

Chapter 21

Post–COVID Indigenous Women Entrepreneurship: A Case of the Kichwa–Puruha in Ecuador

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ABSTRACT

Despite its great importance within the indigenous communities of Ecuador, the number of studies carried out on the Kichwa (Quichua)-Puruha indigenous population is minimal: the majority of those that have been undertaken are related to archaeological issues. The purpose of this chapter is to shed light on the socioeconomic and cultural traits of female entrepreneurship in the Kichwa (Quichua)-Puruha indigenous group and how this relates to the Sumak Kawsay (Harmonious Life) in the region of Chimborazo, one of the most impoverished provinces of Ecuador. In order to achieve this goal, a mixed methodology has been applied made up of focus groups, in-depth interviews, questionnaires, and hours of direct observation. The results show that indigenous female entrepreneurs belonging to the Kichwa (Quichua)-Puruha ethnic group living in the Chimborazo region are guided by four concepts—relationship, correspondence, reciprocity, and complementarity—and on five principles related to national culture and which are related to sustainable development.

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INTRODUCTION

Is it possible to talk about an indigenous Andean culture of female entrepreneurship distinct from traditional female entrepreneurship? Chimborazo province is one of the poorest provinces in Ecuador and is primarily inhabited by the Kichwa (Quichua)-Puruha (from *puru*, 'hill') ethnic group. Female members of this group have an essential role to play due to their resilience and self-sufficiency (Bullough, Renko, & Myatt, 2014). In addition to inhabiting the Province of Chimborazo (6,500 km²), the area chosen for this research, the Kichwa (Quichua)-Puruha ethnic group are also found in the Ecuadorian provinces of Bolívar (3,945 km²), Tungurahua (3,386 km²), and some villages (*cantones*) of the Cotopaxi province (6,180 km²).

Kichwa (Quichua)-Puruha culture is believed to have originated around the year 1200, with the population raising guinea-pigs (*Cavia porcellus*) for food and traditional medicine (also known as indigenous or folk medicine) and growing the corn and potatoes which still make up their staple diet. The culture introduced a social system based on patriarchy, deities, and mythologies. The most important deities are Mama Ocllo, a deity representing textile clothing, housework, the intimate chest (*uqllay*, 'housing in the breast'), and her brother, Ayar Manco, representing the law and the cult of the Sun. The latter is regarded as the first deity of this culture, being Inti's son ('Sun' in the Kichwa (Quichua language)). Both deities are accompanied by their corresponding sacred symbology, with Kichwa (Quichua) being viewed as the language of warriors and goddesses linked to textiles (Calvo, 2019). This is the reason why the main activity of female entrepreneurs in Kichwa (Quichua)-Puruha communities is the production of textiles and handicrafts known "for their designs, bright colors, and models that encapsulate the living wealth of the people." (Calderón-Cruz, 2018, p. 14). This textile clothing has a strong symbolic and religious significance.

The authors have chosen the Kichwa (Quichua)-Puruha ethnic group because it has not been widely studied despite its significance within Ecuadorean indigenous communities. The purpose of our study is to understand indigenous female entrepreneurship better, as it displays peculiarities that differentiate it from female entrepreneurship in other parts of the world. The authors have applied the technique of mixed-methodology comprising 4 focus groups, 72 in-depth interviews with local indigenous leaders (men and women), 320 hours of direct observation, and 1,067 questionnaires on the subject of entrepreneurship in the 51 Kichwa (Quichua)-Puruha social groups existing in the region, of which 549 are female entrepreneurs.

This study challenges the traditional understanding of female entrepreneurship by introducing socially-acceptable behaviors (e.g., informal minor-age entrepreneurs) and five indigenous cultural principles: *Minga* (Solidarity-based differentiated products rooted in community work), *Sumak Kawsay* (Sustainability in harmony and good living), *Ama killa* (Inter-ethnic indigenous collaboration grounded on the principle of not being idle), *Qispinana* (The transmission of values to the new generation founded on the Kichwa (Quichua)-Puruha cosmovision), and *Yanantin* (Gender equality based on the pride of belonging and the combination of the principles of correspondence and complementarity).

These principles are inherent to indigenous entrepreneurship but have not been considered so far in female entrepreneurship. The authors have analyzed five databases for literature on this topic. The results are as follows: seven papers at the DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals), and eight papers at both the Web of Science-Clarivate Analytics and Scopus-Elsevier. One paper deals with political issues, with the remainder relating to different archaeological matters. Neither Latindex nor EBSCO databases have papers published on this topic.

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