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SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN THE PRIMARY ZONE OF THE ISTHMUS REGION, OAXACA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE INTEROCEANIC CORRIDOR OF THE ISTHMUS OF TEHUANTEPEC (CIIT)

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to identify the main gaps that affect social inequality of five municipalities in the primary zone of the Isthmus region of Oaxaca in the context of the Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (CIIT). In order to fulfill the objective, a mixed methodology of synthetic scope was used, a total of 339 surveys were applied in the municipalities of Juchitán de Zaragoza, Salina Cruz, San Blas Atempa, San Mateo del Mar, and Santo Domingo Tehuantepec. The results obtained indicate that there are gaps in education, housing, income, employment and salaries. It is concluded that these gaps limit the quality of life of the local population of the inhabitants of the primary zone and, therefore, evidence their social inequality.

KEYWORDS: Social Inequality, Local Population, Gaps.

1. INTRODUCTION

Inequality is a problem present in different geographical areas of the world; its reduction has been eminent for the well-being of the population. For this reason, since 2015, it has become one of the development goals to be met globally (United Nations, n.d.)

There are different types of inequality, depending on the approach with which it is analyzed, which can be economic, territorial, gender, among others. However, these converge in social inequality, since it emphasizes all those aspects that affect people's quality of life. (ECLAC, 2016)

In the Mexican context, the problem in question is evidenced, on the one hand, by data from the World Bank (2024), which indicates that Mexico has a Gini coefficient of 43.5%, reflecting income inequality. On the other hand, the reports that 36.3% of the population is in poverty, and of which, 65.7% has at least one social deprivation: educational backwardness, health services, social security, quality and spaces in housing, basic services or nutritious or quality food. CONEVAL (2022)

In the interior of the country, inequality mainly affects the states located in the south, including Oaxaca. In this state, estimated poverty in 2022 was 58.4%, composed of 38.2% in moderate poverty and 20.20% in extreme poverty. These data show an overview of the 570 municipalities that make it up, which are grouped into eight regions: Central Valleys, Coast, Isthmus, Mixteca, Papaloapan, Northern Sierra, Southern Sierra and Cañada. (CONEVAL, 2022)

In the specific case of the Isthmus region, made up of the districts of Juchitán and Tehuantepec: with 22 and 19 municipalities respectively, 629,036 people live, of which 61.3% are indigenous. Of the municipalities as a whole, 49% have high or very high levels of marginalization, 25% show high or very high social backwardness, and in most of them more than half of the population is in a situation of poverty (COPLADE, 2020; CONEVAL, 2022). (INPI, 2017) (COPLADE, 2020)

A relevant fact in this area is that, today, it has attracted attention at the national level due to the implementation of the Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (CIIT): a project derived from the Program for the Development of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (PDIT) 2020-2024, from the National Development Plan 2019-2024, whose purpose is to generate development to reduce inequalities. to direct an economy towards the well-being of the majority and to improve the quality of life of the population (Government of Mexico, 2020).

Therefore, various investigations have addressed the social, economic and environmental aspects that this project entails. On the one hand, there is evidence of the lack of knowledge, disagreements of the local population and their environmental effects (Ceceña et al., 2021; Hernández et al., 2024; Mina et al., 2022; Rodríguez, 2023). On the other hand, optimal future scenarios are foreseen from a commercial and economic aspect, closely linked to foreign investment for the improvement of infrastructure (Thierry-Aguilera et al., 2021).

However, as it is a project with a transcendence at the country level, it is relevant to know all the possible aspects that involve the local population, given its implicit, positive or negative impact. For this reason, this paper aims to identify the main gaps that affect social inequality in five municipalities in the primary zone of the Isthmus region, Oaxaca, in the context of the Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (CIIT).

The research consists of a frame of reference that includes a general overview of social inequality linked to the theoretical aspects of local development, followed by a brief approach to the Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (CIIT). Subsequently, the methodological aspects based on a mixed approach that served to meet the established objective are addressed. The results continued, in which the gaps in education, housing, income, employment and lack of opportunities are evident.

It is concluded that the lack of levels of education, formal employment, access to services and income affect the quality of life, evidencing inequality within the local population. Likewise, the lack of citizen participation in the execution of the CIIT shows that it does not provide opportunities for the population to be the main actors and main beneficiaries of the project.

1.1. Social Inequality and Local Development

Broadly speaking, inequality means the lack of equality between people, things, or other aspects (El Colegio de México, 2025). According to the United Nations, this is not limited to wealth, but also to living conditions, which include health services, educational quality, as well as access to public services. (2019)

From the perspective of Rousseau (2021), there are four inequalities that regulate and compare societies: wealth, nobility or rank, power and personal merit; the latter being the origin of all the others. However, institutions are fundamental actors, due to the role they play, since they are the ones who provide opportunities for citizens to minimize the

situation of inequality. (Turégano, 2022)

On the other hand, under the approach of Amartya Sen (2021), an individual's ability to perform actions that have value provides a panorama to evaluate the social conditions in which they are inserted, while the functions they manage to put into practice will vary between people. Therefore, capacities and functioning are aspects that show equality and inequality between social groups.

Another important aspect of the issue in question is the territory, since this is a space where the relationships of human beings arise and, therefore, where inequalities are visualized. In this area, agents carry out different actions, such as projects focused on local development, to contribute to the reduction of them. (Schteingart *et al.*, 2023)

Local development initiatives emerged in nations with less advanced economies and lagging development (Vázquez-Barquero, 2009), where citizen participation was promoted as a necessary framework for local development (Arocena, 2013). This type of development is defined as a strategy that focuses on the constant improvement of the available resources of a given territory with economic, technical, social and cultural characteristics. (Boisier, 2005; Vázquez-Barquero, 2007)

The objective of local development is to improve the quality of life and well-being of the population in which it arises through the mobilization and participation of public and private actors, to establish and agree on strategies for local impulse: economic, cultural, social, institutional and human development. (Alcañiz, 2008; Carpio, 2002) (Albuquerque, 2003)

Local development is characterized by its territorial, endogenous approach and a bottom-up model. The first is associated with the fact that development is applied to a heterogeneous geographical space that refers to a municipality or micro-region, but can cover a wider area due to the interrelations that exist beyond borders (León and Peñate, 2011) (Albuquerque, 2003).

The second characteristic, the endogenous approach, refers to the local resources available in the territory, although for local development it is necessary to integrate exogenous elements for their long-term continuity (Boisier, 2005). Albuquerque (2003) points out that many initiatives at the territorial level depend on external dynamism, so they must consider external factors with the task of "endogenizing" them for their local impact.

Finally, the bottom-up model corresponds to the fact that initiatives are proposed from within. As Carpio (2002) points out, local development implies

a transformation in how development is conceived: moving from top-down to bottom-up approaches, from external to internal, and from concentration to dispersion. However, although the local development model is bottom-up, it is important to seek the efficient coordination of the different public administrations for its coherent integration into general development policies (Albuquerque, 2003).

1.2. The Interoceanic Corridor of The Isthmus of Tehuantepec (CIIT)

To begin with, it is necessary to specify that an isthmus is the narrowest part of land that connects two oceans. In the case of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, it is a territory that links the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean for 200 km, encompassing the southern states of Mexico: Chiapas, Tabasco, Veracruz and Oaxaca. (Gómez-Martínez, 2021) (Ceceña *et al.*, 2021)

This territory is where the national project of the Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (CIIT) is currently being carried out. Although it only involves the territorial area of the states of Oaxaca and Veracruz, with 46 and 33 municipalities, respectively, a total of 79 administrative units, chosen for their proximity to the railroad tracks, their cultural and logistical relevance (Government of Mexico, 2020).

The CIIT is a project that precedes the ideas that arose in colonization. According to Queen (2019), since the arrival of Hernán Cortés, the creation of a road linking the two oceans was contemplated, with the purpose of the Spanish Crown exercising control of the maritime routes. Although the strait was not found at this time, the expeditions carried out led to a trade route in the region.

Other attempts arose in: 1880 with the Alpha Omega Plan; 1996 with the Comprehensive Economic Development Program for the Isthmus of Tehuantepec; 2001 with the Puebla-Panama Plan; 2007 with the Logistics System of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec; 2010 the Multimodal Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec; 2013 with the Isthmus Puerta América Plan and 2016 with the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) (Torres, 2017).

However, as Torres mentions, none of the multiple proposed projects have been successful, but the implementation of plans in this area continues, given that the region of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec is strategic for commercial development. For this reason, in 2019, the federal government announced the Program for the Development of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, adapted to the parameters of social sciences, environmental and contemporary

technologies. (2022)



Figure 1: Trans-Isthmus of The Isthmus of Tehuantepec.
Source: INEGI, Geocomunes, 2020. <https://Geocomunes.Org>.

The intention of this project is to connect the port of Coatzacoalcos in the state of Veracruz and Salina Cruz in the state of Oaxaca, through the modernization of the railway; the strengthening of rural roads and roads; strengthening of the port network and construction of a gas pipeline to supply companies and domestic consumers and creation of production estates with greater potential (Government of Mexico, 2020).

2. METHODOLOGY

This is social research of a heuristic, cognitive, dialectical and planned nature (Ñaupás, 2018). It is based on a mixed approach related to the

paradigm of pragmatism, since it involves the collection, analysis and interpretation of quantitative and qualitative data in accordance with the statement of the problem and the context of the area of study (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

The research was carried out within the margins of the state of Oaxaca, and the choice of study units was made at convenience, based on the classification provided: primary and secondary zone. Five of the eighteen municipalities that make up the primary zone were chosen to carry out the study: Ramos-Soto et al. (2024) Juchitán de Zaragoza, Salina Cruz, San Blas Atempa, San Mateo del Mar, and Santo Domingo Tehuantepec.

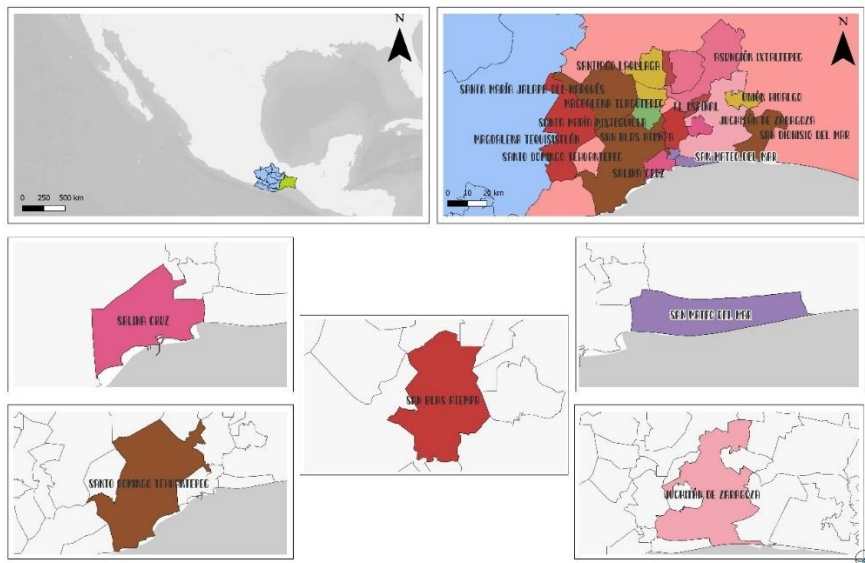


Figure 2: Surveyed Municipalities in the Region of Isthmus, Oaxaca. Fountain. Own Elaboration.

Subsequently, the sample was determined in a non-probabilistic way, a total of 339 random surveys were applied in the month of May-June 2023. Despite the type of non-probabilistic determination, a confidence level of more than 94% of the sample was obtained.

The 339 surveys were answered by 208 women, representing 61.4% of the sample; 129 men, equivalent to 38.1%, one person who did not identify with either sex, that is, 0.3%, and the other 0.3% did not answer this question (Figure 3). The average age was 39 years, representing a young adult population.

3. RESULTS

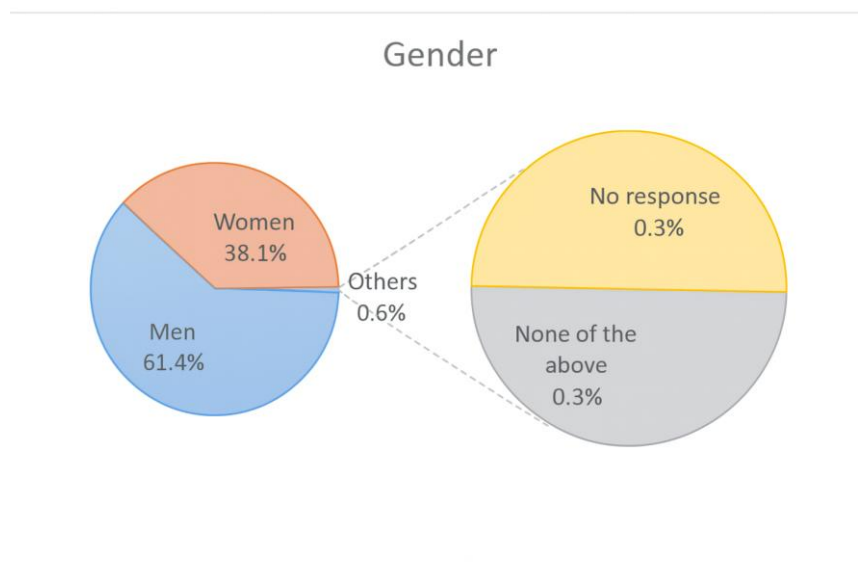


Figure 3: Gender Of Respondents. Source: Own Elaboration.

The respondents indicated that they were originally from 39 neighborhoods belonging to the municipality of Tehuantepec, eighteen neighborhoods located in San Blas Atempa, two neighborhoods in Juchitán de Zaragoza, three in San Mateo del Mar and 14 in Salina Cruz. Regarding

marital status, 43.1% of the interviewees, corresponding to 146 people, are married; 37.5% are single, that is, 127 individuals; 12.1% are in a common-law union, a total of 41 informants and 5.6%, equivalent to 19 respondents, are widowed.

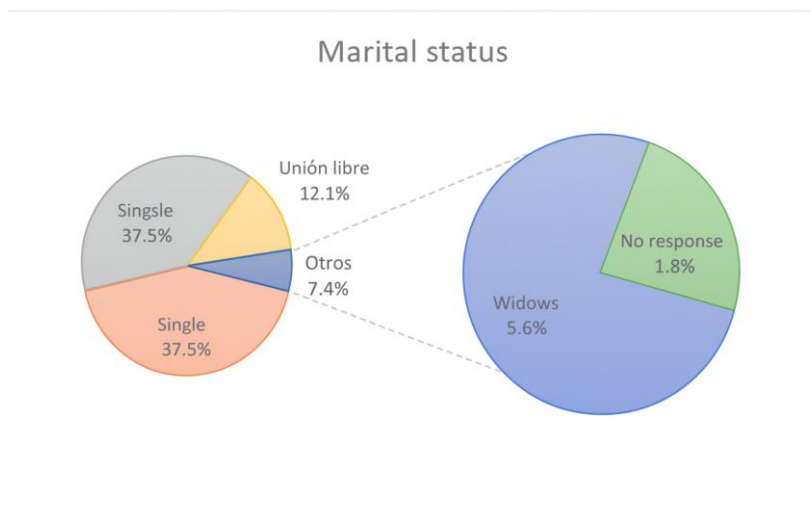


Figure 4: Whistleblowers' Marital Status.

Source: Own Elaboration.

The quantitative data previously provided show that the majority of the population comes from different municipalities, that regardless of age, more than half of the informants have a partner, regardless

of whether they are married or in a common-law union, which represents a total of 55.2% who share their expenses with another person.

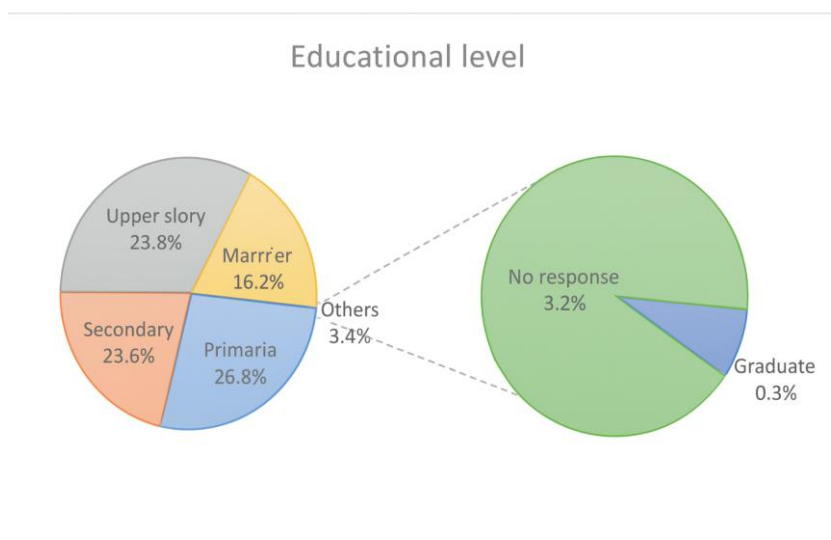


Figure 5: Educational level.

Source: Own Elaboration.

The following results were found at the educational level: 26.8% of the people indicated that they had primary education; 23.6% responded that they had a secondary education; 29.8% have completed the upper secondary degree; 16.2% reported having studied a bachelor's degree and only 0.3% having studied a postgraduate degree.

In relation to housing, they were asked if the place where they live is rented, borrowed or owned, in order to know the opportunities that the population has to have something of their own. The results

showed that 62.5% mentioned not paying rent, that is, it is their own home; 20.15% live in a borrowed place or live with some other relative; the rest assumed to pay rent.

Subsequently, they were asked if their home had a firm floor, bathrooms and electricity and drinking water service. 90.9% of the respondents stated that they had these characteristics, 5.9% indicated that they had three of the four particularities, 2.1% said they had only two, 0.6% said they had only one and 0.6% mentioned not having any characteristics.

Services in Housing

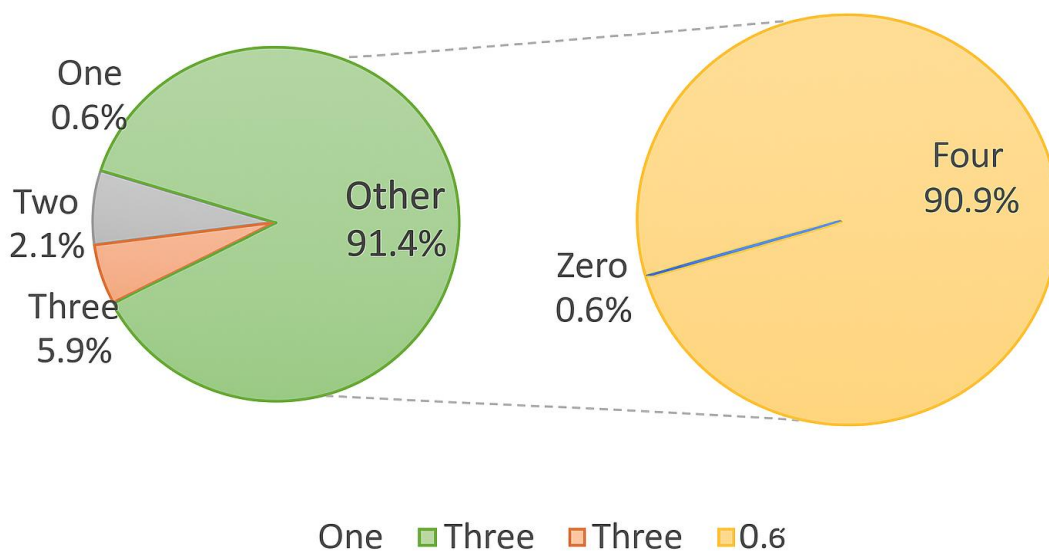


Figure 6: In-Home Services.

Source: Own Elaboration

Another piece of data collected through the survey was the number of rooms in the home, the maximum number was 5, representing 3.5%. The

majority of respondents, 34.8%, indicated that they had two rooms; 27.7% said they had three quarters and 18.5% with four.

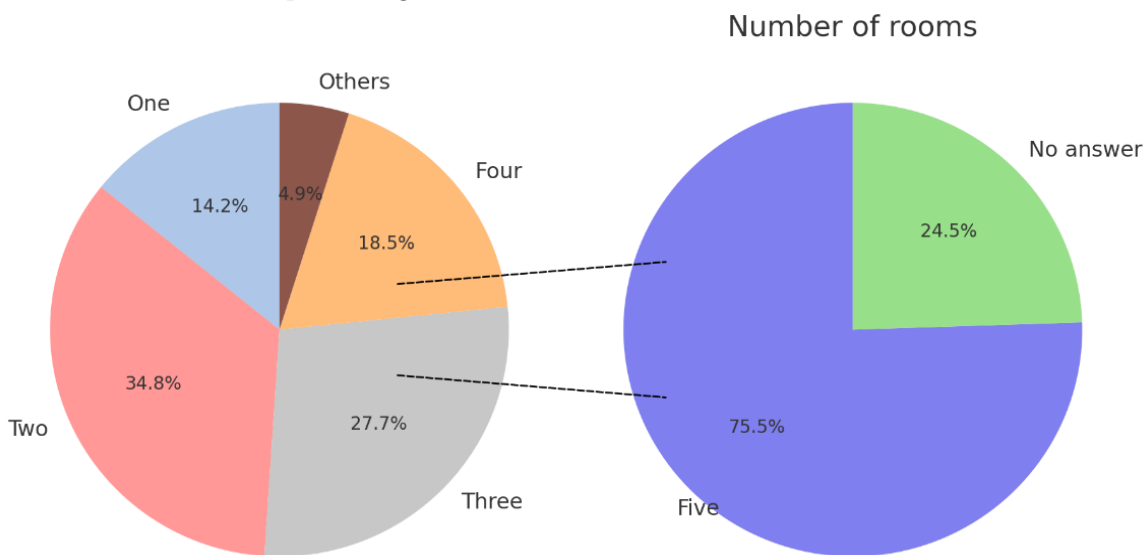


Figure 7: Number Of Rooms.

Source: Own Elaboration.

Regarding employment, the data collected indicate that 53.1% do not have a permanent job, that is, 180 people. 46.9%, equivalent to 159 individuals, do not have a job. They indicate that they are in the

search process: 1.2% indicate that they have been looking for a job for a year, 12.5% have been in the process for a month and 39.5% more than two months looking for work.

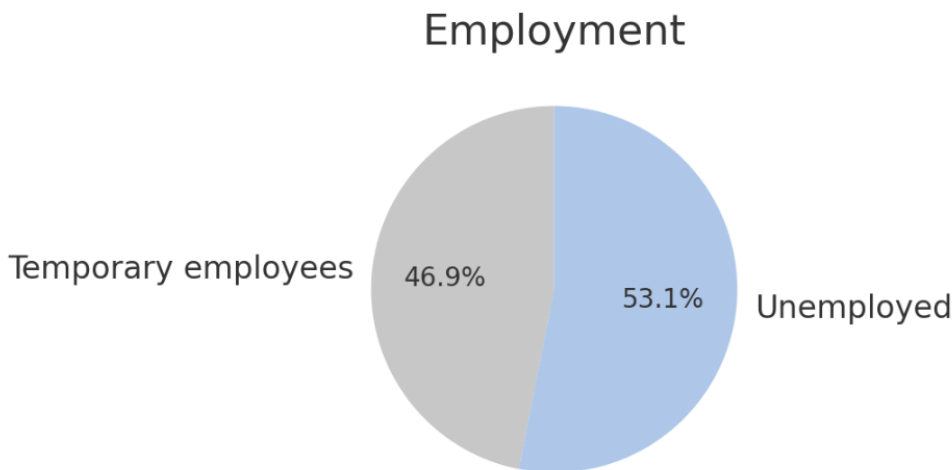


Figure 8: Employment.
Source: Own Elaboration.

On the other hand, since they do not have a permanent job or are unemployed, they carry out various activities, the informants indicated a total of 36, among which commerce, gastronomy, the elaboration of handicrafts or simply traditional activities of the region stand out; 89.4% carry out these activities in the peripheries of the capital of the municipality; 4.4% develop them in the center of the municipality; 3.5% in the park, and 2.7% indicate that they work at home, either as a housewife or have their own business in their own home, so it would also be a commercial activity.

The activities mentioned above are carried out in the informal sector, which does not provide legal protection, a fixed salary, health insurance, an established working day, bonuses, training, rest days and, in general, do not have benefits granted by law. This limits the income and well-being of local people.

In relation to the salaries they received, they were a little reluctant to answer: 48.4%, a part of the unemployed, said they did not have any income; 25.7% had a minimum wage; 16.5% two minimum wages and 1.8% answered that they earn four minimum wages.

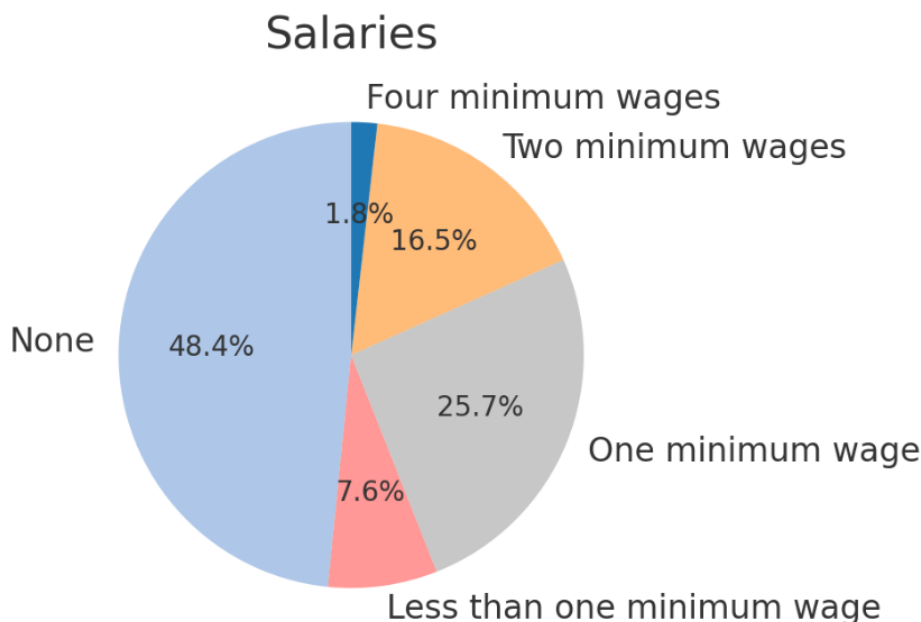


Figure 9: Salaries Received.
Source: Own Elaboration

In terms of productive capacity, they were asked if they had land to plant, where 9.4% answered that they had privately owned land; 7.4% work in communal domains, which means that they are harvestlands belonging to the people; with a minority of 4.1% mentioned having soils that are inherited, this tells us that their relatives left it to them and their lands were passed from generation to generation. Likewise, a large percentage of the interviewees did not answer this question, which represents 79.1%. This is interpreted as meaning that they do not have their own land or just do not have it.

They were then asked if they cultivate the land, since agriculture can be considered an important economic activity, since it reduces poverty, increases incomes and improves the way people who do not have a stable job eat. However, in this reagent, 56.6% indicated that they do not cultivate them, pointing out as a factor the lack of time, lack of personnel, lack of material, lack of knowledge, because, although it seems a simple job, it has a high degree of difficulty; 23.9% indicated that if they cultivate their land taking advantage of this to generate inputs or income that would help cover their needs and those of their families.

According to the products they grow, they are: coffee, lemons, beans, pumpkin, mango, sesame, tomato, corn, almonds, mamey, chili, epazote, plum, papaya, guavas and different flowers, which answered that they work in the markets marketing what they obtain from the land.

4. DISCUSSION

The conditions of the local population show the social inequalities of the primary school area of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca. The first gap is in the educational part, where more than 50% only have basic education.

The second housing-related gap does not lead to major findings, given that more than 90% have the basic characteristics to live. However, overcrowding can be deduced, since the most frequent number of rooms is two, reducing the space of the family.

A third gap is found in employment, because the population does not have a decent job. They carry out self-sustaining activities informally in different spaces of the municipalities, among which commerce, the elaboration of crafts or other activities related to the culture of the local stand out, which shows that the artisanal sector is important in the region.

In the case of people who have sporadic employment, the situation they have is the

perception of low wages, which reflects the limitations to meet their own and family needs, these limits having a quality of life and well-being.

In addition, none of the respondents referred to being employed in any work related to the CIIT, or any other job related to the development program being implemented in the region. This can translate into the null participation of the local population in federal projects.

One more gap is wages, this is directly linked to employment, since being unemployed or not having permanent and decent jobs, the population cannot access an income that contributes to satisfying their basic needs such as food.

A final aspect is the lack of opportunities to carry out agricultural activities, since they are limited in access to credit and knowledge, which reduces their own initiatives to employ themselves and generate income that allows them to sustain household expenses.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the questionnaires applied, it was possible to meet the proposed objective: to identify the main gaps that affect social inequality in five municipalities of the primary zone of the Isthmus region, Oaxaca, in the context of the Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (CIIT). A total of five gaps were identified: educational, housing, employment, income and opportunities.

From our point of view, the educational gap plays an important role in the others, since, by not having a high level of education, the jobs that the population can access are limited. Similarly, with low levels of education, the income they can receive or generate is lower, keeping them at an income below the welfare line, placing them in a situation of poverty.

Also, the education gap limits the opportunities in knowledge to carry out their different activities, for example, they are unaware of the programs to access credits for the field or the programs for their technical training. In the case of people who develop some type of artisanal activity, they do it only from the individual side, without the search for a group for a common welfare.

On the other hand, in the case of the CIIT, it is pointed out that the project developed in the area has little link with the local population that contributes to reducing inequalities. So far, there is no evidence of any positive impact on the population that will provide the objective that this project entails.

Therefore, it is concluded that insufficient education, lack of formal jobs, limited access to services and low incomes directly affect the quality

of life, highlighting social inequality among the local population. Likewise, the lack of participation of citizens in the CIIT shows the lack of opportunities

for the local population, limiting their participation in it and, therefore, benefiting from the project.

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