

FORTALECIMIENTO DE LA ECONOMÍA POPULAR Y SOLIDARIA: UN MODELO ALTERNATIVO PARA EL DESARROLLO SOSTENIBLE EN ECUADOR

STRENGTHENING THE POPULAR AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY: AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN ECUADOR

Marco Antonio González Chávez¹, Silvia Paola González Fuenmayor², Gabriela Estefanía Morejón
Cabrera³, Hernán Octavio Arellano Díaz⁴.

{magonzalez@esPOCH.edu.ec¹, silvia.gonzalez@epn.edu.ec², gabrielamorejon.1492@gmail.com³, harellano@esPOCH.edu.ec⁴}

Fecha de recepción: 28/10/2025 / Fecha de aceptación: 13/11/2025 / Fecha de publicación: 14/11/2025

English translation of the original article published in Ecuacientífica, Vol. 3, No. 7, pp. 84-94.

RESUMEN: La Economía Popular y Solidaria (EPS) en Ecuador se consolida como una alternativa sostenible e inclusiva que contrarresta el paradigma del lucro, planteándose como columna vertebral para el desarrollo del país. La presente investigación indaga en su concepción, proyección y los obstáculos que enfrenta, al mismo tiempo que evalúa su eficacia en generar bienestar social, promover la equidad y proteger el entorno. A través de un enfoque cualitativo, se recogen testimonios de distintas instituciones de EPS, desentrañándose aspectos decisivos para su desarrollo y restricciones que limitan su expansión. Los hallazgos corroboran que el modelo de EPS fortalece la cohesión social, estimula la participación colectiva y promueve la redistribución de la renta, mediante el comercio justo, la producción de cercanía y sistemas de gestión participativa. Las conclusiones ponen en evidencia que el éxito del modelo está indisolublemente asociado a políticas públicas consistentes, a la disponibilidad de financiamiento solidario y a capacitaciones dirigidas a la administración empresarial y la innovación tecnológica. A pesar de estas fortalezas, subsisten retos de envergadura, tales como un elevado grado de informalidad, la carencia de canales de comercialización consolidados y la presión competitiva ejercida por el sector privado. Se concluye del presente estudio que el fortalecimiento de la economía popular solidaria (EPS) demanda una estrategia integral que articule de manera efectiva al Estado, a la sociedad civil y a las propias iniciativas solidarias, de modo que se potencie su función de motor del desarrollo equitativo y resiliente, orientando la actividad económica hacia lógicas más humanas y respetuosas del entorno.

Palabras clave: Inclusión financiera, desarrollo comunitario, soberanía alimentaria, políticas públicas, emprendimiento social

ABSTRACT: The Popular and Solidarity Economy (PSE) in Ecuador is consolidating itself as a sustainable and inclusive alternative that counteracts the profit paradigm, positioning itself as the backbone for the country's development. This research investigates its conception, projection, and the obstacles it faces, while evaluating its effectiveness in generating social welfare, promoting equity, and protecting the environment. Using a qualitative approach, testimonies are collected from different EPS institutions, unraveling decisive aspects for its development and restrictions that limit its expansion. The findings corroborate that the EPS model strengthens social cohesion, stimulates collective participation, and promotes income redistribution through fair trade, local production, and participatory management systems. The

conclusions show that the success of the model is inextricably linked to consistent public policies, the availability of solidarity financing, and training in business administration and technological innovation. Despite these strengths, major challenges remain, such as a high degree of informality, a lack of established marketing channels, and competitive pressure from the private sector. This study concludes that strengthening the popular solidarity economy (PSE) requires a comprehensive strategy that effectively coordinates the State, civil society, and solidarity initiatives themselves, so as to enhance their role as drivers of equitable and resilient development, guiding economic activity toward more humane and environmentally friendly approaches.

Keywords: Financial inclusion, community development, food sovereignty, public policy, social entrepreneurship.

¹Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo; Riobamba, Ecuador; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0888-4723>.

²Escuela Politécnica Nacional (EPN) Quito, Ecuador; silvia.gonzalez@epn.edu.ec; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4552-8357>.

³School of Business and Economics, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU), De Boelelaan 1105, Amsterdam Netherlands; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0888-4723>.

⁴Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo (ESPOCH); Riobamba, Ecuador; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1916-3208>.

INTRODUCTION

Although Ecuador has a normative framework oriented to promote the Popular and Solidarity Economy, this sector persists without becoming a consolidated protagonist within the national productive structure. Structural and operational obstacles remain that slow its expansion and limit its potential to impact in an appreciable manner the reduction of poverty and inequality. For this reason, the present research proposes to elucidate, in a systematic manner, the internal conditioners that continue undermining the strengthening of its organizations and, at the same time, to map the set of external factors that operate in a synergistic or adverse manner. Likewise, the identification of a selective set of interventions and of political orientations is pursued whose scope is measured, not only in function of the economic sustainability of the entities, but anticipating their capacity to make of development a process socially redistributive, inclusive and prudent in relation to its environmental potential.

The economic and social perturbation of global character, deepened by the inherent restrictions of the neoliberal model, has channeled attention toward economic alternatives that place human well-being, social justice and environmental sustainability at the center of their priorities, above the mere accumulation of income. In such a framework, the Popular and Solidarity Economy (PSE) presents itself as an alternative model of disruptive character and, at the same time, constitutes a critical anchorage for a development that aspires to be more inclusive and resilient.

In Latin America, the emergence of the popular and solidarity economy (PSE) does not present itself as a phenomenon of current relevance, but as a prolongation of the community responses and of the popular circles in the face of chronic exclusion and real-estate inequality (1). Cooperativism, the associations of tested producers and the networks of solidarity barter adopted operative forms decades ago, but it has been during the last five-year period that these experiences have received the political and regulatory validation in the region (2), (3). State policies oriented to the PSE have been

strengthened, such as the Program of Foment of the Solidarity Economy in Brazil, the initiatives around the care of food production in Argentina and the frameworks of rural reconversion in Bolivia, which inscribed in the legislation, situate the sector as a determining incentive in the creation of non-precarious work, in the conquest of food autonomy and in the sustainable reduction of poverty (4), (5). Also, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has endorsed, in consecutive valuations, the PSE as a device to inscribe the economy in frameworks of greater democracy, proposing the transfer, in addition to production, of value where scarcity has been institutionalized, constructing in this way, social capital in the margins of the “formal” economy (6).

In Ecuador, the consecration of the popular and solidarity economy (PSE) in the Constitution of 2008 underlined an advance without precedent in public policies, providing an original normative framework for its subsequent advance and reaffirmation (7). The Montecristi magna carta characterized the national economy as of social and solidarity character, declaring this modality as a fundamental pillar together with the public and private sectors (8). The subsequent promulgation of the Organic Law of the Popular and Solidarity Economy (LOEPS) and of the Law of the Popular and Solidarity Financial Sector (SFPYS), in 2011, pretended to regulate, watch over and stimulate the entities that integrate the PSE, such as production cooperatives, of services, of savings and credit, associations, and other popular economic units (9). Nevertheless, beyond the detailed legal support, the sector still remains exposed to structural obstacles that have hindered its definitive strengthening.

The execution of the normative framework faces barriers such as the prevalence of informality, the scarce management capacity of the entities, the limited access to just and stable markets, and the unfair competition on the part of the enterprises of the private sector (10), (11). Such difficulties restrict not only the expansion of the solidarity economy enterprises, but weaken the possibility that these convert themselves into levers of systemic transformation, deteriorating in a tangible manner the well-being of the most vulnerable groups that institutionally depend on their productive model for survival. Although an increase in the number of organizations and in the affiliation of members has been observed, the effect of the cooperative modality on the productive structure and on the design of public policy remains, to date, at marginal levels (12). Consolidating this sector is not an option, but an unpostponable responsibility to develop a model of economy that combines resilience, inclusion and equity in coherence with the sustainable development objectives of the 2030 Agenda (13), (14).

The present study has as general objective to analyze the strengthening of the Popular and Solidarity Economy in Ecuador as an alternative model for sustainable development, through the exploration of the experiences, challenges and opportunities of the organizations that conform it.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study situates itself in a framework of qualitative research, given that this orientation allows deciphering the complexity of social phenomena, human experiences and the meanings that social actors insert in their everyday regulations.

The purpose does not consist in quantifying, but in norming it and unraveling it through a process of reading and analysis that puts in relief the procedural achievements that define the organizations of the Popular and Solidarity Economy in Ecuador. The inquiry feeds itself from the obtaining of non-numerical information, through which is unveiled, from the voice of those who compose them and of their directives, the configuration of their identities, the obstacles that they face and the alternatives that they glimpse.

The environment of the research was the geographic ambit of the provinces of Chimborazo, Tungurahua and Azuay, selected by the significant presence of organizations of the PSE, both in the productive sector (agriculture, handicraft) and in the financial (savings and credit cooperatives).

The study implemented a design that combines bibliographic-documentary review with field work. In the bibliographic phase, the PRISMA approach (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) was resorted to with a view to guaranteeing transparency and exhaustiveness in the selection of sources. A set of key words was defined: "Popular and Solidarity Economy Ecuador", "sustainable development and PSE", "cooperativism in Ecuador" and "public policies for the social and solidarity economy", which guided the search in databases, indexed journals and repositories of public policies. Inclusion criteria were established (publications of the last decade, in Spanish or English, with peer review and substantive relevance in the PSE) and of exclusion (non-arbitrated sources, case studies that extracted data that do not correspond to the Latin American region) and they were processed in an exhaustive manner to avoid biases in the selection.

For the field phase, the obtaining and the analysis of the qualitative data were carried out by means of semi-structured interviews directed to 20 representatives of organizations of the popular and solidarity economy (PSE). To these interviews were added focus group sessions, designed in an intentional manner to provoke the collaborative exchange about the tensions and the possibilities observed in the sector. The resulting recordings were transcribed and subsequently thematic coding was proceeded to. In this process stable patterns were made visible, themes that reappeared in a systematic manner and categories that arose in the observations, such as organizational management, insertion in the market circuits, the protagonism of the apparatus of the State and the social repercussions of the practices of the PSE. The qualitative information, unlike the quantitative databases, was not the object of statistical treatment; the reading was carried out in an integral form, with the purpose of elaborating a unified narrative that reflected with depth the dynamics of the field.

RESULTS

The results of this qualitative research are presented through the identification of key emerging themes from the interviews and focus groups, backed by the reviewed literature. Next, the most relevant findings are detailed in three principal axes: the social and community contribution, the internal challenges and the external barriers.

Social and community contribution

The entities analyzed in the framework of Social Property Enterprises (PSE) exhibit a notable capacity to foster social cohesion and impulses of community appreciation. The greater part of them bases its functioning on self-management and on a decision-making understood as collective exercise, at the same time that it develops the continuous and effective participation of the major actors that in them integrate themselves. In the agricultural collectives that produce, the interviewees emphasize their conviction that the associative practice not only increases productivity, but also elevates, in a significant manner, the quality standards of the offer from a rational prevision of resources and from the optimal utilization of knowledge. In the ambit of the entities that realize savings and that also operate in credit mechanisms, the finding verifies, in a conclusive manner, that their action anticipates and adjusts the financial inclusion of sectors that the bank of simple commercial formalization has insistently declared "risky". One of the leaders in the ambit of agropecuary production in Chimborazo reaffirmed, by way of motivating synthesis, that "success did not dare to build itself its name, but that of the community; after all, we form ourselves in rounds of learning, we dispose ourselves in turns of sale and the utility is entered to the task of constructing a home and of consolidating the community itself".

The regime of production inscribed in the principles of the PSE, in addition to offering signs of justice and productivity, directs itself to food sovereignty through norms that of honesty distill themselves in a personal purpose, and that confront, modestly, the exorbitant models of agroindustry. The federations and the agricultural collectives that re-send themselves opt for agriculture free of synthetic inputs and for the systematic conservation and innocuity of ancestral knowledge, ipso facto, the mechanisms, the agroecological handlings and, without scratches, the modes of collective coexistence insist on the capacity and on the civility of assuring the resilience, in the same collective measure, of the ecosystems that sustain their territorial fabric.

Table 1. Perceived benefits of the PSE model.

Benefit Category	Description
Economic	Access to accessible credit, solidarity markets, fair prices for production, generation of local employment.
Social	Community cohesion, empowerment of women and youth, democratic participation in management, strengthening of cultural identity.
Environmental	Use of sustainable practices, conservation of natural resources, organic production, reduction of the carbon footprint.

Internal challenges of the organizations

Despite the contributions that they have generated, the organizations of the popular solidarity economy (PSE) face permanent difficulties of the internal ambit that limit their structural consolidation. One of the most evident problems is the insufficiency in the formation in business and financial management. Although their referents and affiliates possess a solid domain of the productive techniques, the knowledge in marketing, accounting, strategic planning and the harnessing of information technologies is scarce. This deficit reverberates in their capacity to scale operations and to operate in markets in a competitive manner. Likewise, governance reveals itself

as an additional obstacle; in determined collectives recurrent tensions were documented in the spaces of decision, characterized by the fragility of the institutional mechanisms.

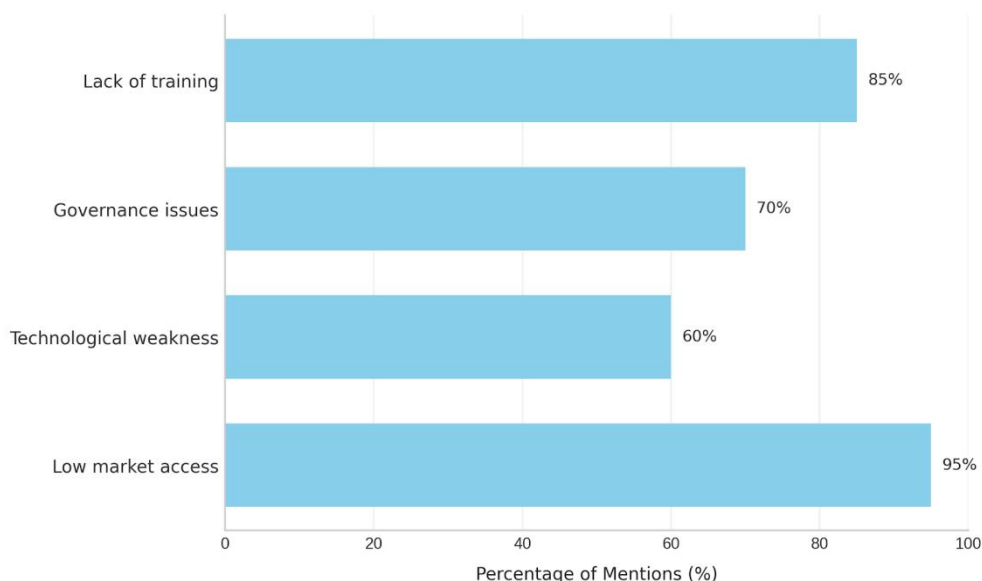


Figure 1. Percentage of PSE organizations that report management challenges.

Figure 1 indicates that the most critical limitation that the entities of the Popular and Solidarity Economy (PSE) face is, with a representation of 95%, the scarce access to markets, a phenomenon that is inscribed in dynamics of structural exclusion and that obstructs their potential of commercialization and viability. To that barrier is added the insufficiency in training programs, whose incidence is in turn of 85%, which suggests functional illiteracy in technical and management competencies.

Complementarily, the dysfunctions of governance contribute a 70% of the complaints, a condition that diminishes the quality of collective decisions, transparency and internal unity. Finally, a 60% of the organizations report technological deficiencies, a lack that clarifies the digital gap and limits the capacity to innovate and to operate with efficiency. These concatenated defects sustain the urgency of formulating and deciding concatenated public policies that strengthen capacities, favor inclusion in commercial circuits and modernize the institutional and digital infrastructure of the PSE subjects.

External barriers and the role of the state

The organizations of the PSE also face themselves to significant external barriers. The limited access to stable and just markets is one of the principal problematics. The majority of the undertakings depend on local fairs or on a limited network of clients, which prevents them from generating consistent incomes. The unfair competition with the private sector and the lack of differentiation of their products in the conventional market were also recurrent themes.

With regard to the role of the State, the interviewees expressed a mixed perception. Although they recognize the existence of the LOEPS and the institutions of foment, they point out that the implementation of public policies is insufficient and fragmented. Bureaucracy, the lack of interinstitutional coordination and the limited financing are

persistent barriers. An interviewee of the artisanal sector in Azuay commented: “The government says that it supports us, but the real support on the ground does not arrive. There are no constant training programs, nor markets where we can sell what we produce at a fair price.”

DISCUSSION

The data presented in this research both confirm and nourish the theoretical understanding of the popular and solidarity economy in Ecuador, opening, through an explicit dialogue, new spaces of interlocution with academic research. In particular, the evidences referred to the social contribution of the PSE and its propensity to produce tissues of community cohesion inscribe themselves in the analytical trajectory of Bértola and Ocampo, who sustain that the solidarity and social economies operate as structural support in the accumulation of social capital and in the construction of resilient capacities within the Region, to which they situate as nucleus of their discussion (15). Simultaneously, the findings that give account of the mechanisms of financial inclusion and of democratization of credit, generated from the action of the popular and solidarity sector, and that locate this process in the spectrum of basic services, show a chaining with the analyses of Moncayo and coauthors (16) from which it is affirmed that their intervention mitigates differentiations of access to financial services that usually perpetuate inequality.

Nevertheless, the findings that address the internal and external challenges contradict, at least in part, the affirmation that the normative device is sufficient by itself to settle the Public Health Enterprise. The valuations of the informants with respect to the lack of formation and to the deficits in the function of management disauthorize the optimism of some official documents (17) that privilege a supposed innate organizational capacity of the community organisms. This analysis evidences that, without the provision of a sufficient technical and strategic assistance, the PSE will continue in a condition of precariousness.

The permanent restriction linked to the access to markets for the initiatives of Popular and Solidarity Economy (PSE), together with the evident insufficiency of the public policies, has been documented systematically in the bibliography. The report of the Alliance for the Popular and Solidarity Economy (18) reaffirms that the lack of stable commercialization channels arrogates itself the status of principal obstacle for the efficacy and the survival of the undertakings. The evidences that here are presented add that the bureaucracy and the disarticulation between the normative and the operative appear, in a unanimous manner, as some of the most formulated critiques by the actors.

This coincidence orients to conclude that the institutional policies of support have not produced the strategic effects that would be sought, at least in observable terms. In turn, the demand of a more robust framework that articulates the public sector, the private sector and the organizations of the PSE is dosed in the contemporary thought; this exigency coincides with the framework proposed by (19), that appeals to the construction of a framework of plural economy capable of integrating, in equality of conditions, the most varied organizational modalities.

The discussion confirms that the consolidation of the popular and solidarity economy (PSE) in Ecuador exceeds the merely legislative horizon and becomes a question of construction of integral public policy. Such construction should, simultaneously, confront internal vulnerabilities such as insufficiencies in human formation and deficiencies in management and dismantle external obstacles, in particular the limited access to markets and to financing. It is imperative to attack these interdependent dimensions through an orientation that transcends the conjunctural assistance and that centers itself, instead, on the promotion of autonomy and the deployment of competencies that generate themselves in the very bosom of the undertakings. Only thus the PSE will be able to acquire the character of protagonist agent in the processes of sustainable development that the country demands in the current conjuncture (20).

CONCLUSIONS

The model of Popular and Solidarity Economy in Ecuador manifests itself as an option of sustainable development of broad credit, given that it articulates, in a same horizon of actions, social inclusion, strengthening of communities and guarantee of environmental sustainability. Through practices of self-management and of horizontal solidarity, the groupings that integrate the PSE consolidate networks of mutual support that, in turn, increase the capacity of response of the communities before perturbations and offer, in programmatic terms, a transit toward an economy whose axis is not the individual accumulation, but the common well-being.

Despite the apparent normative backing, the consolidation of the PSE faces diverse limiting factors. Among these stand out the obstacles of management, the precarious access to markets and the fragile governance. The insufficiency of training programs in strategic competencies and the inconsistent execution of public policies exercise an accumulative effect that restricts the expansive capacity of these initiatives and their potential multiplier effect. It results, therefore, indispensable that the State and civil society instrument, in an articulated manner, strategies that attend these limitations, in order to provide to the PSE entities the competencies, markets and legitimacy required for their growth, consolidation and sustainability in time.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

1. Villalba-Eguiluz U, Pérez-de-Mendiguren JC. The social and solidarity economy as a way to «buen vivir». Rev Iberoam Estud Desarro Iberoam J Dev Stud. 5 de mayo de 2019;8(1):106-36.
2. Mutuberría Lazarini V, Plotinsky D. La economía social y solidaria en la historia de América Latina y el Caribe: cooperativismo, desarrollo comunitario y Estado. Tomo 1. En Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Ediciones Idelcoop; 2015.
3. Castelao Caruana ME. Las políticas públicas y su visión de la economía social y solidaria en Argentina. Rev Mex Cienc Políticas Soc. mayo de 2016;61(227):349-78.
4. Panorama social de América Latina: 2019. Santiago de Chile: Naciones Unidas, CEPAL; 2019.
5. Asamblea Constituyente de Ecuador. Constitución de la República del Ecuador.

6. Asamblea Nacional de Ecuador. Ley Orgánica de la Economía Popular y Solidaria y del Sector Financiero Popular y Solidario.
7. Taipicaña MPH. CLÁUSULA DE CESIÓN DE DERECHO DE PUBLICACIÓN DE TESIS.
8. Inclusión financiera en Ecuador: el cooperativismo de ahorro y crédito como alternativa. Santiago de Compostela: Universidade de Santiago de Compostela; 2021.
9. (PDF) Sistema Financiero Popular y Solidario y su evolución desde la implementación de la nueva Ley Orgánica de Economía Popular y Solidaria en el Ecuador [Internet]. [citado 8 de septiembre de 2025]. Disponible en: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332309168_Sistema_Financiero_Popular_y_Solidario_y_su_evolucion_desde_la_implementacion_de_la_nueva_Ley_Organica_de_Economia_Popular_y_Solidaria_en_el_Ecuador
10. Villalba-Eguiluz U, Pérez-de-Mendiguren JC. The social and solidarity economy as a way to «buen vivir». Rev Iberoam Estud Desarro Iberoam J Dev Stud. 5 de mayo de 2019;8(1):106-36.
11. Gutierrez E, Sojo Obando C, Morrison AR, Gordon Rapoport S, Rodríguez E, Strasser C, et al., editores. Desarrollo social en América Latina: Temas y desafíos para las políticas públicas. San José: FLACSO; 2002. 461 p.
12. Inclusión financiera en Ecuador: el cooperativismo de ahorro y crédito como alternativa. Santiago de Compostela: Universidade de Santiago de Compostela; 2021.
13. [No title found]. Telos Rev Estud Interdiscip En Cienc Soc.
14. Guerrero FC, Serrano AO, Díaz OP. Indicadores Sociales en Instituciones Financieras de la Economía Popular y Solidaria. RETOS Rev Cienc Adm Econ. 2016;6(12):133-48.
15. Coraggio JL. Economía social y solidaria: el trabajo antes que el capital. Editorial Abya-Yala; 2011.
16. Peñafiel NT, López PEF. Balance de la economía popular y solidaria en Ecuador. Econ Desarro. 158.
17. Estrella HJ, Sánchez J, Oleas J, Martínez D, Torresano D, Romero D, et al. Economía Solidaria. Historias y prácticas de su fortalecimiento.
18. Serrano V de JB, Zurita SNG, García MBF, Márquez JDS. Políticas públicas para el fomento y sostenibilidad de la economía popular y solidaria: una revisión a su implementación. Polo Conoc. 24 de diciembre de 2024;9(12):1957-82.
19. Verzosi Vargas C, Carvajal Brito RV. La Economía Popular y Solidaria en el Ecuador. El empoderamiento femenino. CIRIEC - Esp Rev Econ Pública Soc Coop. 2023;(107):71-100.
20. Favi FP, Martínez CR. COOPERATIVISMO COMO HERRAMIENTA DEL DESARROLLO TERRITORIAL RURAL: EXPERIENCIAS CONCRETAS, DESAFÍOS Y APRENDIZAJES. 2013;1(2).