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How have the United Nations development efforts in Mexico promoted and worked towards Sustainable Development Goal 5 in achieving long-lasting gender equality in the country?

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Submitted by:

Neva Barnhart

Geneva, Switzerland

Supervised by:

Yolanda Lopez Hernan

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Name: Neva Barnhart

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Neva Barnhart', written in a cursive style.

Table of Contents

Declaration of Authorship	2
Table of Contents	3
Abstract	5
1. Introduction	6
2. Literature Review	9
Importance of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	9
The Significance of Women's Economic Empowerment	9
Women's Role in the Mexican Economy	11
Gender Equality & Women's Issues in Mexico	12
Indigenous Women in Rural Areas	13
Advancing SDG 5 Gender Equality in Mexico	14
Conclusion	14
3. Methods	15
Research Proposal	15
Research Methodology	16
Data Collection	16
4. Findings	18
Women's Economic Empowerment	18
Indigenous women in rural areas	19
Hindrances and strides toward gender equality	20
Communication between UN Women and private companies	21
5. Conclusions, Limitations, and Recommendations	22
Conclusion	22
Limitations	23
Recommendations	24
References	27
Appendices	30
Appendix 1	30
Appendix 2	31
Appendix 3	32

Abstract

The sustainable development goals are a set of 17 objectives created by the United Nations with the aim that they would create a global framework so that every country may take initiatives in reaching the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The sustainable development goal number 5 discusses gender equality and has become increasingly significant in making headway towards sustainable development. In countries such as Mexico, where gender disparities are rampant it has become crucial to work towards gender equality initiatives which will in turn not only propel advancement towards SDG 5, but several others as well. UN Women was an organization that was established in Mexico in 2012 with the sole purpose of advancing women's rights in the country. Analyzing the current programs is integral to assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of said programs. This subject carries great significance due to the repercussions that not only Mexico would face, but we would all face on a global scale if we did not manage to follow the timeline established by the United Nations. After conducting extensive research it was found that although there are evident advancements towards gender equality in Mexico, it continues to be minimal. Irreversible change will require total transparency, collaboration and accountability measures throughout several sectors (private, public, NGO's), as well as a clear action plan that takes into account the most impactful gender equality initiatives. This is essential to achieving the sustainable development goals within a time frame that will still allow us to correct the damage that has been done before we no longer can.

Keywords: [UN Women, Mexico, Women's Economic Empowerment, Indigenous Women, SDGs, SDG 5, Gender Equality, Sustainable Development]

1. Introduction

Sustainable development is the concept that we as a society should find ways to meet our needs while not compromising the needs of future generations. This particular topic has recently gained awareness on an international scale due to the serious repercussions of living beyond our means, such as rising global temperatures, loss of biodiversity, and unpredictable (often extreme) weather patterns to name a few. Several countries, as well as organizations, have tried to develop initiatives in efforts to halt or reverse the damage that has been done. Although, very few of these initiatives took into consideration a broader view on the matter that encompassed not only initiatives but looked at how reversing climate change and creating a more sustainable future had to include *everyone* in order to be effective (Kumar et al., 2016). This meant that goals couldn't be achieved by simply saying things to the tune of, 'we need to save our oceans, therefore we should start recycling.' The reality is far more complex and entails a more systemic approach to creating programs and initiatives that will provide quality education, reduce hunger and poverty, innovate technologies that make it affordable and practical to switch to more sustainable options. One crucial aspect of sustainable development that has only recently been touched on is reducing gender inequalities and empowering women.

Due to the complexity and interrelation of these issues the United Nations has managed to take the concept of sustainable development and create the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). The significance being that they were the first of their kind to acknowledge that ending poverty and hunger as well as other deprivations must work in unison with strategies developed in efforts to improve health and education for all, reducing gender and economic inequalities, as well as creating economic growth without causing more damage to our ecosystems – all these issues must be looked at while taking into account and acting on cleaning our oceans and alleviating climate change (“The 17 Goals”, n.d.). For this research paper, I will be focusing on the United Nations SDGs' goal 5 which states its purpose as “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.” and I will be analyzing the progress of this goal specifically within Mexico.

In the UN's attempt to reach their ambitious goals by 2030, the organization has created and hosted several conferences and put impressive efforts into generating awareness and championing programs and initiatives to reduce gender inequality by promoting women's rights in several countries through several outlets. It's important to note that gender equality as well as women empowerment play a role of great importance when it comes to sustainable development. This is due to a few reasons. To begin, having equality and ending discrimination is a basic human right, it is not acceptable that half of the global population is treated differently and restricted compared to the other half. Additionally, it's incredibly unproductive to expect that a vast majority of the SDGs could even be achieved without first and foremost educating, employing and empowering women and girls to contribute to the

movement which would have a ripple effect throughout all the UNs sustainable development goals.

Part of the reason why I've chosen to focus on research in Mexico is in part because it is where I grew up, therefore I have a particular interest in the country's development, as well as seeing vast inequalities while living there in day to day life between women and men. Early last year, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development conducted research into gender equality and women empowerment for inclusive development in Mexico. According to the OECD, less than 50% of women who are of age to work participate in the labour market, as opposed to 82% of men active in the labour market (Gurria, 2020). This immense gap can be attributed to a few key reasons, firstly, due to the fact that women who do manage to enter into the workforce are often underpaid, and offered little to no security or social and financial protection. Additionally, stereotyped gender roles and outdated ideas of what a woman *should* be still play a huge part in society causing women to experience microaggressions on a regular basis (Smith-Oka, 2015). Moreover, the continuous representation and promotion of these stereotypes through several outlets has put a strain on the process of empowering and emancipating women in Mexico. According to Gurria (2020) these stereotypes continue to hinder gender equality by normalizing harmful gender stereotypes, women are already expected to carry out the majority of unpaid housework, which leaves them little to no time (or energy) to search for an official paid job.

According to OECD statistics the percentage of women who are not employed, getting an education or training (NEET) is an astonishing 33%, several points higher than the organizations average, not to mention women in Mexico are four times as probable to be a part of this percentage rather than men (Gurria, 2020). This statistic is in need of change for various reasons, not only because it's the morally and ethically correct thing to do, according to Revenga and Shetty (2012), the potential that empowering women has on sustainable development, particularly economic development, is astonishing. Additionally, violence towards women in Mexico is at an all time high, with more than half of all women aged 15 and up have been victims of some type of violence whether it be in the home, school or with romantic partners ("Estadísticas a Propósito", 2020). This fact is not only worrying but the numbers don't seem to be diminishing, according to De Lara and Arellano (2020) this could mean that the country would greatly benefit, in all aspects, from pouring efforts into projects and programs that will help uplift, empower and create an equal society for all women and girls to feel safe and be exposed to the same opportunities of independence and stability as men. This topic has become increasingly important particularly in the wake of the pandemic, which spiked an increase in femicides and gender based violence in Mexico (De Lara & Arellano, 2020). The significance being that if the country manages to decrease gender violence and stereotypes, create an equal labour force and overall empower women the potential for sustainable social and economic growth is unmatched.

Research sub-questions:

- ❖ **Which initiatives towards gender equality are being prioritized?**
- ❖ **Is there anything that could be done to maximize the impact of gender equality initiatives?**
- ❖ **What are the main obstacles hindering progress toward SDG 5?**

2.Literature Review

Importance of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

In 2015 the 17 SDGs were officially adopted by all member states with the intention of creating a collaborative effort to reduce inequalities, end poverty, advance health and education while generating economic growth and addressing climate change (“The 17 Goals,” n.d.). According to the authors Cernev and Fenner, all goals carry importance because the consequences of not achieving puts humanity in a vulnerable position, although, it remains crucial to analyze the SDGs in order to identify which goals should be prioritized in order to create positive effects on other goals. Their analysis concludes that among the most important goals are “SDG 1 No Poverty; SDG 13 Climate Action and SDG 4 Quality Education with SDG 2 Zero Hunger, SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production and SDG 16 Peace Justice and Strong Institutions.” (Cernev & Fenner, 2019). Out of the seven key goals identified by their research, three of them (SDGs 1, 2, and 13) recognize that SDG 5 on gender equality is a crucial aspect in reaching the aforementioned objectives; therefore policies and action plans developed to tackle SDGs 1, 2, 13, and 5 should work in synergy with each other in order to achieve the desired outcome from each of these SDGs (Agarwal, 2018). Additionally, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development which was produced during the United Nations Earth Summit supports this by highlighting the importance of women empowerment in achieving sustainable development. Principle 20 states that women play a vital role in environmental management and development, meaning that their empowerment and participation is pivotal in successfully achieving sustainable development (Rio Declaration, 1992).

The Significance of Women's Economic Empowerment

UN Women published an article titled Facts and Figures, (n.d) which references that prioritizing the economic empowerment of women is at the center of closing gender gaps, economic growth, advancing women's rights, as well as achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The article also adds significance to the SDG analysis done by Cernev and Fenner discussed in the previous section, as it mentions that empowering women economically will have a direct effect on the progress and achievement of SDGs 1, 2, and 8, in addition to several others (“Facts and figures”,

n.d.). The United Nations panel on Women's Economic Empowerment produced an extensive report issuing a call to action, noting that in order to reach the objectives set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development there is a urgency to increase the actions being taken to advance gender equality and reach full economic empowerment of women by 2030. Moreover, the report suggests that this could be accomplished most efficiently through a collaborative effort between businesses, governments, civil society, and thought leaders in creating partnerships where each actor can formulate concrete action plans to achieve women's economic empowerment (“UN Secretary Generals,” 2016). The economic empowerment of women is not only beneficial in closing the gender pay gap but it also aids in stimulating the economy, particularly in the case of countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Ferrant & Kolev, 2016). This can be seen in estimates made by PricewaterhouseCoopers women in work index, which shows that OECD countries have the potential to boost their GDP by 6 trillion if the female employment rates were similar to those of Sweden, which is an OECD country with one of the highest rates of women in the labour force at 65% (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2019). Another advantage associated with women's economic empowerment is expressed by the Food and Agriculture organization of the United Nations stating that it has a positive impact on food security and nutrition, especially in regard to children. The reason behind this is that evidence has shown when women have more control over their household income they are more likely to spend it on education, food and health purposes in comparison to men (“Empowering Women,” 2017).

Although the economic empowerment of women is important, it is equally important to understand what diverse effects this could have on other women's issues. Understanding these complex issues is crucial to successfully achieving SDG 5 on gender equality. Research conducted by Bolis and Hughes (2015) explored the link between women's economic empowerment and increasing or decreasing domestic violence rates. The findings were mixed but suggested that there is a correlation between increased DV and women's economic empowerment programs, although this varied greatly depending on community factors such as gender norms and views, rural or urban locations, as well if current rates of DV are already high. The authors' recommendations involved taking a closer look at how the empowerment programs are designed and consider adopting a more holistic approach by providing resources and tools within the programs that encompass more than economic resources; moreover, it would be beneficial to enhance collaboration and clear communication between those who work in the fields of womens economic empowerment and those who work with violence against women (Bolis & Hughes, 2015). Even though the study was thorough, there remains a need for further research and exploration of the

topic in gender and development literature due to the relatively minimal statistical and analytical data available on the matter.

Additionally, a policy brief written by Thomas et al. (2019), goes over the central challenges in measuring women's economic empowerment, that can be divided in 3 of the following aspects: Several stakeholders need to be held accountable in measuring the impact as well as governance mechanisms of women's economic empowerment, while taking into consideration that accountability and impact may vary widely depending on dominating economic sectors within a country and whether it is a public or private organization. The authors identified the second issue explaining that although there is an existing framework and measures agreed upon to achieve women's economic empowerment, these still remain very broad and data collection in most countries to validate the current measures is low. This has a direct negative impact on policy development and implementation. Finally, the last key issue the authors mentioned the existing governance mechanisms and measurement of progress within the public and private sector stating "... the integration and implementation of a gender focus on data collection, disaggregation, analysis and publication of all demographic, social and economic statistics are critical..." (Thomas et al., 2019) in regards to the design, implementation, and monitoring of more holistic, gender informed policies.

The last two bodies of literature mentioned support each other through stating the need for a more informed, well rounded approach to women's economic empowerment. However, it is clear that all the data collection and examination in the world would not matter unless governments and companies take it into their own hands to take extensive measures in addressing data gaps, the understanding of systemic as well as contextual differences that influence women's economic empowerment and the total commitment from all stakeholders.

Women's Role in the Mexican Economy

UN Women Mexico has identified economic empowerment to be one of three key priorities in advancing gender equality, stating that they put significant efforts into creating programs that enable the development of systems that respond to women's needs and work towards visible improvements, while considering rural and indigenous entrepreneurs to be of primary concern ("UN Women," n.d.). There has been extensive research conducted proving that more women participating in the economy stimulates GDP growth, contributes to reducing gender gaps and improves child health and education. Nonetheless, Mexico continues to be a country with one of

the lowest rates of female labour force participation with a statistic of 46%, indicating less than half of women of working age in Mexico participate in the labor force (“Labour force participation rate,” 2021). According to an OECD article this is most likely due to the excessive burden women in Mexico carry to take care of the majority of unpaid household work including childcare (Gurria, 2019). This statement is supported by research conducted by Abreu and Garcia that found when men do participate in household labor the time dedicated to these activities pale in comparison to that of women, averaging spending 150% more of their time on household work. Moreover, the study supports previous literature mentioned, discussing that the regions most affected by these disparities are rural municipalities, and more so in indigenous communities (Abreu & Garcia, 2018). These findings are concerning for a number of reasons pointed out by the World Bank stating that gender labour gaps create extensive social and economic opportunity loss for not only women but their households, families, communities and countries as well. It was shown that if women were to participate in the market at similar rates to men Mexico stands to gain an estimate of 21% of the country's GDP. Although, it should also be taken into consideration that an increase in proper childcare facilities has been correlated with a slight reduction in female unemployment rates in rural regions (Lopez-Acevedo et al., 2020).

Gender Equality & Womens Issues in Mexico

There have been positive strides in some areas of women's equality in Mexico, for example, in political representation. A report released by UN Women Mexico pointed out that the country managed to improve their global ranking of women in parliament, with 48.2% of women in Congress and 49.2% women in the Senate (“Informe Anual,” 2019). Nonetheless, there are still several areas that require improvement, according to The National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico, the country continues to have one of the highest rates of violence against women, with 63% of women above 15 years of age reported experiencing some sort of violence at some point in their lives (“Estadísticas a Propósito,” 2020). This statistic has unfortunately increased since the lockdown in March 2020, due to Covid-19, several countries in Latin America experienced a spike in domestic violence reports for months, while Mexico in particular reported a 25% increase in domestic violence cases (Pasquali, 2020).

Another prevalent issue within gender inequality seems to be disparities in the healthcare system with many women lacking access to proper health and safety resources, this is increasingly noticeable in research conducted by Brinda et al. (2015) on maternal and child health and mortality rates. This association is explored in depth

through a study carried out in 138 countries. The results indicated a direct correlation between gender inequality and child mortality rates attributed to, most commonly, maternal malnutrition, low household income that creates insufficient access to medical services, and maternal exposure to domestic violence. Additionally, the study observes that better maternal education has a significant positive impact on the issue, citing the reduction of 4.2 million infant deaths under the age of five over the span of 40 years. Moreover, it was also concluded that women's control over their household income can aid in reducing child mortality (Brinda et al., 2015).

Indigenous Women in Rural Areas

All women in Mexico experience these gender issues, but there is overwhelming evidence suggesting that indigenous women who live in rural communities are on average considerably more affected in each category of gender inequality. Indicating a need for policies and programs specifically aimed at the empowerment of women in poverty living in rural areas (Conovas, 2020). These findings can be supported by a separate analysis on indigenous communities in Mexico stating that this demographic has consistently displayed some of the highest levels of maternal and infant mortality rates in the country which can be largely attributed to lack of quality services during prenatal, birth and postnatal services (Gamlin, 2020).

It is important to identify who in the country is most affected by economic inequalities so that organizations and the government are able to properly allocate efforts and resources to specific needs these individuals and communities have. According to a study conducted by The National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (2019) over 10 years on the measurement of poverty in Mexico, the three states that appear to have the highest rates of extreme poverty are rural. Additionally, it was found that the individuals most affected by extreme poverty are more likely to be women, minors, indigenous people and having a darker complexion (Coneval, 2019). This statistic further highlights the important role that empowering all women and girls and achieving gender equality (SDG 5) plays in attaining sustainable development.

Some solutions proposed to enhance the economic empowerment of indigenous women in Mexico are explored by Duran-Diaz et al. (2020) suggesting that programs aimed at inclusive land management, capacity building, women's organizations and cultural tourism have improved socio-economic issues within communities. The research also concluded a useful instrument to empower women in rural areas were indigenous women's organizations to strengthen their position as key stakeholders in

community development. Throughout the literature analyzed there seems to be no mention of the possible relation between women's economic empowerment and domestic violence rates in Mexico. Bolis and Hughes (2015) found that although the body of literature is relatively new, it's possible that women of low income households and living in rural regions have greater exposure to this issue when trying to enter the labour force. The authors acknowledge that while this can't be generalized, the correlation between said factors and domestic violence does require much additional research.

This is a crucial aspect to developing holistic policies and programs toward women's economic empowerment in Mexico. Failing to examine this particular area could lead to setbacks in reaching women's economic empowerment and achieving gender equality in the country. Examining the relation between the two will lend insight to governments, businesses and NGOs in evolving current strategies to involve countermeasures to ensure the safety of women and achieve sustainable development.

Advancing SDG 5 Gender Equality in Mexico

The current president of Mexico, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (most commonly referred to as AMLO) made equality and empowerment central to his campaign. This initiative is one of the reasons why the amount of women found in the political sector has been increasing and opening the door to the possibility of gender equality and women's empowerment finally being a priority for the government, allowing greater collaboration with organizations, such as UN Women, in developing policies and programs to combat these inequalities (Andrade, 2020).

Mexico still has a long way to go in reaching SDG 5, according to UN statistics, since December 2020, there have only been 63.9% of indicators available needed to keep track of the SDGs related to gender issues and disparities. Furthermore, there's several areas that continue to lack appropriate methods for continuous monitoring such as gender in relation to poverty, access to assets, the environment, as well as physical and sexual harassment (“Country Fact Sheet”, n.d.). A separate analysis conducted by Villegas Salazar (2020), noted that several social problems on the United Nations SDGs Agenda have to be addressed collectively in order to be efficient and effective, this includes gender inequality, poverty, disparities in education and health as well as hunger.

Conclusion

Overall, it could be said that while Mexico is making some advances towards reaching SDG 5 on gender equality, the progress is slow and at the current pace it is unlikely that the country will be able to successfully attain all 17 SDGs before 2030. The literature presented explores several areas of women's issues that are often overlooked when creating policies and programs. Although there has been literature stating that other SDGs should be prioritized over SDG 5, this claim is disputed by Agarwal (2018) showing separate data that gender equality must be given equal importance because none of those goals can be achieved without the other. Moreover, several authors draw attention to the existing gender data gaps in this field, and emphasize the importance of collaboration between the public and private sectors to effectively monitor and manage gender data gaps in order to implement holistic policy and programs towards gender equality in the country (Bolis & Hughes, 2015; Thomas et al., 2019). In regard to women's economic empowerment, there's a need for Mexico, which has high rates of domestic violence, to conduct research in reference to the possible links between the two and explore what other adverse effects women's economic empowerment can have on women's issues so organizations, Such as UN Women Mexico can be adequately prepared to deal with them.

3. Methods

Research Proposal

The hope of this thesis is to assess the current progress of the United Nations projects in Mexico in regard to achieving their sustainable development goal 5 on gender equality to better understand what is hindering its advancement; moreover with the purpose of identifying areas or issues that might be overlooked that could potentially be crucial to achieving gender equality by the established timeline of 2030. Consequently, it was important to identify what particular aspects of gender equality would have a greater positive impact on advancing women's empowerment so that resources and efforts could be allocated to where they are truly needed. Mexico has only begun putting efforts into rectifying gender equality in the last ten years, and is known for being a society with conservative, gender stereotypical, and patriarchal beliefs. Additionally, all of the significant advancements, such as women in politics, have only come in the last five years. After analyzing the literature it can be deduced that at the rate Mexico is making progress, it will take several decades past 2030 to achieve gender equality, which will in turn stall the achievement of several other sustainable development goals. The aim of the conducted research is to help provide

new insight based on the gaps in the knowledge stated in the literature review that could help further SDG 5 in Mexico.

The proposition of this research focuses around the assumption that there are several issues to be addressed when it comes to the transparency between the UN and the private sector. With a belief that if this were improved upon, it would open the door to more accurate and wide scale statistical data on women's occupational health and safety as well as the complex issues that can arise when implementing women's empowerment programs. In turn, this will allow UN Women in Mexico to develop more holistic policies and programs that take into consideration adverse effects women could experience from well intended policies so that the organization can also be prepared to provide additional support and solutions when needed. These extra measures should presumably aid the UN in achieving gender equality in Mexico by the guidelines indicated by the 2030 Sustainable Agenda. Additionally, it's possible that women's economic empowerment will be a driving factor in accelerating gender equality in the country.

Research Methodology

The methodology chosen for this research paper is the inductive approach, this method requires the researcher to look at the topic from a broad perspective, by examining both empirical as well as theoretical research in order to develop a logical theory as to what direction this paper should evolve. The inductive approach was selected to allow the researcher to make observations of existing data to help construct the research question, while remaining with as few presumptions as to where the research is headed as possible so that recommendations and theories can be reached through observation of the data.

After collecting and thoroughly analyzing the progress of the sustainable development goal 5 on gender equality in Mexico, and reviewing the literature that offered solutions for a more holistic and rapid approach to achieving this SDG; furthermore, the gaps in the knowledge were identified and Mexico's current situation with gender equality was assessed. The data being collected is through the qualitative research method, moreover, in order to gather information on the primary issues Mexico is facing in advancing SDG 5 we searched for people who work for UN Women in the country to conduct interviews. Additionally, through analyzing the interviews and previous literature, clear observations could be made on possible recommendations to aid in Mexico's progress towards SDG 5 so that it can be achieved by the timeline established by the United Nations.

Data Collection

The data found in this research paper was collected through a wide variety of primary and secondary sources. An exhaustive amount of research was collected involving books, academic journals, documents produced by government agencies and NGOs. All of the aforementioned sources have been included in the literature review section of this paper and the observations as well as the gaps in the knowledge identified after examining the research served as a tool in developing the interview questions for the data collection. As previously described, the chosen research method is qualitative due to the nature of the data, we are not looking for numerical information, the aim is to understand an insider's perspective on the points touched upon throughout the paper. For this reason it was also crucial to ensure that the questions asked didn't involve any leading or suggestive questioning (Hammarberg et al., 2016) . The questions followed the format of a semi-structured interview, asking open ended questions, allowing room for flexibility so that the interviewees can explore the topic from an individual viewpoint. Another benefit of using this type of structure is that it will create an interview that can flow similarly to a conversation, and depending on the information the participant has shared, additional interview questions and theories not previously thought of can be developed (Longhurst, 2003). The interviews consist of 12 central questions with a series of sub questions (Appendix 3), determined by the direction and topic the participants chose to explore. Due to factors such as distance, conflicting schedules and Covid-19 measures the interviews were conducted online through Zoom and Google Meet and recorded on through an application during the month of May 2021; moreover, the duration of the interviews spans between thirty five to forty five minutes.

When searching for interviewees to participate in the research the main strategy was to contact people who work for UN Women in Mexico. Furthermore, due to a few observations in the literature noting the importance of women's participation in the economy, it was also crucial to find a participant who had experience or was currently working in the sector of women's economic empowerment. In this particular research, factors such as age or sex regarding the interviewee was not deemed relevant. Those who chose to participate were properly informed on how the data would be used and given the option to remain anonymous. In order to ensure the process remained ethical by implementing the use of signed consent forms found in appendix 1 and 2, in addition to requesting verbal consent when recording the interviews.

Throughout the data collection process a few limitations were presented. Firstly, when contacting possible participants the desire was to obtain at least one interview with someone who worked at a private organization in partnership with UN Women and

had experienced what it was like collaborating with the organization on a project. This information would've helped build a more well-rounded view of possible limitations/solutions surrounding the research question. Additionally, (two) questions asked during the interview revolved around the interviewees experience when working with private companies, therefore this would have contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics and issues between UN Women and the private sector in Mexico. Unfortunately, since we were not able to conduct this interview it should be taken into consideration that the information collected in regards to joint operations is only from the perspective of people working for UN Women. Secondly, there were few participants and therefore a lack of diverse viewpoints. A description of the participants who were interviewed can be seen below:

- ❖ Lucia Villafaña - Her current position is Technical Specialist in Outreach and Substantive Liaison of the Executive Secretariat of the Generation Equality Forum in Mexico. She holds extensive experience in coordinating and consulting on numerous development projects for gender equality and women's safety.
- ❖ Mitzy Baqueiro - Currently, she is the Technical Specialist for Economic Empowerment and Education at UN Women Mexico. Has three years of experience working with United Nations Development Programs as an economic and social policy analyst.

4. Findings

Women's Economic Empowerment

In the literature review it is discussed that women's economic empowerment could be central to achieving gender equality for numerous reasons. Throughout the interview process it was possible to comprehend the importance and resources UN Women Mexico puts into women's economic empowerment programs. Both Mitzy Baqueiro and Lucia Villafaña had similar responses when asked what they believed to be the most important aspect in achieving SDG 5 in the country, stating that a rise in women's participation in the economy could have the most widespread effect and stimulate positive change in several other initiatives for SDG 5. Mitzy emphasized that “women getting involved in the labour force is now more important than ever because it is at the center of Mexico's economic recovery plan after the damage done by Covid-19...”. Similarly, Lucia noted that all of the positives included in economic empowerment does not solely advance SDG 5 “... we can see that all of these aspects contribute also to other SDGs such as SDG 8 to promote productive employment and

decent work, SDG 1 for ending poverty, SDG 2 for food and security, SDG 3 for health, and, of course, SDG 10 for reducing inequalities... ”

There are two main partnership programs with private companies for women's economic empowerment, one known as the Second Chance program (started in 2019) currently implemented in three states as well as a collaborative partnership with a water drinking company, and a few others (initiated this year). Mitzy explored both partnerships describing their implementation as successful, but noting that both programs are fairly new, therefore accurately measuring their success in the long term is difficult. The collaborative partnership is a model consisting of three pillars, the first being an inclusive economic recovery program in areas affected by the 2017 earthquakes in Mexico; the second pillar is aimed at promoting gender equality within the company and the third one revolves around raising awareness of equal employment opportunities for men and women.

Mitzy mentioned that the hope is that this model serves as a framework to have similar partnerships with more private companies in the future. Additionally, the second chance program focuses on economic empowerment through education, and receives more resources but she believes this is due to the fact that it is a global initiative. Nevertheless, she predicts that the collaborative model with Bonafont will become increasingly important because the goal is for other private companies to eventually adopt these pillars as well.

Mitzy also revealed that although Mexico is the country to have most recently joined the second chance program, they are one of the countries who have been able to implement it the best from the start due to their ability to engage all partners “... the program has done great work in engaging the government in all levels.”. She goes on to say the hope is that the government will make the program their own, so that when the resources stop they have the skills and the knowledge to continue with the program. Another aspect that's made this program successful is its adaptability. UN Women works with other civil society organizations that are well-versed in the current issues wherever the program is implemented; therefore, they are able to inform the UN office about each specific context, so that the women who take part in the program are able to receive what they truly need.

While Mitzy seemed optimistic about the programs, Lucia said that they may seem promising but “in Mexico, we have seen many collaborative programs and initiatives not live up to their potential because private companies sometimes want to seem like they are working towards gender equality but fail to take the necessary steps to achieve it.”

Indigenous women in rural areas

When asked if she believed there to be a particular group of women who faced greater marginalization in Mexico, Lucia quickly pointed out that it was the indigenous

women who lived in rural areas explaining that on average they are the ones who experience the highest rates of gender violence, discrimination in the labour market, in addition to health and security inequalities. Given this information, the technical specialist for women's economic empowerment, Mitzy, was asked if there were any programs dedicated to empowering this specific group of women. She revealed that from 2013 to 2016 there was a program called Expanding Economic Opportunities for Rural Women Entrepreneurs in Latin America, "...unfortunately the funds were only for those three years. When that timeline was reached the funds ended, since then there haven't been any initiatives specifically to economically empower indigenous women." Granted, she also mentioned that in one of the states where the 'Second Chance' program is being implemented there is a significantly higher presence of indigenous women.

Lucia did state that there is a need to develop more initiatives directed towards the empowerment of indigenous women and this is something that UN Women and the Generation Equality Forum touch on frequently. She furthered her statement by adding that "since Covid-19 this has gotten worse, these women have been disproportionately affected as their vulnerabilities have multiplied." Mexico is a very diverse country with many indigenous communities, Lucia explained, many women did not have access to proper health and safety information because of language barriers. For this reason UN Women created valuable information on gender based violence and health recommendations on how to take care of themselves and their communities during Covid-19. The program was rather successful, Lucia states "we managed to get this information translated into five languages. The information was distributed through the radio and broadcasted on community speakers." This initiative was able to reach over 50,000 indigenous people.

Hindrances and strides toward gender equality

Throughout the interviews both participants made it clear that in the last few years, Mexico has put more efforts into achieving gender equality than ever before. However, they still face obstacles one surprising observation made by Mitzy was that several companies continue to conduct marketing strategies and distribute commercials that portray incredibly harmful gender stereotypes. This issue has been prominent and something UN Women has tried to address when working in partnership with private companies. "This can go back to the three pillars I spoke about, through the second pillar companies are supposed to commit to ethical marketing practices..." Mitzy goes on to explain that although many companies have benefited from adopting this model, there are still a small number who have wanted to implement it but continue to display discriminatory practices such as sexist advertisements. Lucia supported this statement by mentioning "there is still a very large gap in leadership positions, for example in company boards, including in those that have adopted gender equality initiatives."

Another major hindrance toward gender equality that both Lucia and Mitzy agreed upon is the unpaid work burden. With Mitzy stating that this is the number one reason as to why women's participation in the labour market in Mexico is so low, even in comparison to other Latin American countries “Women assume like 30, almost 31 hours of unpaid work per week, while men contribute only around 11 hours.”. The excessive unpaid work burden restricts women from having the time to develop skills or learning that could help them enter the labour market, in addition to leaving little to no time to even search for possible employment. Another component that prevents women in Mexico from entering into the labour market is the pay gap, which Mitzy points out is at around 18%, women already carry most of the work at home and are not able to dedicate much time to a job, and it is even less motivating when they earn significantly less than their male counterparts.

On a more positive note, Lucia mentioned that in recent years, UN Women has seen an increase in companies that want to collaborate and put efforts into trying to learn to be more understanding and get educated on the matters regarding gender equality and how they can implement it within their business practices. And even though the unpaid work burden is high Lucia pointed out “there is starting to be more awareness, civil society organizations and the government are trying to work closely with the UN Women office here in Mexico to innovate ways to alleviate this burden.”. Additionally, Lucia continues stating that earlier this year a huge advancement was made, with help of the global initiative Unstereotype Alliance, nine major advertisers have created a coalition with the goal of working together to end harmful gender stereotypes within the country's marketing sector.

One of the questions asked in the interview was if there was currently any research or data being collected to gauge any possible adverse effects that women's economic empowerment programs could have, particularly in states that experience higher rates of gender violence. Mitzy responded by stating that although currently there isn't any research done into that specific topic yet “In UN Women Mexico we have a very holistic perception and have programs to address gender violence in public spaces.” She continues to explain that during the pandemic domestic violence had a dramatic increase and UN Women Mexico together with Unstereotype Alliance developed a shadow pandemic business toolkit to help companies address this increase. The toolkit discusses how to notice signs of domestic violence and how to properly handle the situation now that their employees were working from home.

Communication between UN Women and private companies

Due to the nature of the work between private companies with UN Women Mexico in advancing SDG 5 there were questions about the interactions between them. When Mitzy was asked how she would describe her overall experience when working with the private sector she said it felt like an overall very positive experience. She mainly attributes this to noticing that the private sector is increasingly more aware and

interested in incorporating actions to advance gender equality in addition to seeking out UN Women to implement joint programs. However, she notes that “there is always a learning curve when working with the private sector because they are used to doing things in a different way.” She was referring to times when companies were more accustomed to working independently or were more interested in indicators instead of the actual work that's being done. Despite that, Mitzy is pleased with how her interactions have been and believes there to be good communication and transparency when UN Women works with private companies in the country.

Lucia noted that traditionally, it has been difficult to collaborate with the private sector but recently this has been changing. In light of the pandemic causing the regression of women's rights in many countries, the Generation Equality Forum was organized by UN Women and has been co-hosted by Mexico. This global gathering was created to form a solid collaborative effort by forming a coalition involving private companies, governments, and gender rights activists. Lucia emphasized the importance this will have on private-public sector relations “The agenda will allow all sectors to have active communication, transparency and take collective action for gender equality.” Lucia added that the coalition is extremely promising and, overall, should help Mexico make real irreversible progress towards SDG 5 in the following years.

5. Conclusions, Limitations, and Recommendations

Conclusion

The purpose of this research is to understand what is being done to address SDG 5 on gender equality in Mexico with the aim of identifying crucial programs, prioritized initiatives and major hindrances in the country in order to provide solutions and recommendations to achieve SDG 5 as efficiently and effectively as possible.

It has been discussed throughout the paper and in literature reviewed that women's economic empowerment should be prioritized in gender equality initiatives (“Facts and Figures,” n.d.; Ferrant & Kolev, 2016). In the interview conducted with Mitzy, she recognized that UN Women Mexico does consider women's economic empowerment to be a priority and a core driver in not only achieving SDG 5, but several others. Nonetheless, Mexico has only recently begun putting concerted efforts into this particular aspect of gender equality, but currently women's economic empowerment plays a crucial role in recovering the country's economy. Even though the efforts are recent, the fact that Mexico was able to excel in the beginning stages of implementation in their program Second Chances brings about hope that the program will be effective and continue expanding in the long term.

Historically, Mexico has been known to be a patriarchal society riddled with stereotypes and high levels of gender inequalities, yet in recent years there has been a wave of change (De Lara & Arellano, 2020). This was supported by Lucia, when she discussed that governments and private companies are becoming increasingly more involved and interested in taking steps toward reform through collaboration with UN Women. This has cultivated the growth of many programs, action plans and initiatives with the potential to make significant positive impacts on gender equality. Although this shift is great news, UN Women Mexico has acknowledged that the progress hasn't been advancing at the pace needed in order to achieve SDG 5 by the timeline set out by the 2030 Sustainable Agenda. This is precisely why the Generation Equality Form was created. It only started off in March 2021, so its effects can't be gauged yet, but its ambitious action plan and objectives are promising enough to leave hope that real substantial change will come from it.

When conducting the interviews it is mentioned that companies are gaining interest in change and gender equality initiatives but often fail to elicit change within internal company practices. According to Thomas et al., (2019), this is why it is crucial to work towards open communication between the private and public sector. It will allow for collaboration and to share common targets for women's empowerment. But in order to achieve this efficiency public and private sectors need to build a solid monitoring and evaluation system to keep track of initiatives and subjective aspects regarding women's empowerment. Moreover, as it was pointed out by Duran-Diaz et al. (2020), indigenous women could contribute greatly to the economy. Not only that, but their participation is vital in achieving SDG 5, yet there are still no programs currently in place to help them have access to the tools and resources that will empower this group of women in Mexico.

Limitations

When conducting research a few limitations came about. Firstly, there are several perspectives that would have been relevant to have in order to conduct a more comprehensive study. At first, part of the interview strategy was to find a private company who had experienced working with the organization first hand in order to get their perspective on joint programs with UN Women and how they operate. It was not possible to get in contact with a private company who had participated in these programs; therefore, it should be taken into consideration that the findings and perspectives shared are solely from the viewpoint of UN Women. Moreover, it would have been beneficial to speak to a larger group of people, who worked in diverse sectors of UN Women in Mexico, this would have allowed the evaluation of UN

programs from several different perspectives. Unfortunately, due to time constraints and conflicting schedules this wasn't possible so there were a limited number of interviews. Additionally, it should be noted that it wasn't possible to interview women who had benefited from these programs, whose point of view could have shifted the outcome of the research by understanding how they felt about the effectiveness of the programs.

There are a few crucial aspects pertaining to the success of SDG 5 that were not mentioned in this paper, such as human trafficking, because it was assessed that the nature of the topic is too complex and few people are comfortable speaking on the matter. Another limitation was observed in the literature in addition to being mentioned by both participants. In Mexico, gender equality efforts in general are relatively new, and the ongoing programs that were discussed in the findings have only been implemented in the last 3 years, with some starting as early as this year. The recentness of these programs limits the amount of data that's been conducted on the effectiveness of the programs, and makes it difficult to gauge the magnitude of the impact it may have on advancing SDG 5. Lastly, it should be mentioned that although there is a vast amount of information available pertaining to the research question, a few key studies that could have added immense value to the research were not accessible.

Recommendations

Literature mentioned previously by Coneval (2019), discusses the different degrees of marginalization among the various demographics of women, and finds that indigenous women who live in rural areas are more often subjected to inequalities. This was confirmed during the interview with Lucia. Due to the fact that there has not been a program dedicated to empowering this specific group of women since 2016, it's recommended that it be considered to discuss this issue during the Generation Equality Forum to open the possibility to new funding and development programs for the purpose of empowering indigenous women in Mexico. Indigenous women make up a significant part of the country's population and a crucial part to advancing SDG 5.

An additional recommendation would be for UN Women Mexico to conduct further research into the possible adverse effects that their women's economic empowerment programs could have on other gender issues. As Bolis and Hughes (2015) have pointed out, this subject has only recently been explored in academic literature but should gain more awareness because understanding the possible links could be critical

in creating contingency plans. Within Mexico, there hasn't been any studies or data conducted on the matter. It's vital to identify any possible unforeseen outcomes from these programs so that UN Women can develop skills and tactics to adapt and address these situations to maintain a program's efficiency.

When conducting the interview with Lucia, she made a point to mention that although now, more than ever, companies are interested in gender equality initiatives and collaborating with UN Women, many don't reflect this interest when integrating the practices within internal company policy. This is why many companies who have joined the programs with the Organization continue to have low gender diversity in the boardroom or conduct marketing practices that feed into harmful gender stereotypes. In light of this information, further recommendations would be to implement an accountability model with private companies to ensure they stay on track and implement UN Women initiatives holistically.

A final recommendation, due to the fact that these programs and initiatives are fairly new it could be beneficial to develop a shared data bank between the government, UN Women, feminist organizations and private companies taking part in the Generation Equality Forum. This is so that the progress towards gender equality can be accurately measured which will in turn help the organizations view where more resources are needed and what initiatives should be prioritized to create irreversible change.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Consent form for Lucia Villafañe

I agree to participate in the research project entitled “*United Nations Development Efforts in Mexico Towards Long Lasting Gender Equality in the Country*” undertaken by the researchers named below;

Neva Barnhart

By signing below, I acknowledge that:

- I have agreed to participate in this study.
- I have been informed of and understand the purpose of this study.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice.
- I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else.
- Details relating to anonymity and confidentiality have been explained and I understand these.
- I have had the opportunity to ask any questions.
- With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.



Signature:

Date: 14 / 05 / 2021

Lucia Villafañe

Appendix 2

Consent form for Mitzy Baqueiro

I agree to participate in the research project entitled “*United Nations Development Efforts in Mexico Towards Long Lasting Gender Equality in the Country*” undertaken by the researchers named below;

Neva Barnhart

By signing below, I acknowledge that:

- I have agreed to participate in this study.
- I have been informed of and understand the purpose of this study. • I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice. • I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else.
- Details relating to anonymity and confidentiality have been explained and I understand these.
- I have had the opportunity to ask any questions.
- With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Signature:



Mitzy Baqueiro

Date: May 21st, 2021

Appendix 3

Interview Questions

1. Do you partner with private companies to achieve the goal of women's economic empowerment? If so, which ones?
2. What is the main program/project that is currently being invested most focused on?
3. How is the success and ongoing progress of this program/project measured?
4. What are some of the most common obstacles that are faced when trying to achieve the goal of empowering women in Mexico?
5. What do you believe is the main reason why it has been a struggle for women in Mexico to become economically independent?
6. What would you consider to be one of the most important aspects in reaching SDG goal number 5 on gender equality?
7. How has your overall experience been with working with the private sector in Mexico? Positive? Negative? And how so?
8. When working in partnership with a private company, how would you describe the transparency and overall collaboration?
9. Is there a shared database between UN women Mexico and the private sector to keep track of the progress of programs?
 - a. If not, do you believe a shared database would be helpful in identifying obstacles in women's economic empowerment
10. Has there been any research done on the impact of women's economic empowerment on domestic violence rates and situations?
 - a. If not, is this something the organization is considering? Do you believe this could be beneficial in developing more holistic policies and programs when trying to empower women economically?
 - b. If yes, what were the findings and how do you keep track of the data? And do you collaborate with sectors that work with combating violence against women?
11. What is being done to raise the introduction of women into the Mexican labour market?
12. Upon some of my research, I came across an analysis that mentioned the demographic most affected by inequalities are native women who live in rural areas in Mexico. Are there any programs that are specifically dedicated to empowering native women who live in rural areas?

