

The power of education

A qualitative study to the role of NGO education programs in the empowerment of young women in La Paz, Bolivia



Lara Schalkwijk



Utrecht University

The power of education

A qualitative study to the role of NGO education programs in the empowerment of young women in La Paz, Bolivia

Student	Lara Schalkwijk
Student number	6494102
E-mail	w.m.schalkwijk@students.uu.nl
Supervisor	Seama Mowri
E-mail	s.s.mowri@uu.nl
Second reader	Romain Dittgen
E-mail	r.dittgen@uu.nl
Date	4 th of August 2023

Abstract

Although female enrollment rates in higher education are increasing worldwide, there are groups that stay behind. In the Bolivian context, socially and economically disadvantaged young women are still at disadvantage to complete their schooling. This is where certain NGO education programs step in. In this research the following question is central: *How do NGO education programs like Helping Hands support the empowerment process of young women in La Paz, Bolivia?* Education is an important tool in the process of empowerment. However, education alone is not enough to fully empower a woman. Additionally, as gender relations are culturally specific and differ across contexts, it is important to consider cultural contexts when looking at strategies to foster empowerment. As studies on the role of NGO education projects for women empowerment are lacking, especially in the Bolivian context, this study is empirically relevant. Additionally, it can be helpful for NGO projects to see what dimensions are effective to support processes of empowerment. The research has been conducted in La Paz, the administrative capital of Bolivia. Qualitative methods like conducting in-depth interviews and conducting participant observation were used to gain understanding of the lived experience of the participants.

This study states that a holistic approach is needed to support the empowerment processes of young women in La Paz, Bolivia. In this, four important dimensions of empowerment are presented. These are 1) the economic dimension, 2) the health dimension, 3) the social dimension and 4) the personal dimension. The study concludes by stating that NGO education programs are a great way to bring individual change from a grassroots level. However, structural barriers are not necessarily removed by these programs.

Acknowledgements

From the 8th of February until the 3rd of May, I have conducted qualitative research in Bolivia, the administrative capital of Bolivia. This thesis is the end product of a long process of preparing, conducting fieldwork, analyzing, writing, and reflecting, which I have experienced as a very valuable and educational time within the Master program of International Development Studies at Utrecht University.

First, I would like to thank my supervisor Seama Mowri for supporting me throughout this process. I want to thank her for her helpful feedback and her fast and clear replies when I had questions. This motivated me and gave me confidence during the preparation phase, the fieldwork period and the writing process.

Next to my supervisor, I would like to thank everyone that helped me with and participated in this research. I am grateful for the opportunity to conduct my research at Helping Hands and I would especially like to thank Linda Zarate for her hospitality and her efforts to help me with my research. I am also grateful for Janneth, Fabiola, Maria and Ángel, the staff members of Helping Hands, for the interesting conversations and their practical help during the period of my fieldwork. Additionally, I would like to express thanks to my interview participants as well as the many other people that I have spoken during my fieldwork in La Paz. I would like to thank them for sharing their personal stories and ideas with me. Without them I could not have written this thesis.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friends for being there for me throughout the process that I went through the past year. Also I would like to thank my peers for all the study sessions, the mental support and for the motivation to continue during the writing process.

Table of content

Abstract.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	4
Introduction.....	7
Chapter 1: Theoretical framework.....	10
1.1 Thinking on women and development: the theories.....	10
1.2 Women empowerment.....	10
1.3 Pathways to women empowerment.....	12
Chapter 2: Regional thematic framework.....	15
2.1 La Paz.....	15
2.2 Gender and ethnicity in Bolivia.....	16
2.3 Women empowerment & education in Bolivia.....	17
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	19
3.1 Operationalization of concepts.....	19
3.2 Interviews.....	20
3.3 Participant observation.....	20
3.4 Analysis of data.....	20
3.5 Positionality as researcher.....	21
Empirical chapters.....	23
Chapter 4: Gender inequality in Bolivian society.....	24
4.1 Machismo.....	24
4.2 Changing gender norms and feminism.....	26
Chapter 5: Aims and aspirations.....	29
5.1 Career choices.....	29
5.2 Dreams & Goals.....	31
5.3 Concerns about the future.....	33
Chapter 6: Empowering aspects.....	34
6.1 Economic dimension.....	34
6.2 Health dimension.....	35
6.3 Social dimension.....	36
6.4 Personal dimension.....	38
Chapter 7: Discussion of findings.....	40
7.1 Faces of empowerment.....	40

7.2 Cornwall's empowering aspects.....	41
7.3 The need for a holistic approach	42
7.4 Limits to empowerment	43
Conclusion.....	45
References	49
Appendixes.....	53
Coding tree.....	53
Printscreens NVivo output	56

Introduction

Gender inequality and discrimination based on gender is a worldwide phenomenon. From unequal pay to child marriages and from stubborn stereotypes to collectively ignoring the capabilities of women, gender inequality poses important challenges to societies and it specifically creates obstacles for women. For a long time, these unequal opportunities were also present in education systems. Especially women's participation in higher education remains a challenge in many societies. However, a trend of feminization of higher education has been going on for the last years. This means that female enrolment in higher education is increasing rapidly (Rea, 2011). In Latin American countries, female enrolment has increased from 16% to 55% from 1985 to 2016. This can also be seen in Bolivia, where the enrolment of women in higher education increased to 36.7% in 2014, which is actually a few percent more than the male enrolment. However, women are still at disadvantage to complete their schooling (Guerrero & Rojas, 2020; The world bank, 2018). Additionally, not all women have access to education. Especially indigenous women in poorer rural and urban areas often do not have access to education. This lack of access is mostly caused by precarious economic conditions and the different cultural expectations for men and women (Zapata et al., 2011). Shetty & Hans (2015) contend that women education is an important tool in women empowerment, since it provides women with the skills to respond to challenges and to change their lives. Education allows women to find higher-paid jobs, thereby decreasing poverty. Next to this, educated girls are less likely to marry and have children at an early age (UNESCO, 2013). Other schools of thought led by scholars (Pigg, 2002) posit that although important, education alone is not enough to fully empower a woman. In this research, the aim is to look at the way in which NGO programs that are specified in education support young women in their processes of empowerment. This means that I don't necessarily look at the education itself, but at other dimensions of support that help young women navigate their processes of growth.

Although enrolment rates for women in general are increasing, groups of socially and economically disadvantaged women are still at the disadvantage when it comes to the access and completion of education. This is where certain non-governmental organizations step in to financially support these women to be able to complete their schooling and to offer extra support in that process. In this research I would like to look at the way in which these non-profit education projects empower young women to reach their goals and aspirations. This would add to the social relevance of the research, since it enables the organizations to see what effect they have and what aspects of their programs would be interesting to take a look at for future projects. Additionally, literature on NGO projects for empowerment often offers rather broad recommendations. In this research, I situate specific dimensions in NGO education projects that are important in processes of empowerment.

Important to note is that gender relations are culturally specific and differ across context (Khurshid, 2017). Also, strategies to foster empowerment are most effective when they are culturally sensitive and locally driven (Porter, 2013). Empowerment in the Global North may look very different from empowerment in the Global South since the phenomenon is embodied and relational. Therefore it is important to look at the role that education projects play in women empowerment across different cultural contexts. In this research, I situate empowerment in the context of economically and socially disadvantaged young women in La Paz, Bolivia and investigate the role that NGO education programs play in the processes of empowerment of young women aged 18-30. I thereby look at gender inequality in the daily lives of these women and at the aims and aspirations that they have for their future. For the Bolivian context, literature on women empowerment is mostly focused on microfinance projects. Studies focusing on education programs are lacking. This makes the present research empirically relevant. All of this brings us to the following main question:

How do NGO education programs like Helping Hands support the empowerment processes of young women in La Paz, Bolivia?

I aim to find the answer to this question by first looking at the situations that these young women have grown up in. I hereby investigate the way in which young women think about gender inequality in their contexts. In this way we can gain an understanding of what role gender inequality plays in the daily lives of women. Additionally, it shows what the situations are that young women are trying to change. The next step is to look at the aims and aspirations that young women have for their future. Women empowerment is about women taking control in order to be able to reach their goals and to live a life they have reason to value (Galiè & Farnworth, 2019). In order to see in what ways women are empowered, it is thus important to look at the goals they want to reach. The last step to take is looking at empowering aspects of the NGO education program, in this research specifically Helping Hands. All of this leads to the following sub-questions:

1. How do young women in La Paz, Bolivia think about gender inequality in their contexts?
2. What aims and aspirations do young women in La Paz, Bolivia have for their future and where do these aims and aspirations come from?
3. What aspects of NGO education programs are empowering?

From February to May 2023, I have conducted fieldwork in La Paz, Bolivia. This city is located high in the mountains of the Andes and is accompanied by El Alto, a satellite city that is situated at the altiplano of Bolivia. I conducted this research in collaboration with Helping Hands. Helping Hands is an organization that supports students, mostly from La Paz and El Alto, with limited economic resources in their studies. They do so by economically supporting them, but also by offering other

sources of support. The organization helps both boys and girls, but in this research I have looked at the way in which young women specifically are supported through this NGO program. Important to note is that Helping Hands is an organization that has poverty alleviation as one of the main goals. Women empowerment is not necessarily the main goal. However, in practice, efforts to foster empowerment are made. I chose to conduct qualitative research since I was looking for the personal and lived experience of my participants. I have done so by conducting in-depth interviews with 19 women. Most of them are currently enrolled students, but I have also interviewed some staff-members and some former students of Helping Hands. Next to this, I had many informal conversations with people from inside and outside the program. Lastly, I conducted participant observation. All of the participants for this thesis have been anonymized and have been given new names in order to ensure privacy.

In the upcoming sections, I will present a theoretical framework. In chapter 1, the most important concept for this research – women empowerment – will be introduced and explained, based on relevant academic work. Chapter 2 will provide a context for this study. Here, the themes of this study will be connected to the specific background of education and women empowerment in Bolivia. After this theoretical framework, chapter 3 will present the methodologies that I have used in this study. Next, I will present the empirical results of this study. Chapter 3 is about gender inequality in the daily life of young women in La Paz, Bolivia. This chapter is followed by chapter 4, which discusses the aims and aspirations that these young women have for their futures. Chapter 5 will consider the empowering aspects of the NGO education program of Helping Hands. After these more empirical chapters, chapter 6 will be on the discussion of the results. In this chapter the empirical results will be connected to the theoretical framework. Additionally, this section will be used to see what we can learn from this specific case for the broader themes of women empowerment and NGO education programs. Lastly, the conclusion will provide four important dimensions of empowerment: economic, health, personal and social. Additionally, the question will be raised as to what extent NGO education programs play a role in the removal of structural barriers of inequality regarding gender in Bolivian society.

Chapter 1: Theoretical framework

1.1 Thinking on women and development: the theories

Before we dive into the main concept of this research - women empowerment - it is important to look at the way in which the relation between women and development has evolved over the last decades. There have been multiple paradigms and theories that have analysed the role of women in relation to development (Peet & Hartwick, 2015; Rathgeber, 1990; Miller & Razavi, 1995). As this research looks at women empowerment in relation to an organization active in development, it can be seen as part of this field of thought.

Thinking about the relation between women and development began with the Women in Development approach (WID) that appeared in the early 1970s (Rathgeber, 1990). This approach was based on the assumption that the problems that women in the global South face stemmed from insufficient participation in processes of economic growth, that were said to bring development. Efforts of development were thus aimed at integrating women in the workforce (Miller & Razavi, 1995). The WID discourse, however, was criticized for ignoring the root causes of inequality while at the same time using foreign 'solutions' to women's problems in the global South (Peet & Hartwick, 2015). As a reply to this discourse, the Women and Development (WAD) approach appeared in the second half of the 1970s (Rathgeber, 1990). This strand of thinking was based on dependency theory and neo-Marxist approaches to development and underdevelopment. Also, they placed value on reproductive work that many women are active in. However, this approach, like WID, tended to ignore differences in race, class and ethnicity that create different groups of women with different experiences (Peet & Hartwick, 2015). These differences were acknowledged in the Gender and Development (GAD) approach that emerged in the 1980s (Rathgeber, 1990). Additionally, GAD argued that women's roles cannot be looked at without also looking at broader gender relations. The concept of gender had to be acknowledged as a part of the wider international system (Peet & Hartwick, 2015). In the 1990s, the Postmodernism and Development approach appeared (PAD) in accordance to a broader emergence of postmodernism. This view criticized the GAD view for representing women in the global South as 'other'. PAD places an emphasis on difference and multiple identities. Additionally, it acknowledges the importance of giving a voice to the people without power and not just to the development practitioner (Peet & Hartwick, 2015).

1.2 Women empowerment

In this discourse on women's roles in relation to development, the concept of empowerment cannot be ignored. As this research considers women empowerment as its main concept, in this section the concept will be discussed.

Women empowerment is described as ‘the capability of women for self-determination: to take control over their own circumstances and to realize their aspirations in order to live a life they have reason to value’ (Galiè & Farnworth, 2019). The concept of empowerment builds on the rights-based approach to development that accepts that every individual has inalienable, universal rights. This approach derives from questions like: ‘what are people actually able to do and to be?’ and ‘What real opportunities are available to them?’ (Nussbaum, 2011). The answers to these questions are influenced by inequality and social injustice, leading to marginal and discriminated people having less opportunities and capabilities. Nussbaum (2011) argues that agency is central in this as well. She argues that agency allows people to shape their lives and to make choices that reflect their own interests and goals (Nussbaum, 2011, 176). Here, the step to empowerment can be made. People might not be able to use their agency effectively to achieve their goals. This often has to do with power obstacles or opportunity structures (Porter, 2013). Empowerment in this sense means to make sure that people have the power to take charge over their own life and to overcome those power obstacles (Pigg, 2002). Since people are always part of societies and social networks, processes of empowerment are always affected by social norms and power relations that are present in these networks (Galiè & Farnworth, 2019). Empowerment takes into account these power relations, including power differences based on gender. Empowerment in this sense gives people a voice in challenging existing dependencies, whereby empowerment programs must confront those power obstacles so that agents have the capacity to make their own choices (Porter, 2013). According to Pigg (2002), empowerment in community development has three interrelated dimensions. These are 1) self-empowerment, which is about individual actions, 2) mutual empowerment, which is about interpersonal actions and 3) social empowerment, which is about social action (Pigg, 2002). To stress the importance of these three faces of empowerment, Pigg gives the example of an African-American women in the 1950s. She might hold great leadership qualities, she might be well-educated and might be effective in her interpersonal relations. This, however, does not mean that she could be active in the political sphere. It took collective action to make sure that African-Americans could vote, thereby more fully empowering this woman (Pigg, 2002). This shows that the different faces should be taken into account when looking at empowerment.

Women empowerment is a sensitive issue which operates in a complex system of social constructs. Gender norms are social constructs that consist of accepted roles and stereotypes that are ascribed to gender. These roles are embedded in the way that people think and behave (Galiè & Farnworth, 2019). Although some of these gender norms can be oppressive, they do not necessarily have to be. Also, women can negotiate their own roles within a patriarchal system. Kandiyoti (1988) states that women use different strategies to optimize their life options and to maximize security within the existing system. She also states that women can actually benefit from patriarchal systems. She gives the example of mothers-in-law that hold a high status and who exercise power over their daughters-in-law (Kandiyoti, 1988). Important to note is that understandings of empowerment and

ideas about what a good way of life is are different in different cultural contexts. This means that strategies to foster empowerment must be culturally sensitive and are most effective when locally driven (Porter, 2013).

WID approaches in the early 1970s mostly saw the participation of women in the labour market not only as a tool for women empowerment, but also as a tool in broader economic development. Inequality would stem from uneven participation in the labour market, meaning that including women would empower them (Rathgeber, 1990). Although WID approaches have lost popularity due to relevant points of criticism, it still influences development strategies. According to Cornwall (2016), a contemporary prevalent assumption is still that women will be empowered once they have access to economic resources. However, Cornwall argues that this is not always a necessary outcome and that empowerment is far more complex than the reduction to an economic dimension (Cornwall, 2016). Similarly, Duflo (2012) argues that, although women empowerment and economic development are related, it doesn't mean that economic development will necessarily bring women empowerment. She gives the example of gender inequality in the global North in for instance the wage-gap between men and women. Additionally, she also mentions costly sex-selective abortions in countries like China and India, that have experienced rapid economic growth in recent decades. Next to this, she mentions persistent biases and stereotypes that are still strong barriers to the participation of women in high positions worldwide (Duflo, 2012). The idea that women having access to more economic resources will bring empowerment is often installed in development strategies from governments and NGOs. For example, granting loans to women in microcredit projects has become a popular development strategy. The impact of these microcredit development strategies on women empowerment has been much debated in literature. These loans often have a positive effect on households as they cause families to be less economically vulnerable. However, this does not mean that these loans bring women empowerment (Garikipati, 2012). Most studies that evaluate microcredit programs, look at outcomes and variables that are said to show women empowerment. Garikipati (2012) argues that the real impact of these microcredit programs can better be understood when looking at the broader processes surrounding these loans. This also applies to other strategies to foster empowerment. Cornwall (2016) argues that we should move away from reducing women's experiences to a collection of measurable indicators. Instead, we should look at women empowerment in a more holistic way. This would include an aim to understand 'the relational dynamics of power and positive change at a variety of levels, in different spaces and over time' (Cornwall, 2016).

1.3 Pathways to women empowerment

Empowerment is not a goal, but more like a social process. It is similar to a path or a journey that develops as we work through it (Page & Czuba, 1999). During this journey, women can be helped by external actors. Metaphorically speaking, these external actors can remove obstacles from the road, can support women from the sideline, can create road-maps and can create stopping places where

women can gather and reflect on the journey. This is where actors like NGOs come in (Cornwall, 2016). In her article, Cornwall (2016) explores 5 ways to support these journeys. 1) The first one she mentions is consciousness raising. Here, empowerment initiatives engage women in reflection on their own circumstances. This helps women to realize their opportunities and expand their horizons. 2) The second recommendation she gives is for the intermediaries and implementers of programs to foster empowerment to be engaged and empowered as agents of change, as these are the people that will be most efficient in a supportive role. 3) A third dimension is the building of collective power. In bringing people with similar struggles together, solidarity and courage are built, which is important for empowerment. Additionally, these collectives can be used to bring about more structural change. 4) The fourth dimension is about relationships. Relationships of loyalty and trust make people feel seen, which supports them in making changes. 5) The last point that Cornwall raises is that role models are highly motivating for people. Finding representation can have a powerful impact on young women (Cornwall, 2016).

Within the process of empowerment, different tools can be helpful. In this research, the tool of education will be investigated. Education as a tool for empowerment has gained attention in the last decades. In 1995, the World Bank stated that the education of girls is a high priority. The idea was that more education for girls would lead to, amongst others, lower fertility rates and to improved child health. This led many donor agencies, governments and NGOs to put the education of girls at the top of the agenda (Heward & Bunwaree, 1999). Also, the education of girls is adopted in the Sustainable Development Goals. SDG 4 considers inclusive and equitable quality education for all. This SDG also has a gender dimension, where the aim is to eliminate gender disparities in education (UN women, n.d.). Education is seen as an important step in the empowerment of women, since it enables women to respond to challenges and also to confront their traditional role and to change their lives (Shetty & Hans, 2015). By mostly developing skills individually, education would fit into the dimension of self-empowerment (Pigg, 2002).

At the same time, Khurshid (2017) argues that women empowerment through education is often a Western neoliberal notion where Western states and corporations aim to modernize societies through women empowerment. This often results in an individualistic and market-oriented approach to women's education and empowerment, where education is seen as something that can bring women to participate in the labour market. This approach often doesn't take into account the complexity of the lived experiences of women in different cultural contexts (Khurshid, 2017). Khurshid then continues to argue that this women empowerment through education is not always opposed to the gendered regulation through cultural traditions. For example, Cardozo et al. (2015) found that education sometimes actually emphasizes and reproduces the domestic role of women and does not necessarily challenge gendered regulation in the social context. In Bolivia for example, teachers tend to ask girls to do certain chores in class that are usually assigned to women in the domestic sphere. Next to this, the curriculum is often very male-centered and women are mostly absent in examples or textbooks

(Cardozo et al., 2015). Processes of women empowerment are thus not necessarily always supported through education.

Chapter 2: Regional thematic framework

In the following chapter, the themes of women empowerment and education as discussed in the previous chapter will be brought into the context of this research. This research is situated in La Paz, the administrative capital of Bolivia. The first section of this chapter will briefly introduce this context. Next, gender in Bolivia will be discussed, after which gender will be brought in relation to ethnicity. Lastly, education and its connection to women empowerment will be discussed in the context of Bolivia.

2.1 La Paz

Fieldwork for this study has been conducted in La Paz (Figure 1). La Paz, which lies between 3250 and 4100 meters above sea level, is the highest national capital in the world. It is situated in the mid-



Figure 1. View of La Paz from the Teleférico (cable car public transport) in El Alto

West of the country, at the end of the Altiplano, a plateau that spreads to the south of the country into Chile (Brittanica, 2023). As La Paz is situated in the Andes, Andean indigenous peoples make up a large part of the population. The broader La Paz department contains a majority indigenous population that is estimated at 89%. A large part of this group lives in the city (Gigler, 2009). Directly located next to La Paz, at the Altiplano and thus at about 4100 meters, the satellite city El Alto can be found. El Alto is a rapidly growing city due to the large amount of migrants that move there looking for employment in the city. El Alto is also called the Aymara capital of the world, after the large indigenous population in the satellite city (Meghji, 2022). Although this research took place mostly in La Paz, many participants actually live in El Alto, since many people from lower socio-economic classes live there.

2.2 Gender and ethnicity in Bolivia

In 2022, Bolivia scored 0.73 on the gender gap index. This means that the gender gap is approximately 27%. Women are thus 27% less likely than men to have equal opportunities (Statista, 2022). When discussing gender relations in Bolivia, but also in Latin America in general, the concept of machismo has to be addressed. Machismo is a social construct that can be defined as ‘a set of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that imply the superiority of men over women, based on stereotypes and prejudices’ (Mamani et al., 2020). Machismo is present in many different aspects of society, such as work, school and family and it has a large impact on the way in which men and women interact. Also in Bolivia, a long history of machismo plays a role in daily life (Cole, 2021). However, studies have shown that women in Latin America are increasingly abandoning certain beliefs and patterns of behaviour that accepted more traditional gender roles in which machismo was present as well (Mamani et al., 2020).

Machismo often has a connection to gender-based violence, as the discriminatory treatment of women can manifest itself in aggressive forms (Mamani et al., 2020). In Bolivia, gender-based violence is an immense problem. In 2018, 74,7% of women who are or have been in marriages had experiences of physical, psychological or sexual violence in the twelve months before the survey. Additionally, femicide is also very prevalent. In 2019, 119 reported cases of femicide were counted by Bolivian media and feminist organizations (Unzúeta, 2020). Feminist movements have in recent years brought together different groups of existing feminism to now form a strong movement (Unzúeta, 2020). However, there is a lot of resistance against feminism in Bolivia, and in Latin America more in general. Stereotypes about feminist movements make it difficult for these movements to bring about change (Yegorova, 2017).

In the Bolivian context, the intersection between gender and ethnicity is highly relevant. More than 60% of the Bolivian population, both urban and rural, identifies as indigenous (Cardozo et al., 2015). This is the largest share of indigenous population in any other Latin American country. The indigenous population is disproportionally represented among the poor in the country and they usually have less physical and human capital. Additionally, they are often confronted with inequalities and discrimination in the labour market (Reimão & Tas, 2017). When the dimension of gender is added, it becomes clear that this intersection results in a vulnerable group that is discriminated against (McDonoug, 2019). ‘Cholas’, as indigenous women are also called, are often easily-identifiable as



Figure 2. Cholas in traditional clothing selling vegetables at lake Titicaca

they wear colorful, layered skirts and specific hats. Cholas often work as street vendors in markets or from their houses, as can also be seen in figure 2. These cholas face discrimination because they are part of the indigenous population. At the same time, they encounter sexism in the patriarchal society of Bolivia. Although they are vulnerable for discrimination based on two different dimensions, they have also become symbols of resilience. In recent years, cholas have worked together in political movements that have resulted in important anti-discrimination laws. Next to this, they have become quite popular in tourism, where chola wrestling matches are a huge success. The chola stereotype has become a symbol of national pride for parts of the population. However, their battle for equality is still ongoing and is complex (McDonoug, 2019).

2.3 Women empowerment & education in Bolivia

Gender disparities in relation to education are present worldwide. Women's participation in higher education still remains a challenge in many societies, especially in the Global South. For a long time, women have been underrepresented in higher education, but a reversal of this gender gap in certain countries has become visible in the last years (Rea, 2011). This phenomenon is referred to as the feminization of enrolment in higher education. This can also be seen in Bolivia, where the enrolment of women in tertiary education increased to 36.7% in 2014. At the same time, male enrolment in 2014 was 34.6%, thus lower than the percentage for women. However, this does not mean that all women have access to schooling and also they are still at disadvantage to completion of schooling (The world bank, 2018). Here too, the intersection of gender and ethnicity is highly relevant (Reimão & Tas, 2017). When ethnicity is taken into account, the gender gap stays in favor of men. Indigenous women in Bolivia still experience challenges in education. Of all population groups, indigenous women are least likely to complete schooling. A reason for this is that many indigenous girls tend to adopt domestic chores and household tasks (Zapata et al., 2011). Next to this, discrimination, poverty and prevailing ideas about gender roles in these communities play important roles (the world bank, 2018).

Education is by scholars often seen as a way to overcome oppressive gender relations, whereby new female identities are created that are different than the traditional ones. Education is thereby seen as a way for women to secure autonomy and financial independence (Ames, 2013). At the same time, the official national curricula that is taught in schools is reproducing gender norms that

encourage women to adopt more traditional female roles as caregivers and housewives. The education itself is thus not empowering women to challenge these gender norms that can sometimes be oppressing, especially in a Bolivian context where machismo is influential in gender norms (Ames, 2005). So although schools provide girls with skills and knowledge, which would fit into Pigg's dimension of self-empowerment (2002), other dimensions of empowerment remain unaddressed. Like this, actions to foster social and mutual empowerment are not taken, which might have consequences for the process of empowerment of these young women.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The main goal of this research is to gain a better understanding of how NGO education programs like Helping Hands empower young women in La Paz, Bolivia. To discover this, this research has been conducted with young women that are enrolled in the NGO education program of Helping Hands. During the research, I have looked at the tools for empowerment that are provided for these girls. Next to this, I have looked at the way in which these girls perceive gender and gender inequality in their own social environments and in the broader Bolivian society. Lastly, I have looked at aims, aspirations and worries that these young women have for their future. In this section, the methodology for this research will be discussed.

3.1 Operationalization of concepts

In the coming section, I will briefly discuss the way in which I tried to find answers to my three subquestions that are all aimed at different aspects. The first subquestion is about the perception of gender inequality in the participants specific context. For this question, I have asked my participants questions to find out what it is to be a woman in La Paz, Bolivia. Additionally, I have asked questions about their daily life and about their family. I have asked them in what ways gender plays a role in those contexts. This was made more concrete by asking about the impact that it would have if the young woman would not have been born a woman, but a man. When I heard the concept of machismo being mentioned in the majority of the interviews, I decided to include questions about machismo. I tried to find out what it is, and in what way it plays a role in the lives of my participants. Because there are currently changes happening in the gender situation in Bolivia, I also included questions on feminism and on ways to diminish gender discrimination. To learn more about the empowerment of Bolivian women, I also visited feminist centers and I looked at public manifestations of women empowerment.

The second subquestion is about the aims and aspirations that young women in La Paz, Bolivia have for their future. This question was a bit more straightforward to investigate. The questions regarding this topic were mostly about dreams, goals and career paths. Additionally, worries and concerns were discussed, also in relation to the mentioned dreams and goals.

The third and last subquestion is about the empowering aspects of the NGO education program. These aspects were investigated by asking about the support that Helping Hands offers and the influence that this support has on the lives of the participants. Additionally, I have been present at multiple activities at the office to see how the organization operates and in what ways it offers support.

To find out in what ways young women in La Paz, Bolivia are empowered through NGO education programs, I have conducted qualitative research. I chose qualitative methods because I

wanted to learn about personal and lived experiences of the participants. The methods that I have used are conducting in-depth formal interviews, informal interviews and participant observation.

3.2 Interviews

“Interviews provide an opportunity for researchers to learn about social life through the perspective, experience and language of those living it. Participants are given the opportunity to share their story, pass on their knowledge, and provide their own perspective on a range of topics” (Boeije, 2010, 62). I have conducted 19 semi-structured interviews for which I had created interview guides in advance. Next to semi-structured interviews, I have also conducted informal interviews. These are interviews that do not have a certain structure. They are more like conversations that are held in the field so that the researcher can get acquainted with topics of which he or she does not yet have a lot of knowledge or to learn more about a topic in a more informal or relaxed context (Bernard, 2018, 163). In total I have conducted 19 in-depth interviews. 13 of those interviews were with young women (18-30) that are currently enrolled in the program of Helping Hands. 3 of those interviews were with staff-members, of whom 2 are also former students of the program. Additionally, I have conducted 3 more interviews with former students of the program. In these interviews I have gathered data on all three research questions. All of these in-depth interviews have been recorded, transcribed and coded. Informal interviews were held with all kinds of people. Some of them were students, others were staff-members, caregivers of students and people from outside the program. The informal conversations especially allowed me to get a more comprehensive view on how gender plays an important role in Bolivian society. The data from these informal conversations has been collected in field notes.

3.3 Participant observation

Participant observation is “a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture”. (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, 1). Not only did I want to learn about women empowerment through what my participants are able to put into words, but also through the unspoken expressions and behaviors. In the context of this research, participant observation mostly took place at the office of Helping Hands. Here, I took part in multiple activities and workshops and I could see the daily course of events on normal days without activities. Additionally, I attended a staff-meeting. Next to this, I visited both a community center and a feminist center, where I did participant observation. During participant observation, I usually noted down my observations in a note book. After the event, I wrote more extensive field notes on my laptop.

3.4 Analysis of data

To analyze the collected data, I have used the program NVivo to create a coding tree. Figure 3 shows a part of the complete coding tree, of which a larger part is shown in appendix 1. I mostly used a

inductive strategy to analyze the data. I chose this inductive coding process as it provides a more complete view of the themes throughout the data without using preconceived notions of what codes

Example from the data	Code name	Code family	Concept
"I like my career a lot, because when I was young, there was a lot of violence. So that's more than anything else the motive for my choice of career (...)"	Chose career because of own past	Career choice	Aims & aspirations
	Chose career because of role model		
	Etc.		
"The largest obstacle in my life is economics. I don't have economic stability and that makes it hard to reach my goals."	Worries about money	Concerns	Aims & aspirations
	Worries about parents		
	Etc.		
"And I don't want to stop. I want to keep studying"	Wanting to keep studying	Goals & Dreams	Aims & aspirations
	Wish for stability		
	Etc.		

Figure 3. part of coding tree

ought to be. This allowed for the results of this research to emerge from the raw data (Dovetail Editorial, 2023). I started the coding process by creating small codes based on what I saw in the data. From these smaller codes I created larger subcodes that I then categorized into larger code families. As can be seen in Figure 3, this resulted in a code tree. For example, I coded "And I don't want to stop. I want to keep studying" as "wanting to keep studying". By grouping similar codes together, I arrived at the larger code family "Goals & Dream". Together with other code families, I then categorized it under the concept "Aims and aspirations". All of this took place in multiple stages of going through the data, whereby I first created all the small codes and then categorized further by every step of the process. This process has helped me to understand my data and enabled me to draw conclusions from it.

3.5 Positionality as researcher

In this small section I will reflect on my positionality as a researcher. It is important to do so, since positionality influences not only how research is conducted, but also its outcomes and results (Holmes, 2022). Since this research considers women empowerment, my gender is an important part of my positionality. Myself being a women helped to talk about gender issues with the participants who as well were female. At the same time, I am aware of my privileges that come from being born and raised in the Netherlands and which might have been an obstacle in understanding people's contexts. Also,

my different socio-economic status, nationality and ethnicity might have made it more complicated to completely understand my participants' lives. I do, however, feel like my participants opened up to me and did not seem to hold back in telling me about their lives.

An important bias in research is that the young women that I interviewed, were only the ones that actually made it to the program and I was brought in contact with them by the organization that I worked with. This means that it is in no way generalizable to all women in Bolivia. However, important lessons can still be learned from the gathered data and the analysis.

What has also been of importance in this research project is my ability to speak and understand Spanish. As I only had a very basic knowledge of Spanish when I first arrived to La Paz, I conducted my first interviews with an interpreter, who was a staff-member of Helping Hands. This might have influenced the conversations. Further on in the project, my Spanish level was high enough to conduct the interviews on my own. I did not always directly understand everything that was said. When I transcribed and coded the interviews later, I saw that there were some comments where I could have asked some more in-depth questions if I would've picked up completely what was said at the moment. Additionally, due to the vulnerable nature of some of the stories that I was told, my inability to understand everything directly might have created moments in which I did not respond the way I would when I would have understood directly. This is where some limitations for this research lie.

Empirical chapters

Y todos podemos hacer todo. No hay límites.

And we can do everything. There are no limits.

Lucia (18) has been in the NGO education program of Helping Hands for 5 years now. She has grown up in a surrounding where ideas that women are subordinate to men are prevalent and where poverty and violence are common. Through the NGO education program of Helping Hands she could get a scholarship and she is now pursuing a career in banking. Her enrollment in the program opened her eyes for opportunities that she had not thought to be accessible for herself before. This leads her to the conviction that women, in fact, are capable of everything. In the following chapters, gender inequality, aims and aspirations and women empowerment processes will be presented in the context of female students like Lucia who are enrolled in the NGO education project of Helping Hands in La Paz. Chapter 4 will focus on the role that gender inequality plays in the daily life of these students. Next, chapter 5 will be about the aims and aspirations that these students have for their futures. Lastly, chapter 6 will be about the empowering aspects in the NGO education program.

Chapter 4: Gender inequality in Bolivian society

As stated before, Bolivia scored 0,73 on the gender gap index in 2022. This translates to women being 27% less likely to have equal opportunities than men (Statista, 2022). This chapter will illustrate in what ways this inequality based on gender plays a role in the life of young women that are enrolled in the Helping Hands project. It will thereby try to answer the first subquestion: *How do young women in La Paz, Bolivia think about gender inequality in their contexts?* Additionally it will be analyzed how those young women cope with these inequalities and in what ways a change can be seen when discussing gender equality in Bolivia. First, the concept of machismo will be discussed and the role that it plays in the participants' life. Next, changing gender norms will be analyzed. Ultimately, light will be shed on feminist movements that are present in Bolivian society.

4.1 Machismo

What comes up almost directly when discussing gender inequality in Bolivia is the concept of machismo. As already discussed before, machismo can be defined as 'a set of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that imply the superiority of men over women, based on stereotypes and prejudices' (Mamani et al., 2020). Some of the girls have grown up in environments where machismo was very present. Sometimes this was in the form of a parent, but it could also be an uncle, a brother or an ex-boyfriend. Growing up in environments where machismo was present means that many of these girls have grown up with ideas about what gender roles should look like. Ana (22), says:

I grew up in an environment like that. My dad was very 'machista'. He says that women cannot study. They don't have the capacity. (...) [He said] it's not possible that you study. You are not able. You can [only] be a mother, not more.

As shown in this quote, ideas about what women should and shouldn't do mostly imply that women should not study or work, but should stay at home.

This also means that some families do not support girls in their studies. Silvia, a 24-year-old medical student, for example tells that her uncle, who is an important person in her life, states that if she would have been a man, 'it would be easier' and he would support her. Because she is a woman, he is hesitant in supporting the studies of his niece. A staff member states that support of family for the enrollment in the NGO education program is sometimes lacking. Although they then try to convince the families to let the young woman enroll in the NGO program, it sometimes happens that they cannot be convinced which causes that the girl cannot enroll in the program. Some girls can thus not be reached, which poses the important question as to who stays behind. Regrettably, I have not been able to interview one of these girls.

When discussing gender equality in Bolivian society with the young women interviewed in this studies, the first thing that is often mentioned is that it is easier to be a man than a women in Bolivian society. Accordingly, men have more opportunities in the labour market. Rosa, a former student of Helping Hands who is now a dentist, for example tells that men are often hesitant when they see that their dentist is a woman. She thinks that that is because there is a belief in society that women are less capable and less suitable for some types of jobs. This is an important aspect to take into account when looking at the efficiency of education for empowerment. Education can equip girls with the skills and confidence to be successful on the labour market. However, without addressing structural barriers and persistent ideas on gender, there are still limits to this empowerment. An example can be seen in the case of Cristina (30). Cristina is a former student of Helping Hands and has successfully finished her studies and consequently found a job. Although this is a valuable place for her to be in her life, she expresses that she actually had other goals during her studies. She wanted to travel the world and study more. However, as banking is a career where men typically have more opportunities than women, Cristina decided that she did not have the liberty to pursue other goals. Instead, she would have to focus on getting a job. She expresses that this would have been different if she would have been a man:

Why? Because as a woman you need a job. In the career that I am in there are more opportunities for men. The put the solicitation open, but what they are looking for is a man.

So although Cristina got a job in her desired career, it was not easy for her to get there. She worked extra hard to prove her worth and didn't get to explore the other goals that she wanted to achieve.

Next to inequalities in the work sphere, there are social inequalities. For instance, men often have the upper hand in relationships. Also they are usually less responsible for children and often have few to no household tasks. The participants express that there are different societal expectations for men and women. For example, women are expected to stay at home, do household tasks and take care of the children. Men are then expected to earn money and to be the head of the household. This system is not just kept in place by men, but also by women. Luisa (22) states that:

Machista women exist as well. This means that they themselves say: no, I'm going to stay here, I'm not going to study, because my husband has to work and I have to take care of the children.

She, like some of her peers, states that men, just as women, have certain norms that they have to live up to. This is not always easy and Luisa believes that this should change, just as the expectations for women should.

Machismo is often accompanied by gender-based domestic violence. Many of the participants grew up in environments where domestic violence was present. This violence was often mostly directed at their mothers. Additionally, in some cases sexual abuse was also present. All of this leads to most participants expressing that they did not have easy childhoods and that they grew up in broken

families.

A society where machista ideas are important in the way in which men and women interact sometimes causes resistance from the young women in this study. This resistance mostly consists of taking up space, speaking up, and breaking stereotypes. An example of this is when Elena's (19) mother tells her younger sister that she has to do a chore that was meant to be done by her younger brother. Elena says that her brother should do it, since 'he has hands too'. Her mother accepted and her brother eventually did the chore. Elena sees this as a way of making a change in her family. Another example of this is that Elena bought a doll for her young son for him to play with. Family members did not agree with this. They asked: 'why do you give him a doll? Do you want him to become gay or something?' To this Elena simply replies that she doesn't want her son to grow up and become a machista. Elena is aware that her ability to make a change is limited, but she has decided to make a change where she can. In her own family, she sees opportunities to do so.

Additionally, families that were not supportive previously, might change their opinion when they see the young women study and be successful in her career. This can be seen in the case of Silvia (24), who was mentioned before and whose uncle was not supportive of her studying. Her uncle has recently changed his opinion. He tells Silvia: 'you are a strong woman'. He has seen that she is, in fact, capable of studying medicine and thus supports her now. This shows that mindsets can, in fact, change.

4.2 Changing gender norms and feminism

Most girls state that gender discrimination is diminishing. The difference can be seen when looking at older and younger generations. Some of the girls are aware that they are part of the change that is happening in the area of gender discrimination in Bolivian society. Like this, Ana (22) states that she sees herself as 'breaking with the stereotypes' that are believed to be true in her family. She broke these stereotypes by showing that 'women can. Women can be mothers, can be fathers, can be students, can continue studying.' Next to being the first to break certain stereotypes, these young

women can also become role models for the younger girls in their surroundings. Elena (19) says that if she is going to finish her studies, her younger sisters and cousins are going to see her accomplishment and are going to follow her. This is one of the reasons that she gives to keep studying.

The changes that are taking place in Bolivian society regarding gender are not only present in the stories of the young women, but can also be seen in the streets of Bolivian cities. When walking through La Paz - or other Bolivian cities for that matter - public manifestations of women empowerment can be found. Street art, posters, marches and feminist centers can be found in the

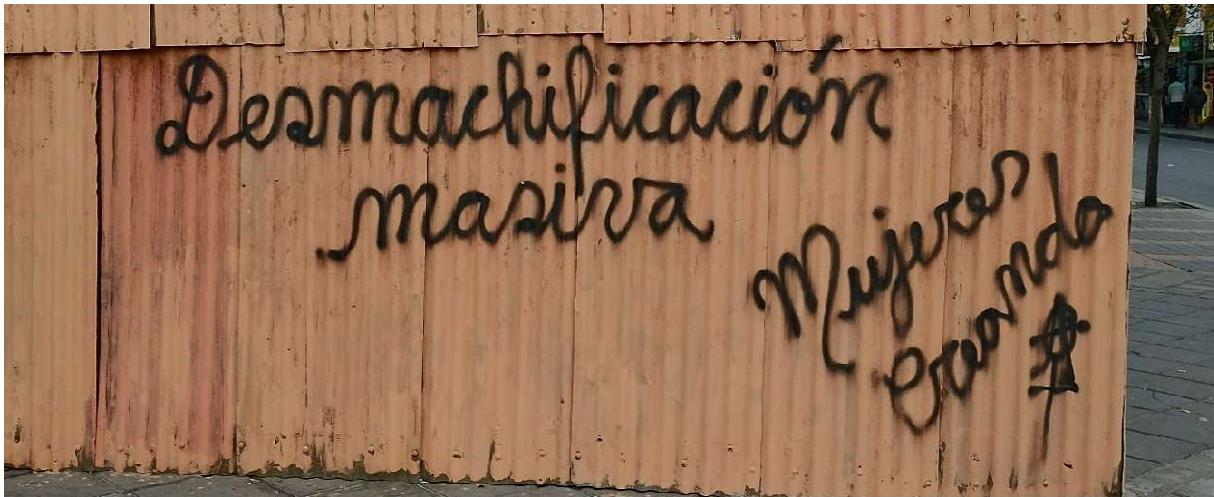


Figure 4. Slogan in the city center of La Paz

public sphere. For example, figure 4 shows a slogan that can be found on one of the main streets of La Paz. It asks for a 'massive demachification' of society and is written by Mujeres Creando, a feminist collective active in the city.

Mujeres Creando also has a multifunctional community center that offers psychological and juridical help for women in situations of abuse, domestic violence and divorce. Next to this it offers the stage to female artists and tries to let female voices be heard. This center is responsible for many public manifestations of women empowerment in La Paz, and is thus worth mentioning here.

All participants state that they think that men and women should be equal and that the situation in the field of gender equality still has quite some important changes to go through. Next to this, they all reject the idea of machismo. When hearing opinions like these, one would expect these young women to support the feminist movements active in Bolivian society. However, most participants actually state that they do not support those feminist movements. Silvia (24), for example, says that:

[feminism] is the opposite of machismo, right? There are feminist movements here in La Paz, but they are exaggerated, because they say that we don't need men, men are garbage. This is the same as machismo (...) it's the other extreme.

This is a shared sentiment among participants. Although they mostly support the main message of the

feminist movements, they see them as exaggerated and too extreme. This often has to do with the way in which the movements protest. Ruth (21) for example says that she doesn't support feminism because feminist protestors often damage and destroy churches and religious symbols, as can also be seen in figure 5. Ruth calls herself a devoted Christian and mentions this as her reason not to support feminism. Also Lucia (18) says:

What I don't like about these feminist movements is that they go in the streets, to places and they start to vandalize and damage everything. I ask myself, why do they do that?

Although most participants expressed something similar, there were 2 participants that do actually support the feminist movements in La Paz. Marina (21) and Luisa (22) go to marches and meetings of feminist groups, because they support the cause and want to be an active part of the change that is happening. The feminist movement usually elicits negative reactions. Luisa tells that when she joins one of the marches, there are always people, mostly men, that shout at the protestors and that try to intimidate them. This often results in tense situations. Although active in the movement, Marina also states that she doesn't support everything that the movement stands for. She says that the movement considers all men as bad, just as Silvia said in the example before. Where for Silvia this a reason not to support the movement, Marina takes this for granted and rather chooses to look at the positive change that the movement brings.



Figure 5. Results of feminist march in Sucre: stains of red paint on a church

Chapter 5: Aims and aspirations

Women empowerment can be described as ‘the capability of women for self-determination: to take control over their own circumstances and to realize their aspirations in order to live a life they have reason to value’ (Galiè & Farnworth, 2019). It thus aims at the ability of women to reach their goals for the future. In order to see in what ways women are empowered, it is important to look at the goals they want to reach. In this chapter, the aims and aspirations that the young women in the NGO project have will be investigated. It thereby aims to answer the second subquestion: *What aims and aspirations do young women in La Paz, Bolivia have for their future and where do these aims and aspirations come from?* First, the career choices and the motivation for these choices will be described. Consequently, the aims and aspirations that the young women have for their futures will be analyzed. Lastly, the concerns that they have for their futures will be discussed.

5.1 Career choices

The first thing that becomes clear when talking to the participants is that all the young women state that they are happy to be studying, or happy that they had been able to study in the past. Although the process often hasn’t been easy, there mostly is a lot of motivation to study. This might have to do with the fact that studying can be seen as both a privilege and a necessity in Bolivian society. It can be seen as a privilege in the sense that without the help of the foundation Helping Hands, many of these students would not have been able to study, because, as Ana (22) says:

I would have to work from 8 in the morning, practically all day, until 6 in the afternoon. I wouldn’t have time to study.

This is a shared sentiment among most students. They state that without financial support, they would lose too much time working besides their studies to pay the monthly fees and other costs. However, most students do say that they would have tried to continue studying, but they are not sure whether they would be able to finish their studies. Being able to study is not self-evident and especially in post-secondary studies young women often have no choice but to drop out. Studying can thus be seen as a privilege.

Next to a privilege, education can also be seen as a necessity in the sense that in order to get a good job, education and experience is needed. This also means that many students tend to choose a career in which they can have a guaranteed stable future, as Julia (30) did. She chose her career in dentistry because:

In Bolivia, you have to see, you don't simply choose what you like, but you have to choose the career that in the first place will generate some economic stability, because here in Bolivia there are not much opportunities in your career.

This means that young people need specific academic backgrounds in order to have a chance on the labour market. Additionally, as was already discussed in the previous chapter, women often have less chances on the labour market than men do, making it even more important for young women to study. The studies that offer the most opportunities are studies like dentistry, medicine and education. Many of the participants of this research are active in one of those fields. Stability is thus often an important factor for the choice of career. This might come from the fact that many of the girls have grown up in unstable environments. Many have grown up in families where domestic violence was present and where there was a lack of money. Stability is also often a larger goal for the future. In the next section this will be discussed in greater detail.

Next to the factor of stability in the choice of career, past experiences sometimes play a role in the choice of career as well. Carmen (24), for example, chose the career of law because of her own experiences in the past. She grew up in a very violent environment. When she needed it, there was no one who could help her. Now she wants to study law to be able to help young women in positions that she herself was in when she was younger. Another example is Luisa (22), a student of educational sciences. She too chose her career because of her own past. She says:

Because of the experience that I have had with teachers, the experience that I have lived. How do they treat you? I want to change that, I'm going to change that. (...) This is the reason that I'm in this career.

When Luisa was younger, teachers and peers used to bully her and treat her badly because she did not have money to have the right materials. Also, she was discriminated against and was bullied for her outspoken indigenous family that wore traditional clothing. She now sees her career as a way to change the system that has hurt her in the past.

Lastly, there are also young women who choose their careers more solely out of interest. For example, Ruth (21) chose to study literature, just because she really likes it. Marina (21) chose to study auto mechanics, a career that is typically not seen as suitable for women. However, auto mechanics is something that she already became interested in as a child when she would help fixing cars with her granddad, who was a mechanic. What Ruth and Marina share is that they are from very supportive families. Next to this, they both mention that they have not grown up in surroundings where machismo was very present, and their caretakers considered them to be capable of choosing what they thought was the best career for themselves.

5.2 Dreams & Goals

The aims and aspirations that the participants have for their future, can roughly be divided into three categories and are in line with the motivation that the students have for their career choice. These categories are stability, supporting family and self-development.

The factor of stability is often mentioned when talking about goals for the future. For example, Elena (19) says that she would want to 'buy a little house, and a little car' and that the future is finally going to be 'calm'. Another example is from Ana (22) who states that she wants to live in 'harmony and peace'. Both Elena and Ana have had difficult, unstable childhoods. For their futures they want to leave their past behind and trade it for stability. This stability also means finding a good husband and having a stable family. Most of the young women additionally stress that they would want a equal distribution of household chores with their future partner. For example, Ana states that she would want to share the care for children '50-50' with her future partner.

Next to stability, many of the girls state that one of their main goals is to help their families. Participants often mention that they want to help their parents, but also their siblings or, in some cases, their children. Claudia (32), for example says that she wants to 'help out' her two daughters in their studies and that she wants to 'be an example' for them. In situations where parents are not able to support, some of the students want to step in. Marina (21) for example states that she wants to help her younger sister, since her father is getting older and is not always able to take care of her. This idea of helping others is also one of Helping Hand's goals. One of the staff members states that one of the goals of Helping Hands is to support a whole family by supporting one student. This staff member, a former Helping Hands student herself, gives a personal example:

[My sister] studies at a (...) private college. I'm paying. The books, monthly fees, shoes, backpack. So I'm paying. So it's like Helping Hands is continuing to support my little sister.

In this way, support of one student can thus be of importance for the social network of that student. This leads to development not only for the one student in particular, but for the social network that she is embedded in.

When asking the participants what their goals are for the future, short-term goals are often mentioned first. This mostly means that the young women want to finish their studies and get their degree. Since this is quite a heavy process in the Bolivian education system, this is seen as a big accomplishment. What is interesting here is that many of the participants indicate that they would want to continue studying. Ana (22) says:

I want to say that I don't want to stop here. In the future I want to be studying. I want to have two careers, I want to have diplomas. I want to grow more. That's it.

Like Ana, other participants also express the desire to grow and develop. This development not only takes place in the area of academics, but also in other areas. For instance, Carmen (24) wants to learn English, Martha (22) wants to travel and see the world and Lucia (18) wants to learn how to swim. When it comes to work, many participants express a wish to also develop themselves professionally and to set up their own businesses or open their own institutes. For example, Marina (21), who is studying auto mechanics, dreams of opening her own workshop for trucks.

What is interesting when discussing goals and dreams for the future is that for some of the students, their time in the project of Helping Hands has made their goals change. By meeting other people, ideas about a desirable future can change. Some students have stated that meeting people with other cultural backgrounds can open their eyes for other opportunities. An example of this can be found in the following situation. At an activity that took place at the office of Helping Hands, a group of American students came to visit the project for a cultural exchange. The students of the Helping Hands project performed a small play about an ancient Bolivian tradition and the American students performed a dance show to an American song. After this more formal part, all students were encouraged to mix and talk with each other while enjoying warm *api con pastel*, a Bolivian treat. Carmen (24), who I had interviewed before, connected with one of the American girls. They chatted, took pictures and spent the largest part of the activity together. At a reflection moment later that day, Carmen stated that connections like these help her broaden her horizons. In an interview with Carmen later she explains this further. She states that she would like to study abroad if possible. This idea comes from meeting international volunteers and visitors like the American students and the stories that they have told her. She says:

Because I always thought everything for me was only in Bolivia. When I saw other people do it (...) I thought I can do that, I can travel or study in different countries and everything.

The project introduces opportunities that were not known by the students beforehand, leading to different goals. Many girls for example state that they would like to continue studying after they have completed their current studies. Martha (22) for example, states that she thought that she wanted to only get one degree, since it was quite difficult for her to get here. However, she now wants to continue studying, because:

Most of all [I went] outside of my comfortzone and I learned to think differently. I don't just do this for the university and then working or working at home. No, I think differently now. I want to continue studying

All of this shows that goals and ideas can change by being exposed to other opportunities. What is an important aspect in this as well is motivation and support of other people. This is an aspect that will be discussed in the next chapter more in detail.

5.3 Concerns about the future

Although some of the participants state that there are no obstacles between them and their goals for the future, most participants state that there are some concerns that stand between them and their desired future.

A great concern for many respondents is decreasing health of family members. If a family member would get sick, it would mean that the student would have to care for this family member and she would possibly not have the time to continue her studies. Especially in one-parent households this is a great concern, as the student would become responsible for the care of the sick parent, but also for the household income, the household chores and sometimes also the care for younger siblings.

Next to concerns about health, money problems are also often mentioned as obstacles for one's future. Although with the enrolment in the Helping Hands project some of those worries have disappeared, most of the young women still live in economic insecurity. The loss of a scholarship, rising housing costs or unexpected expenses are still sources of uncertainty.

Chapter 6: Empowering aspects

In the previous chapters, we have investigated the environment with regards to gender that young women in La Paz live in and relate themselves to. Additionally, we have seen the aims and aspirations that these young women have for their future. This leads us to ask in what ways these young women in their situations go through a process of empowerment to reach their goals. In this chapter, empowering aspects of the NGO program of Helping Hands will be analyzed. It will thereby try to answer the subquestion: *What aspects of the NGO program are empowering for young women in La Paz, Bolivia?* There are roughly 4 dimensions that are important in the support for these processes of empowerment. The first dimension that will be described is the economic dimension. Second, the health dimension is explained, after which the social dimension is discussed. Lastly, the personal dimension will be analyzed.

6.1 Economic dimension

Education in Bolivia is generally quite expensive. This is often an important reason for people to stop studying after high school. For post-secondary education, there are public and private universities that offer education. Private universities are expensive and are thus generally not an option for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Public universities however, have difficult application procedures and are highly selective.

Next to monthly fees for education, materials and travel costs are very high. So even if one were enrolled in a free public university, one would have to spend a lot of money to be able to finish one's studies. With material costs, the costs for books, but also for laptops, uniforms and print services are meant. In figure 6, school materials can be seen that are distributed at the office of Helping Hands. Next to material costs, travel costs are quite high. They can become this high since La Paz is a big city and some students have to travel up to two hours back and forth. These expenses often cause students to drop out of post-secondary education. Some students will try to earn money by working for a year, after which they can study for a year. It's typically not possible to do both at the same time, since school schedules tend to change often. These irregular schedules then prevent students from keeping a job. The process of alternating between periods of working and periods of studying is time-intensive, and thus most students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds choose to start working after high school. This is also what most participants express when they talk about what would have happened if they did not get in touch with Helping Hands. Cristina (30) who works at a bank now, states:

I would have left my studies. I might have taken two years extra maybe, because I would have to work and then return to my studies. If I wouldn't have had the support of Helping Hands, I don't know if I would have finished my studies.

The economic dimension is thus a crucial part of the support package that Helping Hands offers since it actually gives students the opportunity to start and finish their studies without having to worry about the financial aspect.



Figure 6. Donated school materials and other books, to be distributed under the students

6.2 Health dimension

The second dimension that is important in the process of women empowerment is a health dimension. A healthy body enables students to pursue their goals and dreams. Therefore it is important not to ignore this dimension.

As healthcare is quite expensive in Bolivia, many people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds choose not to visit the doctor or the dentist. The Helping Hands project offers support in various health issues. This could be in getting access to doctors and dentists, but also in other ways. One of these ways is by supporting a healthy lifestyle. There are for example workshops on good nutrition and on dental hygiene. Additionally, the families with the lowest income receive nutritious food packages once a month to avoid malnutrition.

Also sexual and reproductive health and birth control are important topics in this dimension. Elena (19) who has a 4-year-old son, stresses the importance of workshops on this topic:

Last year there was a workshop on anti-conception (...) it was with an institute that offered it for free. It was very interesting and very important. (...). There is no place where you can talk freely about those things. It really is very good.

Sexual and reproductive health and birth control are often taboo in Bolivian families. A workshop concerning these topics is thus of great importance, especially when keeping in mind that unwanted pregnancies are a very prevalent problem in Bolivian society.

Lastly, psychological support is part of the health dimension. As many of the students have typically gone through difficult periods of time, mental issues are often an obstacle to successful education and a following career. Ana (22), for example admits that she used to think a lot about everything that had happened to her and that that was an obstacle for her. She now receives psychological support to help her with this problem. Psychological support is provided through the referral to a psychologist and the payment of therapy sessions to support the young women who struggle with mental health.

To support a healthy lifestyle, information is available to the students. For example, at the office of Helping Hands, posters and flyers of dentistry, nutrition and birth control can be found. Those flyers and posters give information and also often contain e-mail addresses, phone numbers and website addresses for more information on those specific topics. This allows students to learn more about ways to create a healthy life in an accessible way.

6.3 Social dimension

The third dimension of women empowerment through the NGO education project is the social dimension. This dimension consists of community building and is about building relationships between students. As empowerment is a social process that takes place within social networks, a social dimension is an important aspect.

Many students state that they see Helping Hands as a family. It is seen as a family that helps you go through a process together with others and you have personal relations with people from similar backgrounds. Helping Hands is an organization where people learn from their peers and their older 'siblings' - alumni - from the program. For example, at one of the monthly workshops, former students, the older 'siblings', were invited to tell something about their careers and about process of graduation in front of the current students, as can be seen in figure 7. This is quite a difficult process to go through in the Bolivian education system, so talking with people who have gone through the process before can help the students to gain some confidence going into the process. Although the length of this workshop was sometimes quite challenging for some of the students, many of them were interested and asked questions to the presenters. When expressing uncertainty about the process of graduation, the presenters replied by saying that the students can do it and equipped them with

practical advice. Another example of the involvement of former students is Julia (30), who says: 'I also really want to help the foundation Helping Hands, to be a part of it.' Julia is now a dentist that collaborates with Helping Hands. She also provides information to the students on dental health.



Figure 7. The principal researcher giving a presentation during a workshop on writing a thesis and finishing a degree

Not only relationships with older generations of Helping Hands students are encouraged, also relationships between current students are encouraged. Going through the process together is motivational. Ruth (21), for example says:

It is to feel accompanied. To know you're not the only one that is in that situation, because those from my studies don't know I'm at the foundation. (...) And there's always a very nice atmosphere and I think that I get the motivation to continue because of this.

A tool that is used in building the Helping Hands community is celebrating smaller and bigger victories. Good grades are rewarded, graduations are applauded and birthdays and holidays are celebrated together. Especially graduations have an impact on the younger students in the project. Seeing people from similar backgrounds succeed is highly motivational. Claudia (30) tells about a graduation celebration that she attended the first year she was enrolled in the program. She saw the graduating students and said to herself: 'I want to do the same, I want to finish like this, finish my career, this gave me an impulse to fight for my dreams.'

As mentioned before, the workshops are of great importance in the process of empowerment. These workshops are not only important because of the themes, but also because of the social function of them. In the beginning of every workshop, there is time to catch up with other students. Usually there are games that bring the students together and that can strengthen the relationships between them. What is also of importance is that the workshops are attended by both boys and girls. An example of this can be found at one of the workshops. This workshop was about friendship. It took

place at the office of Helping Hands, and was pointed to younger students (in elementary- and high school). In this workshop, both girls and boys learned about the importance of building and maintaining healthy friendships. Topics like recognizing and communicating emotions and setting boundaries in relationships were discussed. The workshop was held in a mixed group, but what was interesting to see was that the girls were much more vocal in expressing their ideas on emotions and how to communicate them. Two teenage boys in trendy clothing kept to themselves in the beginning. They were silent and didn't seem very interested. This could be because of the idea that men are not supposed to be vulnerable or talking about emotions. However, when directly encouraged by the leaders of the workshop – two psychologists – they did speak up. The boys needed a little push to become engaged and to be active in the learning process. After they were addressed, they did engage further in the workshop. By engaging everyone in this particular workshop, healthy and respectful relationships between students, inside, but also outside the project, are encouraged.

6.4 Personal dimension

The last dimension that is of importance in the process of empowerment is a personal dimension. Prevailing gender norms and machismo can have a great impact on the way that women think of themselves and of their capabilities and opportunities. Personal attention can be of great importance to change certain aspects of this mindset.

An important characteristic of the project of Helping Hands is the personal approach that they have. The program does not work with an one-size-fits-all approach, but works with each student's specific needs. In intake sessions, every individual student's needs and wants are investigated and support is offered according to this. Next to this, the social worker of the organization visits the student at home to meet the family and to get an idea of the life of the student. In staff meetings, specific students and their situations are discussed, so new plans can be formulated and choices can be made as of how to support them. An example of this personal support and the efficiency of it can be seen in the case of Viola (16). Viola has a father that has never been present. Recently, he has come to her, telling her that he can give her a career as an architect if she comes with him to another country. The staff members suspected that this was a case of grooming. They reminded Viola of her dream to become a veterinarian. Viola was not convinced and wanted to join her father. The staff then decided to take her to a veterinary clinic, which reminded the girl that that was, indeed, what she wanted to do. This made her decide to stay and to continue her education in La Paz.

The personal approach that Helping Hands offers is possible because of the small size of the organization. Also, the background of the staff members can be of help in this. As 3 out of 5 staff-members are former students of Helping Hands, they can relate to the situations that the students are in and are thus also aware of the factors that can support them.

Because of the personal relationships between staff members and students, problems can be identified and support can be offered accordingly. Staff actively motivates the young women by saying that they are capable and that they can do it. As many of the respondents have grown up in machista environments where the capability of women was often ignored, or seen as none existing, this is an important step. This leads to the young women to start believing in themselves. Lucia (18) for example states that the moral support is very important to her. She says:

They [staff-members] support us, encourage us, say that we can do it, that we're not alone, that we're always going to have the support of the foundation.

Additionally, one of the staff members stresses the importance of being there for the young women. They often need someone to talk to, to ventilate their worries and problems. Accordingly, some of the participants highly appreciate that there is always someone to talk with at the office, someone who you can share your problems with and someone who will listen. This does not mean that all the problems that these young women have will directly be fixed, but supporting and motivating the girls to continue is of great value.

Chapter 7: Discussion of findings

After looking at the collected data in the last few chapters, we have now arrived to the further discussion of these findings. What do these findings mean in light of the broader challenges regarding women empowerment and NGO education programs? And what can we learn from the practices happening in La Paz, Bolivia? In this chapter, the findings of this study will be brought in relation with the ongoing theoretical debate concerning women empowerment, education and development strategies. Hereby I will mostly look at the work of Pigg (2002) and Cornwall (2016) to analyze the results of the current study further.

7.1 Faces of empowerment

As was discussed in the theoretical framework, Pigg (2002) posits three faces of empowerment that are also relevant in the context of women empowerment. These faces are 1) self-empowerment, 2) mutual empowerment and 3) social empowerment. Education would fall under self-empowerment, because education is mostly about developing individual skills. NGO education programs would thus also be of support in this category, since it enables young women to continue their education. At Helping Hands, the development of individual skills not only appears through education at schools and universities, but also in other ways. During the workshops, skills like communication are practiced, but also more practical skills like academic writing. Additionally, services like therapy are offered to support people in handling their emotions and to in that way develop themselves. Lastly, the personal approach of Helping Hands offers specific support for all individual students, which helps them to believe in themselves and to grow.

For the second face of empowerment, mutual empowerment, Pigg states that interpersonal relationships and the act of strengthening others can be empowering. Because people are always situated in social networks, others can be of great influence in empowerment processes. At Helping Hands, this social aspect is given attention by encouraging students to get in contact with each other and to share experiences. By creating a 'family', the students are encouraged to go through the process of empowerment together. This is valuable, since participants have said that they feel motivated by knowing that there are others that are in similar positions that they are in. Going through a process of empowerment together is very valuable. Additionally, it is highly motivating to see older peers reach their goals. This gives these young women the encouragement to not give up. The third face of empowerment that Pigg posits is social empowerment. Here, Pigg states that social action is necessary to fully empower a woman. This means that structural power barriers should be removed. This is a dimension that is less relevant for the work of NGO education programs. I will elaborate more on this further on in this chapter.

7.2 Cornwall's empowering aspects

When looking at the dimensions that the NGO education program of Helping Hands uses to support young women in their journeys of empowerment, it appears that there is some overlap with Cornwall's (2016) recommendations to support women empowerment. These mostly overlap with the social and personal dimensions found in this research. Cornwall mentions consciousness raising as a way to support women. In this research, this consciousness raising took place in the sense that the young women reflected on their own circumstances mostly by speaking to other students and to international volunteers for example. This helped them to expand their horizons for new opportunities. Second, Cornwall stresses the importance of the people working at the NGO programs to be engaged and empowered as agents of change. Helping Hand's team exists of people that are engaged in the lives of the students. Also, three out of five staff members are former students of the organization themselves. As these staff-members have gone through the program themselves, they have knowledge based on experience as of how to support the students best in their processes. The third point Cornwall mentions is the building of collective power. In bringing people with similar struggles together, solidarity and courage are built. This can also be seen at Helping Hands, where the organization tries its best to build a community. This also results in the fact that students see Helping Hands as a 'family'. Cornwall mentions that this collective power can also be used to bring about more structural change. This will be elaborated upon further on in this chapter. The fourth point that Cornwall stresses is relationships. She writes that relationships of loyalty and trust support people in making positive changes. In the interviews done in this research, the importance of personal relationships was also stressed. The participants almost all said that it's important for them to know that there is always someone to talk with at the office. The presence of someone that knows their situations and struggles and who can help them if necessary is mentioned as being of great support for them. Cornwall's last recommendation is to acknowledge and encourage representation and role models, as those are often highly motivational. Multiple participants noted that there are not many women in high-functioning positions in Bolivia that can serve as role models. However, there are other people to look up to. Many of them for example mention family members that work hard and that are resilient. In order to provide opportunities to meet people that have gone through the process that the students are going through now, Helping Hands often enlists help from former students that mostly come from difficult backgrounds as well. They are invited to tell about their work and experiences. Some of the participants have said that this is motivating, since it shows how far one can come, coming from difficult backgrounds. Similarly, the young women themselves can become role models for younger girls in their surroundings. By being the first in the family to finish a university degree and finding a suiting job for example, they can become role models for younger siblings.

7.3 The need for a holistic approach

Both Pigg and Cornwall state that there are multiple aspects to empowerment that together can support people to go through a process of empowerment. A holistic approach is necessary to be able to support, in this case, young women to develop and grow. In this research, it has appeared that this holistic approach indeed is of great importance in the empowerment of women. Education alone cannot fully empower a woman, since there is much more to take into account. Underlying gender norms and ideas about what a woman should or should not do cannot be taken away by education alone. Education can even encourage and strengthen these ideas (Cardozo et al., 2015). Next to this, practical obstacles like poverty and health issues are often limiting to the empowerment of a woman. Therefore, practical support is of crucial importance in efforts to foster empowerment. Although both Pigg and Cornwall stress the importance of a holistic approach, an emphasis on practical support seems to lack in their contributions. The two dimensions of economics and health are of great importance in this research. When asking participants in what ways they are supported by the program of Helping Hands, the first thing said is usually of economic nature. Without economic support, most young women in the program would not have been able to study in the first place. Therefore financial support is one of the most crucial parts of this development strategy. Second, worries about health are often great barriers that stand between the young female students and their goals. Learning about good nutrition and hygiene and getting access to health services can take away these worries. This can enable students to focus on their goals and dreams, which leads to personal growth. It is thus of great importance to not ignore these more basic aspects of support that can aid women empowerment, but to add a more practical dimension to these contributions.

It is important to keep in mind that, although crucial, this practical support should always be offered in combination with other kinds of support in order to be effective. The social and personal dimensions discussed in chapter 5 are thus of great importance. Together, all of those aspects form a complete package to support the journey that young women go through.

In the theoretical framework it was discussed that cultural sensitivity is important when looking at women empowerment (Porter, 2013; Khurshid, 2017). As ideas about what a good way of life is are different in different cultural contexts, strategies to foster empowerment cannot be effective when they follow a universal, one-size-fits-all approach. Different cultural contexts experience different challenges in their pathways to reach gender equality. In the Bolivian context, the concept of machismo has proven to be of great importance. Although similarities to this concept can be found in many different contexts, it is important to dive into the situation regarding gender in order to provide fitting support. Additionally, indigenous women are most likely to drop out of school due to poverty and cultural constraints (Zapata et al., 2011), therefore the Bolivian context also asks for sensitivity to the intersection between gender and ethnicity (Zapata et al., 2011; Reimão & Tas, 2017). A way to keep cultural sensitivity in mind and to stay away from Eurocentric ideals of women empowerment is

to make sure that staff-members working in these empowerment efforts are familiar with the cultural sensitivities at play. As mentioned before, engaged and involved implementers of programs are motivational and effective (Cornwall, 2016).

A holistic approach with multiple dimensions of empowerment can help young women in multiple aspects. It helps them to solve practical problems concerning money and health, while at the same time supporting them in other areas. By giving personal attention, creating a community and offering opportunities to learn in the form of workshops, girls are equipped with practical and social skills. Additionally, this approach helps young women increase their sense of self-worth and their confidence.

7.4 Limits to empowerment

Both Pigg (2002) and Cornwall (2016) stress the importance of social action for women empowerment. Pigg posits social empowerment as the third face of empowerment and Cornwall posits building of collective power as an important aspect of empowerment. Both hold the idea that the building of collective power can create social action to overcome structural power barriers. This is a dimension of empowerment that Helping Hands is not necessarily active in. In the case of Helping Hands, the focus is mostly on the individual and the smaller group. At the grassroots level they create change, but structural power barriers are not touched upon. However, change can, of course, also start at the individual level. A strategy of Helping Hands is to support a student, after which this student can support his/her younger family members. This can create a network of people that support others. Helping Hands specifically applies this strategy for the alleviation of poverty, but it seems to work the same way for women empowerment. Some of the participants state that they see themselves as agents of the change that is happening in their surroundings. It enables their younger female family members to study and it also breaks stereotypes of what is thought to be normal for women in their contexts in La Paz. Next to this, family members may change their opinions on gender norms when they see their female family member succeed in her studies and in her career. Although very valuable, this strategy will do little on its own to undermine the systemic reproduction of inequality regarding gender. Transformations on an institutional level require movement on multiple fronts. Larger scale social action is a part of that as well (Pigg, 2002).

When looking at women empowerment in Bolivia, feminist movements are trying to create change on a more structural level. These movements can be seen as part of social empowerment. Although a small amount of the participants of this research is active in these movements, most of them don't necessarily support them. However, many of them do express a wish of structural change. They mostly want to realize this change by acting themselves, by taking up space and by following their goals and dreams. This is similar to the grassroots strategy of Helping Hands.

Education can on itself reinforce the same patriarchal norms in the classroom as are present in

society. Having access to education alone is thus not fully empowering (Cardozo et al., 2015). Girls can have negative learning experiences in environments like these. However, the strength of Helping Hands is that it does not rely on education alone. Next to offering girls the ability to study, they also offer other empowering aspects as was shown throughout this thesis. These aspects help the young women gain confidence, allow them to choose and pursue their own goals and equip them with further life skills.

Conclusion

La Paz is a city with a very pronounced class divide. A wealthy elite in the south of the city, a middle class in the centre and the poverty-stricken majority that lives in informal housing on the hillsides and in El Alto make up for the population of the highest capital of the world. In this geographical context I have investigated the role of NGO education projects in the empowerment processes of young women. Those young women are usually from lower social and economic backgrounds and often do not have the resources to study. Dropout rates are high, especially for indigenous women. As La Paz is a city with a large indigenous population and El Alto is also called the Aymara capital of the world, there are a lot of indigenous women struggling with things like education. I have conducted this research in collaboration with the organization Helping Hands, an organization that supports students (in general) with their education processes. Within this organization I have looked at the way in which young women are supported in their processes of empowerment. To do so, I have interviewed people, I have held informal conversations and I have conducted participant observation to learn as much as I could about the lives of these young women and the way in which they go through their personal processes of empowerment.

This research aimed to answer the following research question: *How do NGO education programs like Helping Hands support the empowerment processes of young women in La Paz, Bolivia?* It has become clear in this research that there are multiple dimensions that support young women in this process. To answer this question, I have first looked at the situations of gender inequality that young women in La Paz live in and relate to on a daily basis. Here, the concept of machismo proved to be of great importance. Machismo is a social construct that consists of a set of beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that imply the superiority of men over women (Mamani et al., 2020). In the daily life of the participants of this study, this often translates to family members ignoring the capabilities of these young women, which can lead to lower self-esteem. Additionally, it causes young women to not be able to notice their opportunities for their future. Next to cultural norms that determine what a woman should and should not do, machismo is often paired with gender-based violence. Many of the participants have experienced some type of violence when growing up. In the program of Helping Hands, attention is shifted away from the problems that young women have, towards their aims and aspirations for their future. I have therefore looked at the goals and dreams that these young women want to reach in their future. For many, stability is one of the most important goals. This translates to having a stable job that allows them to earn enough money to buy a house and a car, without having to worry too much about money. Additionally, many want to contribute something to society. As most come from difficult backgrounds, they would like to help people in similar positions as they were before. An interesting point is that most girls state that they have new found goals that they want to reach since they enrolled in the education project. For example, most state that they would like to grow more in the academic field and some state that they would like to

travel and see the world. All of this leads us to an overview of what a support packages of an NGO education program should consist of in order to support women in their journey of empowerment. Of course, it is important to realize that this is based on a three-month period field work and additional literature research and might thus not be complete. Following young women in their entire processes would presumably lead to a more complete overview. However, this research has already been able to identify four important dimensions of empowerment. These dimensions are in this research specifically discussed for the Helping Hands project, but they could also be translated to other contexts.

- Economic dimension

The economic dimension refers to practical support that is offered to the students. Although this might seem self-evident for an NGO education project, it's an dimension that should not be underestimated. Surely, solely money does not empower a woman. However, it's important not to ignore that money is, in fact, crucial for empowerment processes, especially for women in lower socio-economic classes. Without financial support, the young women enrolled in this project mostly wouldn't be able to study in the first place. Additionally, money problems are often source of great concern, which leads young women to try to get a job as fast as possible and to drop out of school. Economic support is therefore of great importance for processes of empowerment.

- Health dimension

The health dimension is, just as the economic dimension, a more practical dimension. As weak health can be a restraining obstacle in life, it is crucial to also take this dimension into account. Practically, this means that offering access to healthcare and spreading knowledge on health are actions that are of great importance in empowerment processes. This does not only refer to physical health, but also to mental health. As many of the young women in the NGO program of Helping Hands have gone through difficult times in their lives, psychological support can help them overcome trauma and focus on the future. Lastly, this dimension also refers to sexual and reproductive health. The Bolivian society is a society where sexual health and birth control are often taboo. Therefore, it's important to spread knowledge on these topics, especially since unwanted pregnancies are a very prevalent problem in Bolivia.

- Social dimension

The social dimension refers to the importance of community building in empowerment processes. The importance of going through this process together with others is stressed in this. Building a community where people can rely on each other and can support each other is an important practice in empowerment efforts. This dimension overlaps with Pigg's category of mutual empowerment (2002) and with Cornwall's recommendations of consciousness raising, building collective power and

encouraging representation (2016).

This social dimension should not be confused with Pigg's (2002) social empowerment, as this refers to broader social action that tries to bring about more structural change. As NGO projects are mostly focused on bringing change from the individual level, this is less relevant for these programs.

- Personal dimension

The personal dimension of support refers to personal attention that every individual student receives. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, but each student's specific context is considered, after which her specific needs and wants are identified. In this way, specific support can be provided. This individual approach makes people feel seen and known, which makes them feel supported in their processes. This dimension overlaps with Pigg's category of self-empowerment (2002) and Cornwall's point that stresses the importance of personal relationships (2016).

Next to these four broad dimensions that can be applied in different contexts, it is good to stress the importance of understanding the cultural context. The people implementing the programs that support empowerment processes should understand the contexts that these women are in, in order to offer appropriate support for that specific context. Next to this, it is important to realize that women empowerment is not something that can be done 'to' someone. It is a process that women go through themselves. Therefore, programs like the one of Helping Hands are there to remove obstacles on the road and to support from the side. Like this, Helping Hands helps girls increase their self-worth and their confidence.

Based on this research, we can conclude that NGO education programs can be of great importance in empowerment processes of young women. However, there are also recommendations for further research to be made to better understand the ways in which NGO education projects can support women empowerment processes. For instance, research could be done to 'those who stay behind'. An important question here would be: who gets into those projects and who doesn't? Additionally, it could be interesting to conduct a long-term study in order to see how the process of empowerment takes place under the influence of an NGO education project. Also, it would be interesting to take a look at the male students that are enrolled in the project too. Does their thinking on gender shift when seeing the young women succeed in their careers? Lastly, it might be interesting to do research to the possibilities to add a component of social empowerment in NGO education programs. Although the grassroots work of a program like the one from Helping Hands is very valuable, it does not necessarily remove structural barriers of inequality based on gender in Bolivian society. It would therefore be interesting to look at questions like: how can a NGO education program play a role in the removal of structural barriers of inequality? These are some quick recommendations for the specific case of Helping Hands.

As gender inequality and poverty are highly relevant themes in Bolivian society, NGO

education projects that support women in empowerment processes are of great importance. From a grassroots level, these projects try to bring change and diminish poverty and gender inequality. On the individual level it can be seen that those projects do indeed bring positive change in personal lives. When looking at the broader picture, however, one can't help but to think about more structural barriers that are difficult to overcome without broader structural change. How to fully empower a woman stays a challenge that deserves more attention in the academic field.

References

- Ames, P. (2013). Constructing new identities? The role of gender and education in rural girls' life aspirations in Peru. *Gender and education*, 25(3), 267-283.
- Ames, P. (2005). When access is not enough: Educational exclusion of rural girls in Peru. Beyond access: Transforming policy and practice for Gender Equality in Education, 149-166.
- Bernard, R. H. (2018). *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Boeije, H. (2009). *Analysis in Qualitative Research*. SAGE Publications.
- Britannica. (2023). *La Paz: national administrative capital, Bolivia*. Britannica.
<https://www.britannica.com/place/La-Paz-Bolivia>
- Cardozo, M. T. L., Sawyer, J., & Simoni, M. L. T. (2015). Machismo and mamitas at school: Exploring the agency of teachers for social and gender justice in Bolivian education. *The European Journal of Development Research*, 27, 574-588.
- Cole, C. (2021). Being Female and Indigenous: Barriers to Reducing Bolivia's Maternal Mortality Rates Under Evo Morales. *Honors Theses*. 1740. https://egrove.olemiss.edu/hon_thesis/1740
- Cornwall, A. (2016). Women's Empowerment: What Works? *Journal of International Development*, 28(3), 342-359. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3210>
- De Paula, C. & Muller, M. (2018). *Gender Gaps in Bolivia: An Overview*. Washington, D. C.: World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/554551558606816072/Gender-Gaps-in-Bolivia-An-Overview>
- DeWalt, K. M. & DeWalt, B. R. (2011). *Participant observation: a guide for fieldworkers*. AltaMira Press.
- Dovetail Editorial. (2023). *What is inductive coding in qualitative research?*. Dovetail.
<https://dovetail.com/research/inductive-coding/#:~:text=Similar%20responses%20at%20different%20points,the%20themes%20throughout%20the%20data>
- Duflo, E. (2012). Women Empowerment and Economic Development. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 50(4), 1051-1079. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23644911>

- Education for all global monitoring report. (2013). *Girls' education – the facts*. UNESCO.
https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/default/files/Girls_fact_sheet.pdf
- Galiè, A., & Farnworth, C. R. (2019). Power through: A new concept in the empowerment discourse. *Global food security*, 21, 13.
- Garikipati, S. (2012). Microcredit and Women's Empowerment: Have We Been Looking at the Wrong Indicators? *Oxford Development Studies*, 41(1), 53-75.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13600818.2012.744387>
- Gigler, B. (2009). Poverty, Inequality and Human Development of Indigenous Peoples in Bolivia. *Working Paper Series*. (17). 1-38.
- Guerrero, G., & Rojas, V. (2020). Young women and higher education in Peru: how does gender shape their educational trajectories?. *Gender and Education*, 32(8), 1090-1108.
- Heward, C., & Bunwaree, S. (Eds.). (1999). *Gender, education and development: beyond access to empowerment*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Holmes, A. G. D. (2020). Researcher Positionality--A Consideration of Its Influence and Place in Qualitative Research--A New Researcher Guide. *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, 8(4), 1-10.
- Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2020). *Qualitative research methods*. Sage publications.
- Kandiyoti, D. (1988). Bargaining with patriarchy. *Gender & society*, 2(3), 274-290.
- Khurshid, A. (2017). Does education empower women? The regulated empowerment of Parhi Likhi women in Pakistan. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 48(3), 252-268.
- Mamani, V., Herrera, D., & Arias, W. (2020). Comparative analysis of sexual machismo in Peruvian and Chilean university students. *Revista chilena de Neuro-psiquiatría*, 58(2), 106-115.
- McDonoug, C. (2019). Las Cholas de Bolivia: The Uphill Battle Against Racism, Sexism and Commodification in Contemporary Bolivia. *Undergraduate Journal of Hispanic and Italian Studies*, 5(1), 74-87.
- Meghji, S. (2022, May 6). *Old and new in El Alto, Bolivia's highest city*. Geographical.
<https://geographical.co.uk/culture/bolivias-highest-city-el-alto>.
- Miller, C. & Razavi, S. (1995). From WID to GAD: Conceptual shifts in the women and development discourse. *UNRISC Occasional Paper*, (1), 1-45. <http://hdl.handle.net/10419/148819>

- Nussbaum, M. C., & Capabilities, C. (2011). *The human development approach*. Creating capabilities. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard.
- Page, N., & Czuba, C. E. (1999). Empowerment: What is it. *Journal of extension*, 37(5), 1-5.
- Peet, R. & Hartwick, E. (2015). *Theories of Development: Contentions, Arguments, Alternatives* (3rd ed.). Guilford Publications.
- Pigg, K. E. (2002). Three faces of empowerment: Expanding the theory of empowerment in community development. *Community Development*, 33(1), 107-123.
- Porter, E. (2013). Rethinking women's empowerment. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 8(1), 1-14.
- Rathgeber, E. M. 1990. WID, WAD, GAD: Trends in Research and Practice. *The Journal of Developing Areas*, 24(4), 489-502. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4191904>
- Rea, J. (2011). Not feminist yet-feminisation of higher education. *Agenda*, 19, 8-9.
- Reimão, M. E., & Taş, E. O. (2017). Gender Education Gaps among Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Groups in Bolivia. *Development and Change*, 48(2), 228-262.
- Romero, T. (2022). *Bolivia: gender gap index 2014-2022*. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/802891/bolivia-gender-gap-index/>
- Shetty, S., & Hans, V. (2015). Role of education in women empowerment and development: Issues and impact. *Role of Education in Women Empowerment and Development: Issues and Impact* (September 26, 2015).
- UN Women. (n.d.). *SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-4-quality-education>
- Unzúeta, M. (2020, May 13). *Articulaciones Feministas: Contemporary Bolivian Feminisms and the Struggle against Gender Violence*. Washington University in St. Louis. <https://humanities.wustl.edu/news/articulaciones-feministas-contemporary-bolivian-feminisms-and-struggle-against-gender-violence>
- Yegorova, O. (2017). #NiUnaMenosBolivia fights back: a discourse theoretical analysis on the struggle against gender-based violence in Bolivia. Master thesis. University of Uppsala.

Zapata, D., Contreras, D., & Kruger, D. (2011). Child labor and schooling in Bolivia: Who's falling behind? The roles of domestic work, gender, and ethnicity. *World Development*, 39(4), 588-599.

Appendixes

Coding tree

Example from the data	Code name	Code family	Concept
“I like my career a lot, because when I was young, there was a lot of violence. So that’s more than anything else the motive for my choice of career (...)”	Chose career because of own past Chose career because of role model Etc.	Career choice	Aims & aspirations
“The largest obstacle in my life is economics. I don’t have economic stability and that makes it hard to reach my goals.”	Worries about money Worries about parents Etc.	Concerns	Aims & aspirations
“And I don’t want to stop. I want to keep studying”	Wanting to keep studying Wish for stability Etc.	Goals & Dreams	Aims & aspirations
“I didn’t have money. That’s why I couldn’t study at that moment. Yes I wanted to, but I couldn’t”	No money to study Help with materials Etc.	Economic dimension	Empowering aspects
“Also with my teeth. Not with my braces, but with other things for my teeth.”	Dental support Psychological support Etc.	Health dimension	Empowering aspects
“Moral support in that they support us, they encourage us, they say that	Moral support	Personal dimension	Empowering aspects

<p>we are not alone, that we will always have the support of the foundation.”</p>	<p>Always someone to talk to at the office</p> <p>Etc.</p>		
<p>“In the first year I was at a graduation party. I saw that and I said: I want to be the same, I want to finish my studies. It gave me an impulse to fight for my dreams. That’s it.”</p>	<p>Other people’s success</p> <p>Friends at Helping Hands</p> <p>Etc.</p>	<p>Social dimension</p>	<p>Empowering aspects</p>
<p>“I started my studies at a private university where I paid monthly fees, but I found out that that was going to be too expensive and my mother and I were not going to be able to handle it. So I changed schools”</p>	<p>Changing universities because of costs</p> <p>High transportation costs</p> <p>Etc.</p>	<p>Costs</p>	<p>Education</p>
<p>“In reality, here in Bolivia there is a lot of discrimination, because there are studies that men cannot do. And studies like auto mechanics that women cannot do. They are not welcome. That’s what I don’t like.”</p>	<p>Discrimination in studies</p> <p>Quality of education</p> <p>Etc.</p>	<p>Validation of education</p>	<p>Education</p>
<p>“They said I had to stop studying to be a mother. But I can be both a mother and a student.”</p>	<p>Being mother and student</p> <p>Protecting child from machismo</p> <p>Etc.</p>	<p>Being a mother</p>	<p>Gender inequality</p>
<p>“I grew up in that family. It was typical: ‘I am the man. You have to be here. I have to work there. You have to give me food.’ That is where I grew up.”</p>	<p>Grew up in machista surrounding</p> <p>Women can also be machista</p> <p>Etc.</p>	<p>Machismo</p>	<p>Gender inequality</p>

<p>“There are feminist movements here in La Paz, but they are exaggerated. Because they think that we don’t need men. Men are garbage. So it’s not good.”</p>	<p>Feminist movements are exaggerated</p> <p>Attending feminist marches</p> <p>Etc.</p>	<p>Feminism</p>	<p>Gender inequality</p>
<p>“They say: ‘She can’t do that. She doesn’t know. We are more strong.’ The same happens in my institute. They say that a woman cannot things that are heavy. But it’s not true.”</p>	<p>Society thinks women are less capable</p> <p>Being a man is easier than a woman</p> <p>Etc.</p>	<p>Societal norms</p>	<p>Gender inequality</p>
<p>“Since I was a child I lived in a family where there was violence. My stepfather was always violent to my mother.”</p>	<p>Domestic violence</p> <p>Sexual abuse</p> <p>Etc.</p>	<p>Violence</p>	<p>Gender inequality</p>
<p>“So if you are a mother. You should not have to care for your children 100% of the time. In reality, it should be 50%.”</p>	<p>Caring for children should be 50/50</p> <p>Men and women are equal</p> <p>Etc.</p>	<p>Participant’s view on gender</p>	<p>Gender inequality</p>

Printscreens NVivo output

Name	Files	References	Created on	Create	Modified on	Modified by
Other	19	96	6/19/2023 3:40 PM	WMS	6/19/2023 3:41 PM	WMS
Gender inequality in the Bolivia	19	413	7/4/2023 11:31 AM	WMS	7/4/2023 11:32 AM	WMS
Violence	8	13	6/17/2023 10:36 A	WMS	6/17/2023 12:46 PM	WMS
Machismo	13	35	6/16/2023 12:41 PM	WMS	6/17/2023 12:46 PM	WMS
women can also be ma	2	2	6/7/2023 1:57 PM	WMS	6/15/2023 11:14 AM	WMS
not a very machisto fa	2	4	6/12/2023 3:05 PM	WMS	6/15/2023 12:21 PM	WMS
machistas think wome	2	2	4/10/2023 8:50 PM	WMS	5/24/2023 4:26 PM	WMS
machista ex	2	2	4/24/2023 6:11 PM	WMS	5/25/2023 11:26 AM	WMS
machista environment	1	1	6/6/2023 2:19 PM	WMS	6/6/2023 2:19 PM	WMS
machismo when raisin	2	2	5/25/2023 11:22 A	WMS	5/12/2023 12:47 PM	WMS
Machismo not only in	2	5	6/7/2023 1:55 PM	WMS	6/15/2023 12:30 PM	WMS
Machismo is very pres	2	2	4/10/2023 8:56 PM	WMS	4/17/2023 11:09 PM	WMS
machismo is sad	1	1	5/25/2023 11:21 A	WMS	5/25/2023 11:21 AM	WMS
learned machisto ideas	1	1	5/22/2023 12:33 PM	WMS	5/12/2023 12:33 PM	WMS
grew up in a machisto	5	10	4/10/2023 8:48 PM	WMS	6/12/2023 3:49 PM	WMS
father made distinctio	1	1	6/15/2023 11:09 A	WMS	6/15/2023 11:09 AM	WMS
father didn't agree wit	1	1	6/15/2023 10:24 A	WMS	6/15/2023 10:24 AM	WMS
A lot of machismo in B	1	1	5/24/2023 4:22 PM	WMS	5/24/2023 4:22 PM	WMS

Figure 7. NVivo printscreen of code category Gender inequality → Machismo

Name	Files	References	Created on	Create	Modified on	Modified by
Empowering aspects of NGO p	19	386	7/4/2023 11:33 AM	WMS	7/4/2023 11:34 AM	WMS
Working at Helping Hands	5	41	6/17/2023 12:15 PM	WMS	6/17/2023 12:46 PM	WMS
Without support	16	29	6/17/2023 12:14 PM	WMS	6/17/2023 12:46 PM	WMS
Empowering aspects	19	176	6/17/2023 9:58 AM	WMS	6/17/2023 12:45 PM	WMS
Workshops	10	15	6/19/2023 4:03 PM	WMS	6/19/2023 4:06 PM	WMS
Social dimension	18	54	6/19/2023 3:58 PM	WMS	6/19/2023 4:06 PM	WMS
Results	10	14	6/19/2023 4:01 PM	WMS	6/19/2023 4:05 PM	WMS
Personal dimension	15	27	6/19/2023 4:00 PM	WMS	6/19/2023 4:05 PM	WMS
Health dimension	10	16	6/19/2023 3:57 PM	WMS	6/19/2023 4:05 PM	WMS
Economic dimension	17	50	6/19/2023 3:33 PM	WMS	6/19/2023 4:02 PM	WMS
unstable economi	1	1	6/12/2023 3:45 PM	WMS	6/12/2023 3:45 PM	WMS
Support from Hel	3	3	4/24/2023 6:21 PM	WMS	6/7/2023 12:56 PM	WMS
personal sponsors	1	1	4/24/2023 5:57 PM	WMS	4/24/2023 5:57 PM	WMS
no more economi	1	1	6/7/2023 1:04 PM	WMS	6/7/2023 1:04 PM	WMS
no more economi	1	1	6/15/2023 12:07 PM	WMS	6/15/2023 12:07 PM	WMS
no money when g	1	2	6/15/2023 10:06 A	WMS	6/15/2023 10:09 AM	WMS
No money to stud	5	6	4/1/2023 5:11 PM	WMS	5/24/2023 2:30 PM	WMS
Money for child a	2	2	4/1/2023 5:12 PM	WMS	5/25/2023 11:03 AM	WMS

Figure 8. NVivo printscreen of code Category empowering aspect of NGO program → Empowering aspects → Economic dimension