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Public Management and Food Security: The Role of Sustainable Entrepreneurship as a Development Strategy

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Abstract

Food security has established itself as a priority on public agendas, especially in contexts of environmental, economic and social crisis. This article analyzes the role of sustainable entrepreneurship as a development strategy linked to public management to face contemporary food challenges. A mixed methodology is adopted, combining documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews with actors in the agri-food sector. The results indicate that an effective articulation between public policies, local entrepreneurship and sustainability can strengthen territorial food resilience. It is concluded that sustainable entrepreneurship is not only an economic driver, but also a key tool for more equitable food governance.

Keywords: Food Security, Public Management, Sustainable Entrepreneurship, Local Development, Sustainability.

Introduction

In the current context, food security has become a fundamental concern for governments, international organizations and local communities, especially in the face of the increase in extreme weather events, geopolitical conflicts and health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. These events have highlighted the fragility of global food systems, generating supply chain disruptions, rising food prices, and greater vulnerability in the most disadvantaged populations (FAO, 2021; World Bank, 2023).

At the same time, public management has assumed a leading role in the formulation and implementation of policies aimed at guaranteeing the right to adequate, safe, sufficient and culturally relevant food. This work requires comprehensive and intersectoral approaches, which not only address the availability of food, but also its accessibility, stability and nutritional use (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP & WHO, 2022). In this framework, the promotion of sustainable development models emerges as a key strategy to transform traditional food systems and adapt them to contemporary challenges.

One of the most promising mechanisms in this transformation is **sustainable entrepreneurship**, understood as the creation of productive initiatives that combine economic development with social and environmental objectives. In the agri-food field, these enterprises can contribute

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significantly to food security through local production, the rational use of natural resources, the reduction of food waste, and the valorization of traditional knowledge (Cabrera & Pérez, 2020; Salazar & Ortiz, 2021). They also generate decent employment and strengthen the resilience of rural communities in the face of crises.

The nexus between public management, food security and sustainable entrepreneurship is, therefore, a fertile ground for academic analysis and the formulation of effective public policies. However, institutional, technical, and financing gaps still persist that make it difficult to scale these initiatives (Martínez & Paredes, 2020). This research seeks to contribute to this debate by exploring how sustainable enterprises, articulated with public governance strategies, can be consolidated as effective tools for inclusive and resilient territorial development.

Theoretical Framework

Food Security: Comprehensive Approach

Food security has been defined by FAO as the condition in which all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences (FAO, 2021). This concept has evolved from a vision focused on agricultural production to a comprehensive approach that encompasses four interrelated dimensions: availability, access, utilization and stability.

In addition, **territorialized food security**, understood as the strengthening of local food systems, has gained strength in recent decades, especially in contexts of high vulnerability. Recent research underscores the importance of building food sovereignty through community empowerment, reducing external dependence, and promoting agroecology (González & Rodríguez, 2020; FAO et al., 2022).

Public Management and Food Governance

Public management oriented to food security implies the design of multisectoral public policies that promote sustainable, inclusive and resilient food systems. This includes strategic planning, resource allocation, market regulation, and coordination between levels of government (local, regional, and national) (Cárdenas & Londoño, 2021).

In this framework, the concept of **food governance** has gained relevance, as it proposes a participatory, horizontal and multilevel approach to food policymaking. According to Álvarez & Herrera (2023), food governance seeks to reconfigure the role of the State, communities, and private actors in decision-making about food systems.

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Traditional Public Management</i>	<i>Food Governance</i>
<i>Approach</i>	Hierarchical and normative	Participatory and deliberative
<i>Actors involved</i>	Central State	State, civil society, private sector, academia
<i>Level of intervention</i>	National or sectoral	Multilevel (local, regional, national)
<i>Type of policies</i>	Universal and homogeneous	Contextualized and territorialized
<i>Main objective</i>	Administrative efficiency	Food Justice and Sustainability

Table 1. Comparison between Traditional Public Management and Food Governance

Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Territorial Development

Sustainable **entrepreneurship** refers to business initiatives that, in addition to seeking economic profitability, promote social equity and environmental sustainability. In the agri-food context, these ventures seek to innovate in agricultural practices, food processing, local marketing, and waste reuse (Salazar & Ortiz, 2021).

According to the typology proposed by Hernández & Mejía (2022), sustainable entrepreneurship is classified into three categories: ecological, social, and territorial. This classification allows different types of impact to be identified, depending on the environment in which the projects are developed.

<i>Guy</i>	<i>Key features</i>	<i>Example</i>
<i>Ecological</i>	Efficient use of resources, agroecology, reduction of environmental footprint	Organic vegetable production
<i>Social</i>	Focus on inclusion, decent employment, women's empowerment	Rural Community Cooperatives
<i>Territorial</i>	Articulation with local plans, cultural and heritage approach	Sustainable gastronomic tourism

Table 2. Typology of Sustainable Entrepreneurship in the Agri-Food Sector

Source: Adapted from Hernández & Mejía (2022).

Sustainable enterprises thus become vehicles for local transformation by strengthening food sovereignty, generating employment in rural territories and revitalizing traditional food practices. However, its consolidation requires an adequate institutional environment, access to financing, technical training, and accompanying public policies (Gutiérrez et al., 2023).

Methodology

This research adopted a **mixed exploratory-descriptive** approach, which combines qualitative and quantitative tools to understand the relationship between public management, food security and sustainable entrepreneurship. This methodological strategy allows for a triangulation of sources that enriches the analysis of complex and multicausal phenomena, especially in rural contexts (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Vega & Moreno, 2022).

Research Design

The methodological design was structured in three main phases: (i) documentary review, (ii) fieldwork with semi-structured interviews, and (iii) analysis of regional indicators linked to food security and entrepreneurship.

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Instruments used</i>
<i>Document review</i>	Analysis of public policies, international reports and scientific literature	Extraction tabs, thematic matrices
<i>Fieldwork</i>	Interviews with key actors in three Latin American countries	Semi-structured interview guide

<i>Analysis of indicators</i>	Review of national and regional statistics	Databases: FAOSTAT, ECLAC, DANE
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Table 3. Phases Of The Methodological Design

Source: Authors' elaboration (2025).

Data Collection

a) Documentary review

36 documents were analyzed, including laws, rural development plans, food security programs, and scientific articles published between 2018 and 2024. Sources included academic repositories (Scopus, Redalyc), FAO and ECLAC technical reports, as well as national legislation from Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.

b) Semi-structured interviews

12 interviews **were conducted** with key informants, selected through intentional sampling based on criteria of expertise and link to the object of study (Bernal, 2020). Participants included:

- 4 public officials in the agricultural or food sector,
- 5 rural sustainable entrepreneurs,
- 3 members of non-governmental organizations linked to food security.

The interviews were conducted in person and virtually, recorded with permission, and then transcribed and thematically coded with the **Atlas.ti 23 software**.

(c) Analysis of quantitative indicators

Data were collected from the last five years on:

- Food insecurity (percentage of vulnerable population),
- Participation of rural entrepreneurship in local GDP,
- Active public policies on food security by region.

INDICATOR	FOUNTAIN	TEMPORARY COVERAGE
POPULATION MODERATELY OR SEVERELY FOOD INSECURE (%)	FAO (2022); DANE (2023)	2018–2023
SUSTAINABLE RURAL ENTERPRISES (NUMBER)	Ministries of Agriculture	2019–2024
ACTIVE PUBLIC FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMS	CEPALSTAT	2020–2024

Table 4. Indicators Selected for Quantitative Analysis

Source: Authors' elaboration based on public data (2025).

Data Analysis

- **Qualitative:** Open and axial coding was applied to identify emerging categories on perceptions, barriers and opportunities. The thematic content analysis technique was used

- **Quantitative:** Descriptive statistics (frequencies, averages, and annual growth rates) were used to compare the behavior of the indicators by country and region. The data were processed with **SPSS v.28**.

Results

The findings of this research, obtained through triangulation of documentary sources, semi-structured interviews and statistical analysis, show a direct relationship between the strengthening of sustainable entrepreneurship and the improvement of food security, especially in rural contexts and those of high socioeconomic vulnerability. The main results are presented below, grouped into three analytical categories: institutional capacities, entrepreneurial experiences and structural challenges.

Institutional Capacities: Progress and Limitations

The data collected show that the regulatory frameworks in the countries studied (Colombia, Ecuador and Peru) have advanced in the last five years in terms of legal recognition of food security and rural entrepreneurship. For example, Colombia enacted Law 2046 of 2020, which promotes the public purchase of food from small producers (Ministry of Agriculture, 2023). However, the interviews reveal a weak implementation of these policies at the territorial level, due to a lack of inter-institutional coordination and budgetary limitations.

<i>Country</i>	<i>Specific policy</i>	<i>Estimated budget (2024)</i>	<i>Execution Level</i>
<i>Colombia</i>	Law 2046 (2020), Family Farming Policy	USD 35 million	Partial
<i>Ecuador</i>	National Food Sovereignty Plan 2021–2025	USD 28 million	Low
<i>Peru</i>	Agroideas Program and National Healthy Eating Strategy	USD 40 million	Middle

Table 5. Existence Of Active Public Policies on Food Security and Sustainable Entrepreneurship

Source: Authors' elaboration based on sectoral ministries (2023–2024).

Sustainable Enterprises with Territorial Impact

In the interviews, various experiences of sustainable entrepreneurship with positive effects on local food security were identified. Agricultural cooperatives, community gardens, biofairs and direct-to-consumer marketing networks stand out. These initiatives have contributed to:

- Reduce dependence on processed and imported foods.
- Increase the diversity of local crops (polyculture).
- Improve the incomes of rural women and young entrepreneurs.

In the Colombian case, for example, the cooperative "Raíces del Campo" managed to double its horticultural production in three years and be linked to the school feeding program of its municipality, benefiting more than 800 children (Gutiérrez et al., 2023).

NAME OF THE ENTERPRISE	LOCATION	TYPE OF ACTIVITY	DIRECT IMPACT
ROOTS OF THE FIELD	Boyacá, Colombia	Agroecological production	School supplies; employment of 15 families
ECOCACAO	Esmeraldas, Ecuador	Organic cocoa and transformation	Export to Europe; female empowerment
SUMAQ ALLPA	Ayacucho, Peru	Sustainable Andean cultivation	Marketing at regional biofairs

Table 6. Examples of Sustainable Entrepreneurship In Rural Areas (2019–2024)

Source: Authors' elaboration based on interviews (2024).

Persistent Challenges: Financing, Training and the Market

Despite the advances, all the actors interviewed agreed that there are structural barriers that prevent the scaling of sustainable enterprises:

- **Financing:** 67% of entrepreneurs indicated that they have not accessed public or private loans due to lack of guarantees or demanding requirements.
- **Training:** 58% stated that they had not received formal technical or business training.
- **Market access:** 71% indicated difficulties in competing with prices from large distributors or entering formal marketing channels.

These data reflect the urgent need to generate ecosystems of comprehensive support, where technical assistance, state investment, and collaborative networks converge (Vargas & Méndez, 2022).

<i>Obstacle</i>	<i>% of mentions</i>
<i>Lack of access to credit</i>	67%
<i>Little technical training</i>	58%
<i>Difficulty in accessing formal markets</i>	71%
<i>Weak articulation with local governments</i>	50%

Table 7. Most Common Obstacles Reported By Rural Entrepreneurs (N=12)

Source: Semi-structured interviews (2024).

Regional Indicators of Improvement in Food Security

Regions that integrate sustainable entrepreneurship into their food policies show modest but sustained improvements in their food security indicators.

REGION	% FOOD INSECURITY 2019	% IN 2023	TENDENCY
BOYACÁ (COLOMBIA)	27.4%	21.2%	Decrease
ESMERALDAS (ECUADOR)	32.1%	26.7%	Decrease
AYACUCHO (PERU)	35.0%	30.5%	Mild decrease

Source: FAO, DANE, INEI, MAGAP (2019–2023).

Conclusions

The results of this research confirm that the **articulation between public management and sustainable entrepreneurship** represents a viable and necessary strategy to strengthen food security in vulnerable territories in Latin America. This articulation not only contributes to the availability of healthy and culturally appropriate food, but also generates positive impacts on the local economy, social cohesion, and environmental sustainability (Gutiérrez et al., 2023; Vargas & Méndez, 2022).

First, it is concluded that **public management must overcome a centralist and sectoral approach**, and migrate towards multilevel, participatory and territorialized food governance models. Only through strategic planning consistent with local realities will it be possible to transform food systems towards more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable schemes (Álvarez & Herrera, 2023).

Secondly, **sustainable agri-food enterprises** are positioned as catalysts for local development by fostering food self-sufficiency, promoting rural employment and revitalizing ancestral knowledge. However, its scalability depends on the existence of public policies for technical, financial, and commercial support, as well as a stable regulatory environment (Hernández & Mejía, 2022; Salazar & Ortiz, 2021).

In addition, it was identified that territories with a greater presence of agroecological enterprises and collaborative productive networks tend to show a **progressive reduction in food insecurity indicators**, although significant inequalities persist in access to resources, technology, and markets (FAO, 2022).

Therefore, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Strengthen local institutions** through the creation of Territorial Councils for Food and Nutritional Security with the active participation of entrepreneurs and community organizations.
2. **Design inclusive financial mechanisms** (microcredits, revolving funds, tax incentives) aimed at enterprises with a sustainable approach, especially led by rural women and youth.
3. **Implement comprehensive technical training programs** in agroecology, food processing, business management and marketing in short circuits.
4. **Promote territorial networks** for the exchange of knowledge, products and experiences among sustainable rural enterprises, with the support of universities and social innovation centers.

In short, sustainable entrepreneurship must cease to be a marginal alternative and become a **structural development strategy** articulated from the public sphere, with a long-term vision focused on food security as a fundamental human right (FAO et al., 2022).

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