



Dispatch

Adelphos Foundation: Efforts to Build Trust and Bonds Among Different Neighborhoods in the City of Quito

JAIME BAQUERO DE LA CALLE RIVADENEIRA
Universidad San Francisco de Quito, Ecuador

IVY FABIOLA GARCÍA LÓPEZ
Universidad San Francisco de Quito, Ecuador

OLIVIER TOVAR LARENAS
Universidad San Francisco de Quito, Ecuador

One of the most notable characteristics of the city of Quito, Ecuador, is how people's location reflects their social class. Neighborhoods of lower socioeconomic status are usually situated on the slopes of the Pichincha volcano and, in almost all cases, are part of the city's periphery. The people living in these neighborhoods are often marginalized from the productive sectors of society, facing high rates of unemployment or participation in the informal economy. Their social exclusion has deepened in recent years due to rising violence and the emergence of gangs and criminal organizations fueled by drug trafficking; distrust has become the bitter fruit of this worsening crisis.

In 2015, the Adelphos Foundation was established – first in practice and then in legal form – to promote visits to the homes of individuals living in these peripheral neighborhoods, with the goal of establishing direct dialogue in a relaxed environment. The Foundation's aim is to achieve mutual understanding and learning, creating bonds of trust and breaking prejudices among the various social groups of the Ecuadorian capital. By 2022, 610 homes had been visited, fostering relationships that opened up job opportunities.

Since late 2022, in response to the country's economic crisis, the visits have focused on accompanying and supporting families, ensuring – among other things – that daughters and granddaughters of domestic workers, if they so wish, can access some form of higher education. The connections have fostered

Correspondence Address: Jaime Baquero de la Calle Rivadeneira, Profesor Decanato de Artes Liberales, Universidad San Francisco de Quito, Ecuador; email: jbaquero@usfq.edu.ec

ISSN: 1911-4788



social change in the mindset of the volunteers and the lives of the families they serve.

Ecuador, like many countries in Latin American, is characterized by the presence of clear social contrasts. These differences are often delineated by geographic zones: urban vs. rural, central urban vs. marginal urban, north vs. south, plains vs. ravines, etc. In the city of Quito, a significant number of peripheral neighborhoods are located on the slopes of the Pichincha volcano (Unda, 1998). Many of these neighborhoods have grown informally through settlements that are outside the legal framework (Chacón et al., 2023, p. 56). People with limited resources took possession, in practice rather than legally, of territories belonging to private estates or the state, settling down and awaiting the reactions of the authorities: first the houses, then whatever may follow. In other, more fortunate cases, landowners ceded their properties to the employees of old estates once urban growth had engulfed them. These geographic and socioeconomic divisions also reflect a deeper historical legacy of colonialism and racial inequality, particularly affecting indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian communities.

In Quito, family incomes vary drastically depending on the neighborhood. The minimum wage in Ecuador is \$460 US per month (Ministerio de Trabajo, 2023), contrasting with incomes that can be up to fifty times higher in other economic contexts that are often physically adjacent to the poorest areas. Yet even this contrast is inadequate to reflect class differences between people because of unemployment and underemployment, the rates of which are alarming and on the rise, as indicated by studies on multidimensional poverty in Ecuador (Añazco & Pérez, 2016, p. 11). People in situations of economic vulnerability typically reside in the marginal urban neighborhoods, where deprivations related to the labor market are evident (Burgos & Cando, 2016, p. 42).

Although basic services (drinking water, sewage and electricity) are generally available for most citizens, access to quality education remains limited for individuals in the peripheral neighborhoods of Quito. While the *Constitución de la República del Ecuador* (2008), in Article 26, establishes that education is a fundamental right and that all citizens have the right to free education up to the high school level, the reality is that not everyone has access to educational institutions that guarantee the necessary levels of training for successfully pursuing higher education. This truncates the aspiration of an undetermined number of adolescents with high potential. There is no lack of talent, but rather, of opportunities. The quality of education is often directly linked to the financial capacity of families, with private schools offering much better education than most public institutions. The same is true of the healthcare system (Bustamante & Armas, 2018), whose immediacy and quality in care are almost always indisputable when it comes to the private healthcare system; however, access to this system is directly proportional to the economic resources of the citizen.

The problem of crime was already wreaking havoc, and the emergence of criminal groups supported by drug trafficking has caused the levels of insecurity to increase significantly. From a geo-local perspective, these groups often find refuge in the adjacent urban zones. This trend became particularly pronounced in 2022, driven by economic downturns following the collapse of oil prices, the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the growing operations of transnational criminal organizations using Ecuador as a drug trafficking route. This situation leaves a mounting challenge of silent victims along with growing distrust among people who inhabit the same city yet live in diametrically opposed areas in terms of economic and social characteristics. This growing distrust not only consolidates negative stereotypes and social isolation, it fundamentally denies marginalized populations access to equity, justice, personal security, influence over their communities, and the opportunity to achieve wellbeing, thereby deepening the structural inequalities that perpetuate cycles of exclusion and poverty.

Initial Initiative to Connect Diverse Social Contexts

In 2003, Professor Jaime Baquero (first author), along with some of his students, became aware of this growing problem. Approaches were made to civil, religious and youth authorities of the “Cochapamba” neighborhood, located in the civil parish of the same name, which is divided into two zones: north and south. This neighborhood is situated on the slopes of the Pichincha volcano, belongs to the northern zonal administration “Eugenio Espejo” and borders with other significantly more affluent urban areas, such as “El Pinar Alto”, “El Pinar Bajo” and “Quito Tenis.” The contrasts are starkly evident.

According to an information source from the Municipality of Quito, approximately 8,000 people live in the Cochapamba neighborhood, with a significant population of children and adolescents, as is often the case in middle-class sectors of Quito (*Ocho Mil Habitantes de la Parroquia Cochapamba Se Benefician de Obras En la Quebrada Yacupugro*, 2022). At the foot of this neighborhood there is an important western road axis of the city, called Avenida Mariscal Sucre, which crosses the city from north to south. This increases the neighborhood’s attractiveness, as it allows for quick and easy transportation to the different productive areas (industrial, administrative, etc.) of the Ecuadorian capital.

From the contacts made with local authorities and residents of the neighborhood, initiatives for volunteer work were born, focusing on four fronts: the creation of a children’s library; periodic collaboration for the maintenance of an urban vegetable garden; support for elderly individuals unable to care for themselves to access community dining facilities (one in Cochapamba north and the other in Cochapamba south); collaborative participation during the summer in the vacation youth camps; and assistance in the preparation and development of the Christmas activities of the youth group

Frente de Acción Cochapamba (FAC), aimed at extending festivities to the children of the neighborhood.

Building Trust Through a Social Employment Network

Over time, with a deeper understanding of the neighborhood's needs, a new initiative emerged in 2015. Participants in volunteer activities became aware, through prolonged personal contact with the residents of Cochapamba, that most of them were honest individuals striving to support their families and improve their surroundings through what are known as "mingas solidarias" or community work, an ancestral tradition with indigenous Andean roots. These individuals, primarily mothers and fathers, sought opportunities to engage in work activities that would enable them to achieve a dignified livelihood for their families and communities. Most of them believe their potential job prospects to be limited to manual labor, which is usually concentrated in the city's most productive areas. Consequently, people's needs broadly centered on the possibility of working in domestic service: for women, in roles such as housekeepers or elderly caregivers; and gardening, concierge work, messenger services, or family or community security roles for men.

Domestic work, in the narrowest sense of paid work undertaken in a household, has historically been precarious, due in part to the newness of labor regulations and the lack of awareness among domestic workers regarding their rights. Another crucial element in this situation is the country's labor crisis and the often-desperate situation people are in when they seek such employment options. Masi de Casanova (2022) mentions that a key to understanding the contemporary situation of domestic laborers is to realize that people work less than they would like to.

One of the results of the in-situ work done by Baquero and his students was the discovery that a primary challenge faced by the residents of Cochapamba in their search for dignified employment was *anonymity*. In a society like Quito's with all the divisive social factors mentioned above – distrust between different areas of the city, isolation, deeply rooted social prejudices, etc. – it is insufficient to submit a job application on a digital platform or through classified ads: recommendations are necessary for an applicant to emerge from anonymity and stand a chance of getting paid employment. Masi de Casanova (2022) explains how word of mouth is the commonest way in which domestic workers become known to those who employ them.

Taking this reality into account, the idea of creating a job bank was born. This initiative originated as a social outreach project of the Universidad Hemisferios de Quito, involving its students and other well-intentioned individuals, including family members or those who had overcome a situation of economic hardship and wished to join the ranks of volunteers.

The model devised for this solidarity job bank involved promoting the project through neighborhood assemblies held in Cochapamba North and

South. Interested individuals were required to send their basic work profile to a designated email address. A team member was responsible for receiving and reviewing these profiles and then organizing a visit to the applicant's home, which was a fundamental part of the project's *modus operandi*. A date and time were scheduled for the meeting, involving at least two project participants, though volunteers typically outnumbered the attendees during these home visits.

These in-house meetings with job seekers generated several advantages. Firstly, the approach was profoundly human, involving interactions on an equal footing, characterized by shared experiences, spontaneous dialogue, and healthy coexistence outside the conventionalities or formalities of a job interview, all while recognizing the seriousness of the process and its important role in finding people paid work. Secondly, the individuals who were visited assumed a greater degree of responsibility for continuing to pursue opportunities, knowing that their recommenders had become, in some way, closer to them than a simple employment agency and that these people would subsequently monitor their employment situation. Finally, the closeness of the benefactors and their direct knowledge of a worker's efficiency led to spontaneous word-of-mouth referrals among close contacts (neighbors, relatives), who were also in need of employment and equally bound by mutual trust. Indeed, within a few months, the presence of volunteers was requested in new neighborhoods, and the outreach project eventually expanded to nearly all surrounding areas of Quito.

The next step of the project involved investigating the profile of the visited individuals to ensure there were no legal or police obstacles preventing their recommendation. Once this hurdle was cleared – which was almost always a mere formality, as individuals with legal or police difficulties were an exception – social media channels and WhatsApp work groups were used to promote people's visibility and availability for work, as well as to advertise work opportunities (Fundación Adelfos, n.d.). Using social media in this way helped people to emerge from labor anonymity and increased their chances of integration into the productive or more formal economy, while the WhatsApp groups allowed them to identify accessible job opportunities. The project designated a person to receive vacancy notifications and present several potential profiles to those inquiring. From May 2015 onward, between two and four weekly visits were conducted with people who wanted to find work.

In 2018, an influx of Venezuelan migrants required the project's special attention: people needed help not only in job searches but also for the most basic essentials such as food, clothing, medicines and even furniture and housing. From a human perspective, migrants were immensely grateful to have someone by their side to listen and guide them to fulfill their needs. Individuals who found themselves in a foreign nation where they had not always been well received often experienced the opposite, being welcomed and supported as they settled into their new reality.

By December 2019, 470 visits had been conducted. Of these, 308 were to Ecuadorian families, four to Colombian families, six to Haitian families, three to Peruvian families, and 149 to Venezuelan families (D. Villota, personal communication, June 6, 2024). In response to the initiative's growth, a foundation was proposed to carry the work forward more formally. Thus, the Adelphos project was born. Several years into its work, it was established as a foundation on January 9, 2023, under the auspices of the Ministerio de Inclusión Económica y Social (MIES).

It is difficult to establish an exact number of jobs generated by the Adelphos project, but by 2017 it was common to receive cheerful notification in the volunteers' chat about one or two jobs being secured weekly through this initiative. The first person interviewed for our study of the project's achievements was Rosa V., a head of household with two minor children, who worked as a domestic employee from mid-2015 until March 2020, when the COVID-19 lockdown began.¹ Paulina earned the trust and affection of her employers. She saw a positive change in her life and that of her children, thanks to the opportunity to develop as a human being through dignified work that enabled her to demonstrate her professional and ethical worth to society. Another memorable story is that of Esther G. (personal communication, March 11, 2024), also a domestic worker, who has maintained stable employment up to the publication of this work. She remains grateful to the foundation and advocates for its benefits within her community. The stories of individuals such as these are multiplying.

Family Support During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The prolonged months of the COVID-19 pandemic warrant special mention. When in-person visits were restricted, the focus shifted primarily to providing families with food, especially as many experienced renewed unemployment. Also, online psychological support was provided in cases of domestic violence, alcoholism (particularly among men), and other forms of abuse. Below are some key – though not exhaustive – data points from the foundation's work during 2020 (Adelphos, 2021):

- From May to December, direct financial aid was provided to 95 families in desperate situations;
- Between April and December, Pronaca contributed by donating 211 basic food baskets, which were gratefully received by the families served;
- In August, thanks to Toscana, 250 family food baskets were distributed;
- Also in August, with the generosity of La Favorita and other benefactors, 82 shopping vouchers were provided;

¹ The interviews referenced here were conducted as part of a broader exploratory project that did not fall under the category requiring formal ethics clearance at the time. All participants gave verbal or written informed consent, and pseudonyms have been used to protect their identities.

- In September 2020, two ventures initiated by the families visited won the “Capital Semilla” competition organized by the Fundación de las Américas [FUDELA], with support from Adelphos for their development and consolidation;
- Additionally, thanks to FUDELA, 47 financial vouchers were distributed in September to support the education of minors in the families served;
- In October, 21 school kits were provided through a collaborative effort with the International Organization for Migration [IOM];
- By December 2020, families received 90 food baskets with the support of Colegio Intisana, as well as 117 additional baskets thanks to families from Colegio Los Pinos;
- Throughout the year, an additional 25 food baskets were distributed through a joint project with Banco Bolivariano;
- Finally, in accordance with government guidelines and common sense, home visits were resumed, and the project continued to grow. We were welcomed into 25 new households.

In 2021, a year still impacted by the pandemic, 317 food baskets were delivered, furniture donations were given to 53 families, 90 school kits and 30 tablets went to children of migrant parents. Furthermore, 127 individuals received COVID-19 vaccinations through a campaign led by the foundation and, finally, 115 new families were visited. This work was carried out with the same strategic partners as in 2020.

These initiatives reflected acts of solidarity, as families from wealthier urban sectors voluntarily mobilized to support families living in precarious conditions. From a social justice perspective, this grassroots redistribution effort revealed the capacity of ordinary citizens to engage in direct action to reduce inequalities, fostering empathy and collective responsibility across socioeconomic divides. Although the intensity of the support decreased after the height of the pandemic, the experience left a lasting awareness among the participating communities of their role in promoting more equitable social relations.

New Approaches to New Realities

With the return to normalcy, 2022 marked a reinstatement of regular visits, along with a new development: the foundation was established as a community outreach project of the Universidad San Francisco de Quito. However, the country had undergone significant changes during the pandemic. Promoting employment became much more challenging due to the difficult national and global economic circumstances. Consequently, in September, a decision was made to provide ongoing support to families who were already known to the foundation, aiming to address their needs, and not create false expectations of employment for new families. The scarcity of job opportunities made it

necessary to explore new areas of support for the families served by the foundation.

Masi de Casanova (2022) said that increasing women's educational levels can expand their employment options and their knowledge about their labor rights (p. 173). On finishing high school, many young women from the families visited are compelled to seek employment akin to that of their mothers and grandmothers, often in domestic service. This situation arises because their families lack the resources to consider the possibility of higher education for their children, despite their aspirations. Given this reality, the new approach has involved identifying profiles of responsible young women who wish to pursue higher education rather than entering domestic work. While the project prioritizes young women due to their historical marginalization in education and formal labor sectors, we recognize that young men from these communities also face significant risks, including vulnerability to criminality. Although the current program emphasizes women's empowerment as a means of strengthening family and social development in Ecuadorian society, complementary strategies are being considered to address the needs of young men as well.

Over these months, efforts have been made to find donors and sponsors to implement the plan, and there are many success stories. Among them, Rosmy has successfully completed her studies as a Nursing Assistant with excellent grades and is on the verge of being hired at a private clinic. Emily is pursuing a technical degree in Aesthetics, and Sara is studying to become a Physiotherapy Assistant. Other young women have received academic support to successfully pass the entrance exam to the "Universidad Central del Ecuador," achieving positive results. There are many more young women who wish to study; currently, efforts are underway to secure solid and lasting support to establish sustained collaboration to help them reach their goal, as is essential in families unfamiliar with the challenges of completing tertiary education.

Conclusion

Currently, the Adelphos Foundation, in collaboration with the community outreach project of the "Acompañamiento Familiar" from the Universidad San Francisco de Quito, conducts weekly visits to the homes of families in vulnerable situations. The aim is to provide support and foster hope of a better life, assist in matching them to job opportunities when circumstances permit, and finally, to guide some of the daughters of the families in achieving their academic and professional aspirations. Beyond measurable outcomes, the project seeks to advance social justice by restoring dignity, fostering inclusion, and encouraging active participation in society among historically marginalized groups. Over nearly a decade, significant barriers have been dismantled between various sectors of Quito's society, leading to the

establishment of countless bonds of trust and a renewed sense of shared community.

Acknowledgments

This dispatch would not have been possible without the generosity and openness of the families residing in the peripheral neighborhoods of Quito, who graciously agreed to share their experiences. Sincere thanks are also extended to the Adelfhos Foundation and its volunteers, whose sustained efforts to foster dialogue, trust, and mutual understanding across social divides have played a crucial role in shaping the content and insights presented here. Their work stands as a significant contribution to promoting social inclusion and civic engagement in contexts marked by inequality and exclusion.

References

- Adelfhos. (2021, January 16). *Queridos amigos: Compartimos con ustedes nuestra gestión del 2020*. [Post]. Facebook.
<https://www.facebook.com/AdelfhosOng/posts/pfbid02EbwHXzEEonbTufAQAB3sTrC6p2dsQLDGF2bx5qWGKSAK2PaDGixqGuYedqPG98EI>
- Añazco, E. P. R., & Pérez, F. J. (2016). *Medición de la Pobreza Multidimensional en Ecuador*. Gob.ec. https://www.ecuadorencifras.gob.ec/documentos/web-inec/Sitios/Pobreza_Multidimensional/assets/ipm-metodologia-oficial.pdf
- Burgos Dávila, S., & Cando Ortega, F. (2016). Pobreza multidimensional: índice de Alkire y Foster para Ecuador. *Economía*, 41(42), 10-52.
<https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=195650099002>
- Bustamante, K., & Armas, S. (2018, March). *Diagnóstico de Salud el Distrito Metropolitano de Quito*. Quito.gob.ec.
https://quito.gob.ec/documentos/Salud/Diagnostico_Salud_DMQ2017.pdf
- Chacón, D., Parrado, C., Meléndez, G., Simbaña, L., Villavicencio, J., & Arteaga, C. (2023). Informe de Calidad de Vida 2023. En J. M. León (Ed.), *quitocomovamos.org*. https://quitocomovamos.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/ICV-2023_version_final_09-nov_comprimido.pdf
- Constitución de la República del Ecuador. (2008). *Registro Oficial No. 449*.
<https://www.registroficial.gob.ec/index.php/registro-oficial-web/publicaciones/registro-oficial/item/4864-registro-oficial-no-449.html>
- Fundación Adelfhos [@adelfhosec]. (n.d.) *Conectamos a las comunidades periféricas de Quito con el resto de la ciudad, creando lazos de confianza*. [Post in Instagram]. Instagram.
<https://www.instagram.com/adelfhosec/>
- Masi de Casanova, E. (2022). *La desigualdad a domicilio: El trabajo remunerado del hogar en el Ecuador contemporáneo*. Editorial Flacso Ecuador.
- Ministerio de Trabajo. (2023). *Acuerdo Ministerial Nro. MDT-2023-175, de 15 de diciembre de 2023*. <https://www.trabajo.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Acuerdo-Ministerial-No.-MDT-2023-175---Salario-Basico-del-Trabajador-para-2024-1.pdf>
- Ocho mil habitantes de la parroquia Cochapamba se benefician de obras en la quebrada Yacupugro*. (2022, June 3). <https://www.quitoinforma.gob.ec/2022/06/03/ocho-mil-habitantes-de-la-parroquia-cochapamba-se-benefician-de-obras-en-la-quebrada-yacupugro/>
- Unda, M. (Ed.). (1998). *Vida en las laderas*. Centro de Investigaciones Ciudad. <https://biblio.flacsoandes.edu.ec/libros/digital/47866.pdf>