

## Abstract

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This thesis explores the everyday life conditions of low-income women who work mainly in the informal sector in Bogota, Colombia. The work has its point of departure in an analysis of the complex daily lives of two women over an extended time period and from the perspective of the individual. The detailed level of description and analysis will, as a hypothesis, help us to better understand how to improve development programs, allowing institutional and individual levels to meet exactly at the point that is desirable for those who are the target groups in the execution of their daily lives.

The main aim of the study is to describe the conditions of livelihood of the two women from the perspective of the individual and to contribute to the making of institutions' definitions of women's needs, design and follow-up on development projects coincide better with women's interests.

A time-geographic methodology, based on structured time diaries describing patterns of time-use for daily activities, is explored and adapted to the local context of the study. The methodology is also complemented by reflective diaries describing the women's perceptions of present and past experiences, hopes and plans for the future, the intentions and motives behind daily activities. Together, the diaries reveal how decisions in daily life come about in a particular physical environment with specific social and cultural characteristics.

A time-geographic theoretical approach is applied to analyse the women's life stories and biographies of livelihood projects. Theoretical contributions about the main areas of interest when studying women's life courses and conditions in development studies are also referred to, for instance, women's interests and needs, gender analysis, empowerment, livelihoods and local contexts.

The findings of this study and the results of its methodology have demonstrated that to improve women's opportunities for livelihood, it is necessary to understand women's conditions in relation to women's total life contexts. The research methodology applied here opened the way for an empowerment process with higher self-esteem and confidence as a result. This indicates that sector planning, project design, follow up and evaluations in development institutions may gain from using information about women's multiple activities and perceptions from an individual and a gender perspective.

**Keywords:** time geography, diaries, biographies, livelihoods, women, development, interests and needs, empowerment, gender, informal sector, urban, Bogota, Colombia.

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