

Proposal of actions for the development of the popular council Carrera Larga, Guantánamo, Cuba (Technical note)

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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted at the popular council Carrera Larga, El Salvador municipality (Guantánamo province, Cuba), in the period between February and December, 2012, in order to propose actions that contribute new elements to the knowledge system of the inhabitants. Through the diagnosis the potentialities of the territory were identified to implement a sustainable development process, with the purpose of guaranteeing an adequate living standard and social protection for all citizens. The research was exploratory, descriptive and non-experimental, and a descriptive trans-sectional design was used. The methodology used was based on the principles of the Participatory-Action-Research, to identify the principal potentialities that contribute to the adequate foundation of the development strategy of the locality. It was proven that the incorporation of the actions allows channel such development, with relation to the environment changes and the endogenous capacities of the community.

Key words: agricultural development, diagnosis, communities

INTRODUCTION

At the center of local development processes are the governments of the territories, whose main objective is to guarantee a basic degree of social protection to all citizens, which contributes to eliminate inequalities in the access to basic quality services and also provides the groups with lower salaries with the opportunity to receive integral attention, that satisfies their needs and demands without the payment capacity being a barrier.

Development is not only an economic process, although economy is in the foreground; it also constitutes a real social process –political in the first place–, in which a re-arrangement of society is pursued in benefit and interest of the majority, from the power relationship. It intends to achieve a process through which quantitative and qualitative changes occur in all the structures of a society in interest of its improvement (Becerra, 2008).

The solution for developing countries and economies is not in assuming the neoliberal model, with opening to market; but in implementing strategies based on the potentialities of the communities and the local knowledge. According to Vicente (2006), the policies which work very well in some places can cause negative effects on others.

Since several years ago, the processes of local development management have played an increasingly

relevant role in the achievement of higher welfare and progress levels for society. This is a topic that has been approached by diverse authors such as González (2007); Boffil *et al.* (2009) and Benítez (2012). On the other hand, the Guidelines of the Economic and Social Policy of the Communist Party and the Revolution, approved by the 6th Congress of the Communist Party, provide the localities with a higher protagonist role in these management processes.

The experience of this initiative implies contributions for the strategic conception of local development in the community. The objective of this research was to propose actions that contribute to the development of the popular council Carrera Larga, El Salvador municipality, Las Tunas.

Methodological aspects

The research was exploratory, descriptive and non-experimental; and a descriptive trans-sectional design (Hernández Sampieri, Fernández Collado and Baptiste Lucio, 2003) was used. The methodology was based on the principles of the Participatory-Action-Research.

The universe of the population was 560 inhabitants and the chosen sample consisted in 307 inhabitants, which represents 55 % of the total. The study was conducted in the period between

February and December, 2012, in the Popular council Carrera Larga, El Salvador municipality (Guantánamo province, Cuba), in the following production forms: the Cooperative of Agricultural Production (CPA) Jesús Menéndez, the Basic Unit of Cooperative Production (UBPC) 13 de Septiembre, the Cooperative of Credits and Services (CCS) Vidal Megret and the CCS Sabino Pupo.

Theoretical methods

- Analysis-Synthesis. It allowed to determine the constituent elements of local development and to synthesize them in a coherent body.
- Historic-logical. It was useful to approach the antecedents of the locality which is the object of research.
- Induction-deduction. It was used to know the real conditions of local development.

Empirical methods

- Survey. It allowed the validation of the pre-designed conceptions from the results obtained during the study.
- Interview to key informants. It was conducted in order to know the opinion status of local actors about the endogenous transformations.
- Observation. It was used to understand the circumstances that surround the social facts and phenomena, because it contributed consideration and judgment elements, from the perspective of the acting environment.
- SWOT matrix. This tool contributed to the formulation of the strategy.

A detailed document review was also performed, from the consultation of the decrees and regulations of the government system, as well as of reports of preceding studies related to the municipality, which support the validity of the work carried out.

Statistical analysis. For quantifying and processing the data obtained in the surveys the program SPSS version 11.5 was used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All the participants stated that they knew about the local economic development, which facilitates the process of change leading to a better situation.

In this sense, local economic development is defined as “a process of growth and structural change which, through the utilization of the existing development potential in the territory, leads to the improvement of the population’s welfare in a locality or region. When the local community is capable of leading the structural change process, the development form can be called “endogenous local development” (Vázquez, 1998).

On the other hand, Guzón (2006) and Méndez and Lloret (2008) consider that local development should fulfill certain premises depending on its status, such as: the identification of traditional knowledge, an integral and systemic approach to development, widening of cooperation spaces, utilization of the existing structures, an intense training activity, the identification and mobilization of local potentialities and knowledge management to connect innovation to development, as well as social participation since the conception of development.

Endogenous development processes occur due to the efficient utilization of the local economic potential, which is facilitated through the adequate functioning of the institutions and regulation mechanisms of the territory (Albuquerque, 2001). In this research the structure, by ages, in the different productive forms was studied (table 1), which proved that significant structural changes should be made in them to achieve that the productive and economic development contributes to sustainable development.

Table 1. Structure, by ages, of the agricultural sector in the popular council.

Production form	Quantity of members	Structure by age (years)				
		30	31-40	41-50	51-60	+ de 60
Values in percent						
CPA Jesús Menéndez	148	12,16	29,72	35,81	21,62	0,69
CCS Vidal Megret	105	1,90	11,42	9,52	17,16	60,00
CCS Sabino Pupo	130	3,00	16,15	21,63	25,38	33,84
UBPC 13 de Septiembre	177	6,77	16,40	35,03	38,98	2,82

Source: elaborated by the authors.

With the exception of the CPA, the other productive forms which integrate this locality should achieve a higher incorporation of new workers to agricultural activities, because a high percentage of the members are older than 50 years, which constitutes a problem due to the ageing of the labor force. In a near future this could limit considerably the increase of productivity levels, as well as a better organization of the productive forces. The incorporation of new workers would be possible if the entities prioritized the introduction of scientific and technological advances, and increased the standard of living of the inhabitants, which would increase their permanence in the territory because there is a deficit of young population in these farmer structures.

In the studied community a progressive restructuring of local productions has occurred, through the incorporation of new technologies (irrigation systems and agricultural tools) and advances in the commercialization channels (creation of a state agricultural market and opening of seven sale points, etc.), which constitute basic elements to improve the productive tissue.

When the development of participatory processes in the communities is stimulated, the physical and social transformation of the locality, which propitiates a decisive contribution for the achievement of the society's participation and development, increases (Ramírez, Velásquez and Ramírez, 2012). In this sense, the participants refer that in the community participatory actions are not carried out with the local actors, to achieve their self-transformation and direct insertion in the productive and commercialization activities of agricultural productions. For such purpose, a diagnosis was performed which assisted as starting point to formulate the proposal of actions, because

it allowed to detect the existing limitations and identify the capacities and potentialities of the locality to manage its development. Table 2 shows the internal and external factors derived from the strategic diagnosis.

The factors of higher impact, related to the main weaknesses and threats of the locality, coincide with the ones reported by Benítez (2012) in the Camagüey municipality. This means that the government of the studied locality should maximize its strengths to utilize the opportunities. The identification of the internal and external factors facilitates the orientation of intervention measures towards concrete areas; in addition, such factors constitute aspects of mandatory reference to show the possibilities of the territories where synergy sources can exist for the structuration of a coherent system of local-development policies.

The agricultural sector has progressively adapted to the economic changes, by means of searching for new productive processes and actors through the leasing of idle lands for production. The analysis of the evolution of global economy, as well as the particular performance of the different economic sectors of the locality, is essential to further study the strengths of the community from the economic point of view, to determine key factors that contribute to increase the development opportunities, and, especially, to generate new ways of economic diversification for the agricultural sector.

The continuous improvement of the human capital and the incorporation of young people with regards to local development constitute a basic milestone for the introduction of scientific and technical advances, mainly in productive sectors.

Table 3 shows a group of actions and their system of activities, which could contribute more rapidly to the development of the locality.

Table 2. Internal and external factors identified in the strategic diagnosis.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political will to enhance the development of the popular council, and in turn to achieve intersectoriality and integration of all the actors in a common objective. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of culture and training of the entities of the territory in the application of market tests for commercialization.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very favorable position to establish inter-municipal communication by highway and railroad. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of motivation of young people to study agricultural and accountancy careers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient agricultural lands, with adequate soils for diversified food production. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emigration of locality inhabitants towards the main city of the province.

Table 2 (below)

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leasing of idle lands to new usufructuaries to be utilized in food production. Existence of the Jobito el Paso dam, which has a capacity of 220 million cubic meters of water. Productive vocation for varied crops and livestock production, as well as a strong cooperative movement in the rice production activity. Financing in both currencies for project execution. Possibility of widening the industrial infrastructure (agriculture, livestock production, craftsmanship, and fruit production). Possibility of generating new products, from the integration of local productive systems (feed and seeds). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insufficient attention to man in agricultural activities. Population ageing and low birth rate. Lack of a local development model with its procedures. The community does not have a sheltered crop system for vegetable production. Generation of employment without gender approach. Excessive centralization in decision making and resource management.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selection of the territory in a national study about local development. Existence of organizations with financing in both currencies for the development of local projects. Support of national institutions to local development. The community has master students in local development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existence of attractive jobs in the municipal and provincial administrative centers. Scarce material and financial resources. Intersectorial barriers. Economic, commercial and financial embargo to which the country is subject.

Source: elaborated by the authors, from group sessions in the locality.

Table 3. Proposal of actions and their system of activities.

Actions	Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Motivating the locality inhabitants with regards to the economic-social development of the community. Transferring technologies with significant impacts on the environment protection and rehabilitation, considering an ecosystemic management approach. Evaluating the economic-financial performance of the locality, to allow sustainable local development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotion of the active participation of community members. Training and performance of community work to promote an economic culture in the local actors. Creation of a reference area in vermiculture at the CPA Jesús Menéndez. Reforestation of five ha of degraded areas in each one of the production forms. Performance of two craftsmanship workshops in the UBPC. Promotion of productive and service activities. Performance of a market test. Establishment of cost-effectiveness mechanisms in the productive forms. Priority attention to short-cycle crops.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating capacities for the formation, training and development of the human capital needed in the popular council; prioritizing managers and their substitutes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determination of the technical training needs. Negotiation with training and technological-innovation centers.

Table 3 (below)

Actions	Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritizing the female labor force in the newly-created jobs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of intensive gardens in the different production forms. • Creation of a forestry nursery. • Promotion of women to occupy management positions at the different levels.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluating the adequate and rational use of soils; utilizing their potentialities, with agricultural production levels of high added value. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance of necessary innovations in the sites which can contribute to food production. • Link of man to the area and to the final production results.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivating young people towards agricultural careers, without affecting national interests. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of circles of interest in primary and technological schools.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performing a systematic diagnosis to evaluate the possible changes that occur in the environment of the locality, and introducing the necessary corrections and contingency measures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work, along with the Cuban Women Federation (FMC), in the women orientation houses. • Direct link with the working mass. • Permanent feedback, from the criteria of local entrepreneurs and actors. • Monitoring and control of the planned and executed actions.

Source: elaborated by the authors.

To guarantee the sustainability of local development initiatives it is essential to implement actions that serve as starting point; as well as to create structures and determine the people responsible for the management, monitoring and control of the technological innovation projects generated. Such actions constitute an instrument to increase the active participation of the true protagonists of the process, from the generation of knowledge from their practices, and in them the traditional methods harmonize with the requirements and demands of local development.

Thus, an economic, social and environmental culture is promoted in the local actors, with the inclusion of gender reciprocity and participation of the different age groups in the productive processes and the development of the studied community.

This study allowed to identify the main potentialities which can contribute to the adequate explanation of the development strategy in the researched locality. In addition, a group of actions were proposed that will allow to channel development, with regards to the environment changes and endogenous capacities of the community.

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