cooperatives in the area and they talk about the annual plan and decide how it should look. The presidents from the cooperative are the voices of the cooperatives and take forward the cooperatives view about the annual plan. The presidents from every cooperative inform the women in the cooperative about the annual plan when it is finished. The annual plan is important for Femuprocan, since in the plan they can see how far the cooperatives have reached, what kind of help the different women need, etc. Julia explains that somebody from the management group comes and visits every cooperative once a month to see how things are going, and to see what kind of help is needed. Sometimes they might not be able to help directly but they might be able to come with recommendations on how to make things better.

Julia also tells me that they join the women from the cooperative before capacity building meetings that often take place far away from their houses. They join to decide and see who can go. The women that say what they want and are able to go then get to go on the capacity building meetings.

5.2.2 POWER IN THE COOPERATIVES

All the women that I talked to do feel that they have power in the cooperatives and that they are included in the decisions. They think that most of the women feel included, because they join the cooperatives to be able to make decisions. In the cooperatives women can vote for what they want, discuss the question and tell the others what they think. Sofia thinks that the women feel included in the decision about the annual plan because they can put forward their view.
Julia tells me that there are sometimes cases were women feel that their opinion has been left out, but that most of the women know that their opinion is taken into account. Femuprocan asks the cooperatives president what kind of capacity building the women in the cooperatives are interested in and then the president asks the women and afterwards tell Femuprocan, so that the women get the capacity building that they want.

“First they consult us, it’s not like they just tell us this is the capacity building you need.”

5.2.3 POWER IN THE FAMILIES AND OVER THE ECONOMY

All the women I talk to feel that the economical and family power is shared. They say that they make the decision together in the families. They first discuss the question, and then decide together.

“We make the decisions together, me together with my husband... now that our children are older, we ask them as well. Because they work now and can help if we need money to do something.”

Last January Anna and her family had a problem; the engine that they used to water the land was stolen. All the family helped, and worked very hard so that they could buy a new one. They were able to save some of the plants, because they could buy a new one in less than 15 days. This was a collective decision and everybody in the family decided to fight for this.

Anna tells me that she is what she calls “the inventor”, that she is the one who comes with most of the ideas. She tells her ideas to her husband, they talk about it and they then talk with the children and decide. She gets a lot of the ideas from the meetings and capacity building with Femuprocan. She changes the way of explaining the idea when she talks to her husband and her children, so that it suits them better and so they will want to do the change.
Before Sofia and her family make decisions they count money and discuss the negative and positive sides with the idea. Last year Sofia had the idea that they should buy an irrigation system so that they could grow products all year and not only in the rain season. She had seen other women in cooperatives having this. They then bought an irrigation system, with the help of Femuprocan and now they grow all year round. Sofia points out that it is important that the women owns her own land and that this is something that the women in the cooperatives are fighting for.

Julia says that sometimes her husband earns the money and sometimes she earns the money, so the economical responsibility is shared. The decisions about the family economy are also made together. In the house she says that she decides, because she is there most of the time, and he is mostly out on their land.

Susana tells me that she had three of her children at university, however last year she and her husband had to remove the one of them from university. They chose to remove their daughter that has only studied at university for two years, the other two, her other daughter and son had studied for four years. This was a decision that she did not want to make, unfortunately she had no choice, because they could not afford to have the three children studying at university.

5.2.4 CHANGES IN POWER-RELATIONS

Some of the he women do feel that a change in power has happened. All of the women talk about the importance of the capacity building that they have had with Femuprocan, and how much they have helped them change. Susana says this about the capacity building:

“You know that a capacity building value is of gold, the things that one learns.”

Maria tells me that the capacity building has helped her realise that she can make decisions, and how to make them. She has learned how to count the money and use it wisely.
Anna tells me that before she was in the cooperative she had dreams, but she was not able to realise them.

“I had dreams of having a cow, which I could use to make cheese. I had a dream of building a better house... But my husband, he only gave a little of his salary to the family and the rest he used to buy alcohol.”

At this time Anna tells me that her husband took the decisions about the economy and family. She worked in the house and did not gain money to save or to make life-changing decisions. She started sewing and selling food at the local school in order to gain money. The first capacity building that Anna went to was about gender and about how to be able to talk in front of other people. When Anna was younger she was afraid of talking and she said that she was shy and was afraid of people. With Femuprocan and the cooperative she learned speak in front of people and how to talk to her husband.

“In the capacity building I learned to value myself as a woman, and that I can work and fight for my family.”

The cooperatives exist in order to make change, says Anna. Anna now takes care of the money and counts how much the family gains, and how much they can use for different things. She always thinks about the economy. The cooperative has also through capacity building and economic support made the women able to have a better economic situation. The economic help has been different to different women, the women tell me. Some of the women have received help with better products to grow, an irrigation system or other kind of help. With the irrigation system the women can gain more money, because they can grow their products all year, and not only during rain-season. With the system they can also diversify and grow different kind of products. This makes them more immune to price-fall on specific products. Susana, that has an irrigation system, says that last year the price on onions fell, she and her family was not as affected because they had a diversified production. Maria who also has an irrigation system tells me that her family was able to build a new better house. They
were able to do this because of the money her family earned from the land that had irrigation system.

Today Anna’s husband is part of another cooperative, a man’s only cooperative, but they work with capacity building as well and the men talk about the same things in their capacity building, such as gender. Her husband’s cooperative invited her to a meeting, to ask her if the men that were part of their cooperatives listened to the women. She was very happy about this.

Anna and her family now use the money that they have gained to be able to send their children to higher education, all of the children, both women and men.

“This is a decision that I couldn’t have been able to make before, because I didn’t make the decision.”

Talking to other women from different cooperatives has made it easier for Anna to make decisions. She heard about other women that had been able to send their children to higher education, and she started saving for that as well.

“It’s like fashion, I see a woman that has a nice shirt, and I want to buy one. When my children were small I talked to women that told me that they had their children in University. I thought: If they can, I can.”

Sofia tells me that Femuprocan has helped the women get empowered through capacity building about gender and empowerment. Sofia says:

“Before the women were only for having children... without taking any decisions and without any value”
Sofia married when she was only 16 years old, for ten years she lived with her in-law and her husband. She was fully dependent on that her father-in-law worked. When her husband brought something to eat, she ate. Sofia says that before her husband was a machista (commonly used term for male chauvinist), but now he is not, now he has given her space and power in the family. They now both believe in each other, and he has no problem with letting her leave the house to be part of cooperative meetings for example. Now when they make decisions as a family she thinks that life is a lot easier. Her children help her and want her to have power and respect the decisions that she makes. For her this is something very beautiful, and it makes her sad when she sees women that are not organized, are only in their house and dependent on their husband for everything. Most of the women that she works with in the cooperative have the same vision and want to move forward. She says that the reunions with the cooperative and the capacity building help a lot. In the beginning when she went to the reunions she hurried home because she was not a women that took decisions about her. Now she sees herself as another person. She has more responsibility now, but also is able to get better results. Sofia thinks that is she would not have been part of the cooperative she would have felt a lot older, she would not leave the house only waiting in the house and fully dependent on somebody else for everything. She points out that it helps a lot to leave the house, meet other women and see new things. This helps her get ideas to be able to move forward and make decisions.

In Sofia’s opinion there are still a lot of women who do not have power, but the women who are in the cooperative, most of them have been empowered to some extent. Most of the women in the cooperatives now make decisions and have power, they sell their products and form small shops, and this helps them. Sofia says that they now can involve the husband and the family in their decisions. There are still women in the cooperatives that have not been empowered; they and their family have a difficult time changing. If one is very uses to always being at home it is hard to change and travel to meetings. Some of the husbands are very controlling, and do not want to give any of their power to the women. Sofia talks to the women and try to help them, but she also points out that one cannot just come and tell them how to do. She also talks to the husband and tries to give him the confidence to give the woman her space and let her travel to meetings. She thinks that with time, this will change and now few have these problems. If she compares now with the time before, the rural women around her have advanced, and have been empowered. They now know a lot more about how
to work for change, not only in the cooperatives and in the family but also politically in the municipality. It has been a hard fight for the women to break thru the machismo in the municipality. There is still machismo, but you do not see it as much as before, and it is less. There are also still people that think that the women’s place is in the home, but Sofia says that she does not care and that she will not let those people stop her.

Julia has grown up in the cooperative; therefore she does not feel that her power has changes since she entered, because she has always been part of the cooperative. She learned from the beginning that she was a free woman and that she should be allowed to make decisions and have power. She has never had any problem with this. She can see the differences in her colleagues. She has friends that in the beginning did not even say what they thought or came with any suggestions. Now many of those women do make decisions in their home, they for example decide what they are going to grow on their land. She believes that this is a product of the capacity building that the women have taken part in. The women have been empowered thanks to the capacity building, Julia says. Many women from outside see this and want to join the cooperatives.

Susana tells me that she has changed a lot after joining the cooperative, and now she does not even tell her husband when she is going to a meeting. He knows that she goes to the meetings to be able to do a better job for the family, and to learn how to gain more money. She brings her small children to the meetings. It is important that she can do this, because there is nobody at home that can take care of them. Before she would not do these kinds of things, she did not feel free. Now she does feel free and knows about the rights that women have. Now when she gains money she sometimes uses that money in the way that she wants to.

6. FINDINGS

Below I show the findings that are relevant to my two research questions. The women have identified the importance of gaining more power, learning how to use the power both inside and outside the cooperatives. This is a way for the women to become empowered. It is important to note that the findings below are based on the six interviewed women and their
individual experiences and what they have chosen to share. This thesis does not aim to make big generalizations and the few interviews hinders if from that.

- Looking at earlier research on empowerment, especially Kaabers three dimensions, do the women describe that they have been empowered? In what way?

Almost all of the interviewed women (four of five) feel that they have been empowered to some extent after joining the cooperative, and therefore have more power and make more decisions now. They identify that they now have, to some extent all three of the things that Kabeer (2000, pp. 437) has identified as empowerment *resources, agency and achievements*. Before they had little or no power, this means that they feel that they have been empowered to some extent, and not just gained more power. To be empowered one has to have little or no power in the beginning. One empowerment problem is the lack of money and that the women sometimes have to make decisions that they do not want to take, because of the lack of money. The women feel that they need a better economy to be able to make all the life-changing decisions that they want to do.

- How do the women farmers describe the decision-making processes in their cooperatives and do they feel included in the decisions about the development efforts?

All the women farmers that I have talked to do feel involved in the decision making process and think that most of the other women also do feel involved. They point out that there are always women that take more space and therefore are have more power and that there will always be women that are dissatisfied with the decision-process. A problem that has been identified is that not all women show up to the meetings that they have and that they are therefore not part of the decision making process.
7. ANALYSIS

Here, I will discuss the information gained thru the interviews and their correlation with the chosen theories and prior research. The research questions and findings seen above are here analysed.

One of the most important aspects of the chosen theory, the postcolonial feminism is the fact it aims for freedom in social, cultural, economic and religious issues for all women (Kumar Mishra, 2013, p. 1). These freedoms look different in all countries; in Nicaragua part of this struggle has to do with the women’s right to land. The postcolonial theory is important, because it is important that we learn from our history. It is crucial that the western NGO’s do not become a new colonizer and restrict the freedom of the women in once colonized countries as Nicaragua. The fact that We Effect does work with local organisations instead of coming and starting the projects by themselves shows that We Effect has considered this. On the other hand, the fact that We Effect always remains the decision-maker of which projects to support and that the women working in leading positions are from Sweden is a problem. These leading women will probably have a eurocentric view whether they want or not, and this is something that they need to think about all the time.

Femuprocan does seem to have considered the issues that Koczberski (1998, pp. 399-405) has identified as problem with aid to women. When it comes to the institutional construction of integration, the interviewed women do feel involved in the decisions and do not feel that Femuprocan has neglected their informal power. Femuprocan, they feel, have through capacity building helped them gain more power. When it comes to the categorisation and portrayal of third world women it is considered to be positive by the women that Femuprocan is a local organization and not a western organisation. We Effect gives Femuprocan money but none of the women that I talked to mentioned We Effect, because they see the help coming from Femuprocan, an organisation that is from Nicaragua. One of the things that We Effect has helped Femuprocan with is the irrigation system. The women that I talked to that have an irrigation system were all very happy and said that it had made their economy a lot better.
One of the women point out that it is good that the leader of Femuprocan is a woman that knows a lot about farming, and has been a farmer. Therefore she knows what kind of help the different women need. Femuprocan seems to try to help the women with the things that they want help with and does not homogenize the women. The women are involved in the decisions about the money from the aid through voting in the cooperatives, both the management group and the women in the cooperative say that this is a fact.

The women are always allowed to leave the cooperative; this is a life-decision. The women in the cooperative also choose who are allowed to enter the cooperatives, they vote about this. According to Koczberski’s (1998, pp. 399-405) and Deepac’s (2011, p. 790) theories on development efforts it is important to involve the women in the decisions and asking them what they want to do. The women decide over their own land and they do not own the land collectively. Femuprocan does come out and look at the land and come with recommendations, and it might be hard not to follow the recommendations of Femuprocan for some of the women. This is something that Femuprocan should consider, so that they do not involuntary force the women to do things.

All the interviewed women mention the capacity building as a help to be able to take more space and decisions and to become empowered. At the capacity building they both meet empowered women and get tools to become more empowered. Most of the women also mentioned the importance of meeting other women to get new ideas so that they could move forward. It seems as these two things combined with their work on the land is what they see as the biggest contributor to help them become empowered.

Four of the five interviewed women felt that their power has changed. This is as mentioned, the result of a slow change. “Poco a poco” is Spanish for little by little, and could be used as a good way of explaining how the process proceeds. Women empowerment as defined in the theory part is used when examining what the four women expressed in the interviews. The women are able to make more and more life-changing choices, choices that they could not make before. One example of this is that they do not have to ask their husband to go to the
cooperative meetings; they just tell him that they are going, if they want to go. This might seem as a small decision but it is a huge step forward for the women’s power.

Anna is a good example of a woman that feels that she has been empowered. Before she did not make any decisions, now she is able to make life-changing decisions about herself and her family. If one looks at the dimensions that Hashemi and Rilly have identified as necessary for empowerment she has a large proportion’s of these. One thing that she identified as important was number 5. Participation in Non-Family Groups, she participates in the cooperative meetings and the capacity building, and feel that this help her gain more power (William, 2005, p. 10).

Anna now feels that she has all three things that Kabeer (2000, pp. 437) has identified, resources, agency and achievements. Before she had none of them and was disempowered. She now has both human resources and economical recourses. Before the norms in her family said that her husband was the one who took all the decisions. Now the norms have changed and they make the decisions together. She now has the tools to negotiate and put forward proposition to both her family and the cooperatives, this is agency, she even says (see interview information p. 27) that she is the one that puts forward most of the proposition. And if one looks at the achievements, she definitely thinks that she has achieved things, she now has built a better house, something that was only a dream before and she has been able to send all her children to higher education. She has also achieved things with regard to gender; she now makes the decisions together with her husband. I believe that some of the norms that the man has greater power and that the women are supposed to take care of the house and the children, still exist. However, is a lot better now, but more empowerment is needed for an equal life opportunities.

There are still women, like Susana that feel that they cannot take all the life changing decisions that they want to. Susana is not able let all her children attend university, something that is very important for her. Susana has a lack of what Kabeer has identified as resources, i.e. economic resources. She does have other resources, for example she feels that the norms in her family has changed, because they now make the decisions together, before they did not. She has received help in how to bargain and negotiate through the capacity building, which
Kabeer identifies as *agency*. She also feels that she has changed and now makes many more decisions, this Kabeer (2000, pp. 437) sees as *measurements*. The fact that Susana feels that she is not able to make all the life-changing decision that she would like to, shows that there is still work to do regarding women empowerment. She lacks what Hashemi and Rilly have identified as *Economic Security* (William, 2005, p 10).

If one looks at the gathered interview information four out of five of the women do feel that they now are the ones that decide and rule (often together with their husband) over their land and that this is something that has changed. They now also share the decision-making power in the household, something that Hashemi and Rilly have identified as important for empowerment (William, 2005, p 10). The women do point out the importance of owning the land in order to be able to make the decisions. As a first step it is important to have understood this, so that they can move forward with the goal to become more empowered and gain the freedoms that postcolonial feminism strives for.

**8. CONCLUSION**

I will now conclude the findings, interview information and come with suggestions for further research.

By understanding forms of inequality and the power structure created by post-colonial thoughts we can together work towards breaking down these in order to get rid of them. It is important to investigate development efforts using a postcolonial feminist theory. It is important to use a postcolonial feminist view since all women are not the same, and women in once colonized territory such as Nicaragua should decide how they want to use the money that they receive from aid. The theories as well as my findings show that the money will be used more wisely and that the development will be better and faster if we work in this way.

All of the interviewed women have been part of a cooperative for a relatively long time, at least 10 years and most of them are part of the local board in their cooperative. They feel strongly for their cooperatives and this may have been one of the reasons to why they feel that
the cooperative has helped them get empowered. To get a better picture it would have contributed to interview women that joined recently.

It is as mentioned in the theory part very hard to measure empowerment and with this thesis it is hard for me to say if these interviewed women have truly been empowered. Further research would have been needed and a better theoretical framework in order to confirm this. However with my limited research there are many indicators that the women have been empowered and that Femuprocan have helped with this empowerment.

Further research on this matter is needed, especially to measure the women’s empowerment and how they feel about the power that they have in their lives. It would be very interesting to look at women who have recently joined cooperatives and compare interview information with women who have been part of the cooperatives for a long time and see if the level of empowerment differs or if they feel that it differs. This is to see if the women do become empowered mainly with the help of the cooperative. My investigation does however show that the cooperatives have helped the women’s empowerment at least for the women that I have interviewed. To strengthen this research it would have been good to interview a reference group of women that had not been part of a cooperative. With this reference group I could have been able to compare the interview information and compare empowerment levels.

Women should never have to feel that they have limited power of decisions, and it is important that we continue working for the empowerment of all women. I hope that we in the future never have to ask the question: Who has the power, men or women?
9. REFERENCES


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10. APPENDICES

10.1 INTERVIEW GUIDE WOMEN FROM THE LOCAL LEVEL COOPERATIVES

Initial information about the research
Describing how I am and my study and the aim
Stating that they are all anonymous in the research, and that not any third person will be able to access the un-coded data.
That they do not have to answer questions that they are not comfortable speaking about, and that we can quit the interview whenever they want to
I want to hear your personal view of how thing are.
Is it okay to record the interview?

Background info
Name and age
How many manzanas\(^1\) do you own?
How many women with their own manzanas are part of your cooperative?
For how long have you been part of the cooperative?

Decision-making
Can you explain how you and the other women work together in the cooperatives?
What kind of decisions do you make in the cooperatives?
Can you explain how you make collective decisions in the cooperatives?
Can you give me an example?
Do you feel included in the decisions?

Power
Who makes the decisions…? In the cooperative? Economic power? In your family?
Do you feel that you make more or less decisions from before and after joining the cooperative?

Do you have anything else to add?

\(^1\) Measurement that they use, similar to hectare.
10.2 INTERVIEW GUIDE, WOMEN IN FEMUPROCANS MANAGEMENT GROUP

Initial information about the research
Describing how I am and my study and the aim
Stating that they are all anonymous in the research, and that not any third person will be able to access the un-coded data.
That they do not have to answer questions that they are not comfortable speaking about, and that we can quit the interview whenever they want to
I want to heat your personal view of how thing are.
Is it okay to record the interview?

Background info
Name and age
For how long have you worked at Femuprocan?

Decision-making
Can you explain about the decisions in the cooperatives, how they are supposed to work?
Do you think that this is how they work?

Power
Do you think the women in the cooperatives have a lot of power about the decisions in cooperatives?
Do you think the women in the cooperatives have a lot of economic power?
Do you think the women in the cooperatives have a lot of power in their family?
Do you think the women’s power in the fields mentioned above has changed after joining the cooperative?

Do you have anything else to add?