



# Characterization of female entrepreneurship. Essential variables for their promotion and development in the city of Sincelejo - Sucre

## Caracterización de los emprendimientos femeninos. Variables esenciales para su fomento y desarrollo en la ciudad de Sincelejo - Sucre

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### ABSTRACT

The article describes the characteristics of female entrepreneurship in the village of Chochó and the Las Canarias neighborhood in the municipality of Sincelejo. The main objective was to establish the profile of women entrepreneurs from variables that favor their development in the city. The methodology used consisted of a mixed non-experimental descriptive approach, with the application of a survey to 50 women entrepreneurs assigned to the office of women and gender equity, Sincelejo mayor's office. As a result, it was obtained that the entrepreneurial practice is limited due to the lack of business knowledge and the few opportunities for business growth; it is worth mentioning that the motivation and drive of this group of women is to move forward and strengthen their enterprises with the generation of income for their households. It is also concluded that the enterprises are in incipient stages and for their consolidation, institutional and academic support is necessary for business strengthening.

**Keywords:** equality, equity, female entrepreneurship, labor market, strategies.

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### RESUMEN

El artículo describe las características de los emprendimientos femeninos del corregimiento de Chochó y barrio Las Canarias del municipio de Sincelejo. El objetivo principal fue establecer el perfil de las mujeres empresarias desde variables que propicien su desarrollo en la ciudad. La metodología utilizada consistió en el enfoque mixto no experimental descriptivo, con la aplicación de una encuesta a 50 mujeres emprendedoras adscritas a la oficina de la mujer y equidad de género, de la alcaldía de Sincelejo. Como resultado se obtuvo que la práctica emprendedora es limitada por el desconocimiento empresarial y las pocas oportunidades para el crecimiento de los negocios; es de mencionar que la motivación y el empuje de este grupo de mujeres es salir adelante y fortalecer sus emprendimientos con la generación de ingresos para sus hogares. Así mismo se concluye que los emprendimientos se encuentran en etapas incipientes y, para su consolidación, se hace necesario el apoyo institucional y la academia para el fortalecimiento empresarial.

**Palabras clave:** equidad, estrategias, igualdad, mercado laboral, mujer emprendedora.

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## INTRODUCTION

Social development is essential for a life of equality and equity when it comes to gender, and even more so when seeking to eliminate the gaps that limit people's progress (Guthridge et al., 2022). Within social development models and strategies, women-focused welfare programs have been created. These programs generate actions for their growth in various aspects of life and their projects. Issues such as decent work and the workforce have evolved conceptually in recent years, which has favored women occupying leadership positions in large companies and breaking glass ceilings (Jenderedjian & Bellows, 2021; Pal et al., 2022).

In this sense, one of the most powerful emerging trends has been female entrepreneurship; among the main arguments



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put forward is that it is necessary for social development while also promoting women's independence (Rosca et al., 2020). Furthermore, the study of these ventures has highlighted how, unlike men, female entrepreneurs often start their projects out of necessity or precariousness rather than based on vocational considerations (Franzke et al., 2022; Shastri et al., 2022). Consequently, women are considered an economic force in the development of regions; this is undoubtedly reflected in their contribution through their occupational work, whether at home, holding a job, or in other spheres (Aparicio et al., 2022).

It is worth mentioning that, in the socioeconomic context of labor and from a general perspective, employment or job placement is considered a factor of growth and improvement in the quality of life as long as it meets the conditions of the regulations in force in each country (Rojas, 2023). As a result of the abrupt situation experienced in 2020 and 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the global labor panorama saw its problems exacerbated by the massive dismissal of workers and closure of companies, which brought with it an economic and social contraction (Mishra et al., 2020; Naseer et al., 2023; Tisdell, 2020).

In Colombia, the labor market was not immune to global conditions. The impact of the pandemic exacerbated the deterioration in aspects related to the social security system, wage levels, and current regulations. These variables led to social exclusion, poor growth and productivity, and persistently high unemployment rates among the country's population (Bonet-Morón et al., 2020; Morales et al., 2022; Orozco-Castañeda et al., 2024).

In addition, business informality and rising unemployment in the country delayed the post-pandemic economic recovery (Leyva & Urrutia, 2023; Torres, 2020). Generally speaking, these types of scenarios can be interpreted as an inability of the labor market to integrate the population into the productive system (Ham et al., 2021). In this sense, informality is understood as the operating system that characterizes small productive units, marked by poor accounting records, small-scale operations, and the illegal employment of workers (Luque, 2022). In turn, the phenomenon of informality is considered an impediment to the social and economic advancement of regions, as it limits the utilization of the sectors' potential. Furthermore, these variables describe the violation of populations' living conditions. Hence, it is important to coordinate institutional efforts across productive sectors to generate actions that minimize the problem.

On the other hand, this informality not only involves conditions of vulnerability but also situations associated with gender-based violence or discrimination (Lo Bue et al., 2022). The population with the highest level of participation in the context of informal work is women. As mentioned previously, this high prevalence is due to time and resource constraints, aspects that serve as conditioning factors for a wide variety of phenomena that undermine women's job security.

According to studies, a common situation is that women dedicate their time to family-related activities and, in turn, must find resources to cover their daily expenses; this decreases their participation in the formal labor market (Berniell et al., 2021). Although the situation has changed in recent years, and women's participation in the labor market has increased (Petrangolo & Ronchi, 2020), the employment rate is dispersed and marginalized based on gender, a significant fact that suggests that the gaps persist. The aspects analyzed influence women's high participation in the informal labor market and undermine women's position in formal employment regimes by generating informality within organizations (Elgin & Elveren, 2021; Galea et al., 2020).

In light of the ideas presented, the article is structured from a general and problematic approach to the position of women in the entrepreneurial field. First, the theoretical foundations are presented, followed by the results of applying the core instrument. Finally, the results are discussed, and conclusions are offered that support the development of future studies related to supporting female entrepreneurship.

## **Female entrepreneurship**

One way to stand out in a changing business world is in the opportunity or the need for entrepreneurship since entrepreneurship is defined as a mechanism of sustainability in the short, medium, and long term that allows for a relatively stable income (Wannamakok & Chang, 2020). Within this general framework, female entrepreneurship was framed within the dynamics of generating actions that allowed women to provide for their families. While it was previously perceived this way, the landscape has changed. The opportunities and potential for growth through their businesses stimulate their evolution, market position, and economic empowerment (Islam, 2020). This conceptual shift has also generated the need for new legal and political support to provide adequate support for women entrepreneurs (Setini et al., 2020).

The foregoing shows the growth and empowerment of women entrepreneurs in areas that were not previously appreciated, especially when women enter to provide for the household. It is vital to mention that female entrepreneurship is understood as an innovative and creative activity that fosters women's economic independence, employment opportunities, and an improvement in the quality of family life (Corrêa et al., 2022).

Consequently, the theoretical analysis reveals that female entrepreneurship is viewed as a tool that allows for recognition of their efforts, just like men's. Furthermore, it positively impacts society, the local economy, and the environment (Ogundana et al., 2021). In this sense, female entrepreneurship is considered significant, as women play a transcendental role in economic activities, solving problems such as unemployment and improving the quality of life of their families.

A woman's success in entrepreneurship requires characteristics that identify her role and enable adequate performance in her activities. It is worth noting that in the literature, the entrepreneurial woman is characterized by qualities such as commitment, perseverance, and discipline. Regarding the core component, values such as responsibility, honesty, fairness, and solidarity are highlighted. Other frequently mentioned benefits include ongoing training, the acquisition of knowledge to apply in their business, and the development of teamwork skills.

On the other hand, Montaña and Hernández (2021) indicate that women in their entrepreneurial journey exhibit characteristics specific to their gender, which they later incorporate into others they acquire throughout their lives. Some of these characteristics are self-confidence, persistence, results orientation, willingness to take risks, enthusiasm for their activities, creativity, and the ability to detect opportunities. These characteristics undoubtedly lead to better performance by women in their entrepreneurial endeavors, as they recognize the obstacles that may limit them and, at the same time, are able to confront and overcome them (Agarwal et al., 2020).

Regarding the social importance of female entrepreneurship, it is seen in today's world as a way to eliminate gender gaps and inequality in the business world. Furthermore, it offers opportunities to empower women in male-led fields, thus promoting women's ability to generate new ideas and invigorate the market with their ideas and leadership (Ordoñez-Abril et al., 2021).

Economically, women's purchasing power directly contributes to strengthening economies, especially in changing environments. Economic autonomy is an essential component of gender equity policies, as it promotes caregiving, co-responsibility, and labor or employment rights. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen institutions to promote and implement gender mainstreaming strategies in countries. Figures show that, globally, female entrepreneurship reached greater participation by 2020, with women involved in businesses and new ventures reaching 274 million, while women as managers and owners reached 139 million (Tripathi, 2023).

In Colombia, women's participation in entrepreneurship has taken a significant turn; their representation has been evident in creating new businesses and holding management positions. Therefore, it is fair to say that female entrepreneurship in the country is significant, both for its contribution to job creation and for its contribution to the economic development of the regions and the country as a whole. At the same time, it is important to highlight the institutional initiative in promoting public policies on entrepreneurship and gender, to support women in their initiatives, and to close the gaps that impede their growth.

The factors that motivate female entrepreneurship can be personal, social, and institutional, among others. Each positively guides women's improved performance in their initiatives (Latifi et al., 2022). Without a doubt, these significantly promote the possibility of entrepreneurship and having financial dependents (Naguib, 2024).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The article is derived from the project "Gender Equity Policy, Empowerment, and Female Entrepreneurship through the Women's and Gender Equity Office of the City of Sincelejo." The research was conducted using a mixed, non-experimental, and descriptive approach, organized sequentially and through progressive data integration for high rigor (Harrison et al., 2020). The sample consisted of 50 female entrepreneurs located in the Chochó District and Las Canarias Neighborhood in the municipality of Sincelejo. They were intentionally selected to form a pilot group attached to the Women's and Gender Equity Office of the Sincelejo City Hall.

The following inclusion criteria determined the intentional selection of the sample: a clear willingness to participate in the study, formal establishment of the ventures, and confidentiality of information. In addition, an initial contract was drawn up to establish the ethical elements that would govern participation in the study and

clarify issues of interest related to the objectives, confidentiality, protection of the entrepreneurs' personal and verbal data, as well as the commitment to review and communicate the results.

To collect the data, a self-administered questionnaire was used, measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 5 indicating strong agreement. Quantitative data processing was carried out using Excel.

The qualitative data generated by the venture were processed using ATLAS.ti v.9.0 software and incorporated into the discussion of the quantitative data. This integration approach not only provided greater clarity regarding the entrepreneurs' perspectives but also facilitated their representation through a word cloud.

## RESULTS Y DISCUSSION

### Sociodemographic profile of the female entrepreneur

The research determined the profile of female entrepreneurs in the Chochó and Las Canarias districts of Sincelejo; among other things, this profile is crucial for designing future support tools. In this regard, various analytical indicators were identified:

1. The age of the women: it was divided into two large groups. In the first, the range was between 18 and 30 years, corresponding to 30%, while in the second, 32% were between 31 and 40 years.
2. Regarding Current Marital Status: this indicator was divided into three groups. The majority was represented, 36%, by women in a free union; 30% were married; and the remaining 26% were single.
3. Educational level: this corresponded primarily to secondary school, at 66%. In Colombia, this means that the majority completed their high school studies without the possibility of continuing to a higher level of education. However, it is evident that some female entrepreneurs, 14% of whom completed technical or vocational studies, completed their studies.
4. Socioeconomic stratum: 50% correspond to stratum 1 and 36% are unaware of this. It should be noted that the study populations belong to a rural district and, on the other hand, the Las Canarias neighborhood, in the southern part of the municipality.
5. Number of Children: this indicator showed that 52% of female entrepreneurs' households were primarily made up of one or two children. However, 28% had households made up of three to four children.
6. Public Services: in the households of entrepreneurs, 34% of the households provided public services (energy, water, and gas) and 32% provided four services (energy, water, gas, and internet); 30% provided two services (energy and water); it is clear that the proportion of families with two services used wood stoves to supply gas.
7. Head of Household: 42% of women are heads of household, defined as being responsible for the home and their family, while 36% indicated that men are responsible for the family and its income.

The findings, based on the productive age range, established primarily between 18 and 40 years, showed that this population has a high potential for entrepreneurship and entry into the formal labor market. Likewise, these populations have a secondary education level and the potential to continue their education. Overall, the data confirm that self-employment, entrepreneurship development, and generating a stable income for the household are needs and act as motivating factors. Furthermore, the women who studied actively exercised family leadership and were responsible for maintaining their households and improving the families' economic conditions.

### Characteristics of Entrepreneurship

Based on the information obtained from the application of the instruments and the experience of the pilot group of the study, the three dimensions that were taken into account to establish female entrepreneurship are outlined:

#### Personal factors

Among the personal factors that influence women's entrepreneurship in the Chochó and Las Canarias districts, it is noted that 36% are prepared to propose and accept challenges; 66% are confident in their abilities to successfully carry out activities; 52% can control their emotions; and 58% are willing to take risks for business growth, as 50% indicate that entrepreneurship is a well-positioned and valued profession in society.

The entrepreneurs studied consider themselves capable of setting and achieving goals, demonstrating their

self-confidence in developing activities, and taking risks when making business decisions. That is, more than half of the entrepreneurs responded that they agreed and strongly agreed with the statements presented. However, between 40% and 44% of the entrepreneurs were indecisive, specifically related to their knowledge of female entrepreneurship promotion programs and the knowledge required to launch their business in international trade.

### Interpersonal factors

These factors are framed within two fundamental variables for entrepreneurial development. First is family; 38% agree that family responsibilities do not limit their business decisions, and 52% agree that they can balance work in the business with time dedicated to family. It is worth noting that, regarding the previous items, 32% and 34% strongly agree. The other 16% indicated that family responsibilities limit their business decisions.

Second, the analysis of the Work Experience variable showed that 50% strongly agree that work experience gives them the confidence to start a business. Furthermore, 44% indicated that society values work experience prior to starting a business. Therefore, the confidence that an entrepreneur generates in her business and her decisions is highly valued. However, 22% say they are undecided about whether society values work experience prior to entrepreneurship.

### Factors associated with the Context

The analysis allowed us to establish the following factors:

- Networks: 30% were undecided about the importance of having a network of contacts related to their business, and 24% agreed that having a network of contacts is essential. On the other hand, 28% disagreed, stating that they do not require media to promote their business.
- Role models: 52% strongly agreed that they are inspired and motivated to continue pursuing their ventures.
- Stereotypes: 34% of the female entrepreneurs considered that their ventures had not been harmed by existing stereotypes regarding what men and women are capable of doing differently.
- Social valuation: 38% agreed that their business sector is valued equally whether a woman or a man runs it. On the other hand, 58% strongly agreed that they feel empowered to move their businesses forward, 34% partially agreed, and another 34% agreed that there are no differences between female and male entrepreneurs.
- Financing: 32% of the female entrepreneurs were undecided about having the financial means to sustain their business over time; 22% agreed that they would have the financial means to sustain their business, while another 22% disagreed.
- Relationships with organizations: 38% strongly agreed that they consider support from external entities essential for the development of their business; 34% disagreed, as it is not easy to find information on organizational support for entrepreneurship; and 26% strongly agreed that they rely on government support for women entrepreneurs. However, a significant percentage of female entrepreneurs, 24%, remain undecided about the above statements.

### Qualitative assessment of the results

Entrepreneurship among women in the Chochó district and Las Canarias neighborhood was observed as an activity with increasing personal and social importance. However, in the municipality of Sincelejo, female entrepreneurs lack opportunities for business growth, thus tending to operate in small and medium-sized businesses. Furthermore, this scenario was identified as fraught with challenges, as they lack the financial resources to sustain themselves.

Regarding the specific aspects of preparation and training necessary for entrepreneurship, the support received does not fully meet existing needs. In this regard, the verbal data collected in the open-ended section of the questionnaire showed that female entrepreneurs faced a series of challenges different from those of their male counterparts. Therefore, more detailed analyses of their specific needs and ways to meet them through programs, training, or other support are required.

Therefore, training and capacity building plans are essential if female entrepreneurship is to be enhanced at the local level. In this regard, the women studied highlighted the limited access to specific education, which they see as essential for achieving the sustainability of their businesses. Regarding the areas identified, they highlighted finance, marketing, and the appropriate use of technology. Based on the pejorative or pessimistic nature of some



statements, these areas, rather than strengths, are perceived as limitations to their ability to compete in the market. It is essential to offer specific training programs for women entrepreneurs, which provide them with the skills and knowledge necessary to successfully develop their businesses.

As can be seen in the word frequency analysis, the main topics of interest of the women studied revolve around their ventures, a fundamental finding, as it suggests that these are highly hierarchical. Another group of frequent and central terms were those related to gender and femininity, which is critical, as it reveals gender awareness as a conditioning factor in their representation of entrepreneurial activity.

**Figure 1.**  
*Word cloud of verbalizations*



**Source:** own elaboration

**Note:** the figure appears in its original language.

## CONCLUSIONS

Entrepreneurship in the municipality of Chochó and the Las Canarias neighborhood is in its early stages. Among the external factors, it was identified that social support is still lacking to allow businesses to consolidate the necessary elements for their formalization and growth.

Women in the municipality of Chochó and the Las Canarias neighborhood identify gender equity policies as a support that would help them achieve their goals, especially in their entrepreneurial endeavors. However, their verbalizations and numerical data demonstrate the need for assistance to achieve greater visibility, generate channels for participation, and strengthen the allocation of financial resources and training programs in specific areas.

The results allow us to conclude that promoting entrepreneurship in the municipality of Sincelejo requires the introduction of essential variables and factors for its development and promotion. Among other things, it is essential that women have the support of public policies designed to respond to the specific context and that serve as a vehicle at the governance level.

Likewise, it is critical that female entrepreneurs have support from municipal or departmental institutions for

the creation of business networks and associations that facilitate greater competitiveness and representation in the market. Therefore, it is important to finance ventures with seed capital, which supports growth and sustainability in the short and medium-term.

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