

## **“COMPETITIVE MARKET INSERTION STRATEGY THROUGH THE PRINCIPLES OF FAIR TRADE. CASE ACTORS OF THE POPULAR AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY OF ECUADOR, PROVINCES OF AZUAY AND CAÑAR. YEAR 2019**

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**Abstract:** Fair trade has undergone significant growth over the past few years, its principles allow organizations to be inserted into a trade market that contributes to the economic, social, environmental, political and cultural sustainability of a region, although it still continues growing compared to traditional trade which is a participant in the greater market share. This article determines the strategies of competitive insertion into the international market through the principles of fair trade in the actors of the popular and solidarity economy of the cities of Azogues and Cuenca in Ecuador and their participation in world trade. The principles are based on the results of the research, which conform to the political and socio-economic environment of the cities under study. It can be evidenced that despite knowing the term fair trade, the application of its principles is not representative due to the lack of economic resources, infrastructure, organizational structure, innovation in products and services, quality and optimal processes for the sustainable development of the associations. However, the support received by the Superintendence of Popular and Solidarity Economy as a governmental entity, through the Institute of Popular Solidarity Economy facilitates the growth of this sector by strengthening and revitalizing the production, distribution, and financing processes. Based on the results obtained, the principles proposed by the World Fair Trade Organization are applied, with sustainable strategies and optimal working conditions that are consistent with the needs of the sector to which the associations under study belong. **Keywords:** Fair trade, popular and solidarity economy, competitive strategy, competitive development.

## INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly independent world and facing a world economy with a greater degree

of integration and interdependence, the possibilities of internationalizing companies, at least for small business units, are increasingly limiting and unfavorable, causing many of them remain with low economic income, few development possibilities and an environment where the market is saturated with domestic products that cover domestic demand, without the opportunity to be part of this growth. The current economic crisis leaves out many small businesses that cannot compete against low prices, diversified marketing channels, technology, which generates an increase in unemployment, a decrease in the population's purchasing power, and little chance of development. (Arroyave 2012; Sarmiento 2014)

This article bases the results obtained in applying the principles of fair trade within competitive and sustainable strategies that are consistent with the needs of the sector to which the associations under study belong, aspects such as: current situation of organizations and the main obstacles and strengths of entering fair trade.

## FAIR TRADE

Several definitions and terms are related to fair trade, and all have in common: fight for equal opportunities among the most disadvantaged as are the producers of small organizations.

According to EFTA (2002), fair trade is the application of a method to improve the situation of producers in developing countries, as it allows companies and consumers to play an important role in the transaction of wealth towards developing countries, through the sum of millions of small acts of daily consumption.

The WFTO (2017) and CECJ (s / f) define fair trade as "a solidary and alternative commercial system to the conventional one that pursues the development of peoples

and the fight against poverty”. It is based on: adequate working conditions and wages, gender equity and respect for the environment through practices that respect the environment in which they operate. Galeano (2006) and Coscione (2018), emphasize considering fair trade as a cooperation tool formed by organizations whose objective is to improve market access for the most disadvantaged producers that consolidate global poverty and inequality. Fair trade goes beyond exchange: “it shows that greater justice in world trade is possible. It highlights the need for a change in the rules and practices of conventional commerce and shows how a successful business can also give priority to people” (WFTO 2017; EFTA 2002)

It is important to mention the birth of fair trade, according to CECU (2006) and WFTO (2017), born in the 60s in Belgium and France, with the idea of offering producers marketing routes that not only took into account the economic criteria, but also includes political, social, cultural and environmental factors. Since the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in 1964, the Southern Countries have continued to promote the growth of this movement which has not ceased to be in constant evolution seeking the benefit of vulnerable groups that have potential production but lack of technology and networks that allow them to be inserted globally. (Vega and Martinez 2002).

The World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO 2017), determines that fair trade has its beginnings in the United States between 1940 and 1950, with commercial development among small producers in Puerto Rico, which sold handicraft items made by the Small craftsmen from the Southern Communities to the rest of the world. This new idea of solidarity trade allowed them to have small incomes and access to international markets, in 1958 the first formal store that promoted fair trade was

opened, as well as at the same time in Europe, the NGO Oxfam of the United Kingdom starts marketing in its local handicrafts made by Chinese refugees, finally in 1964 they create the first fair trade organization in the world. (CECU 2006).

In 1967, the first fair trade import organization was born in the Netherlands, and in 1969 it opened its first stores which were called “third world store”, being the beginning for the creation of a network of solidarity stores in countries as: Holland, Germany, Belgium, France, Great Britain, Switzerland, Austria and Sweden, under the motto World Shops or stores of the world.

In 1973 the countries of Africa and Latin America have a great boost within fair trade, an example is Guatemala, which starts the distribution of coffee, through a cooperative of agricultural producers called “Indian Solidarity Coffee”, allowing a start to fair trade due to the growth that led to the inclusion of this product in the trade model, which allowed the export of other products recognized worldwide. (WFTO 2017; CECU 2006).

For the year 1987, in Europe a group of traders form the European Fair Trade Association and later the IFAT is formed, now known as WFTO, that is, the World Fair Trade Organization, which encourages this activity with around 400 members. Fair trade refers to a global socio-movement that fosters other types of trade, based on dialogue, respect and transparency, offering better commercial conditions and guaranteeing the rights and fair treatment of less favored workers and producers. (WFTO 2017).

According to Coscione (2018), despite the beneficial conditions that this type of trade offers to small producers, it still represents a very small percentage of sales compared to trade in traditional products; Fair trade has emerged as a value-generating initiative in order to address the underdevelopment of

small producers in the Southern Countries, focused on eliminating the inequalities of exchange and development between the north (Europe and North America) and the south (Latin America, Africa and Asia).

For the WFTO (2017), it determines that as a solidary and alternative commercial system to traditional commerce, fair trade whose objective is based on the development of peoples and the fight against poverty, bases its actions on the following principles: ) opportunities for disadvantaged producers, b) transparency and accountability, d) fair business practices, e) fair payment, f) no to child labor, no forced labor, g) no discrimination, gender equality, freedom of association h ) good working conditions, i) capacity development, j) promotion of fair trade, k) respect for the environment. According to Vega and Martinez (2002), from a vision of fair trade, the producers that take advantage of this system have to offer good manufacturing practices in an environment that does not represent a danger to workers, where equality and growth is generated for everybody.

By making a general analysis, fair trade goes beyond trade, as it demonstrates that there is a law that regulates world trade and shows how a successful business can also give priority to people and their rights, without neglecting productivity and business growth (Galeano 2006). Fair trade adopts its form of work contributing to the sustainable and self-sustainable development of those who put it into practice by offering producers and workers fair compensation, according to their profile and within a decent environment, under appropriate working conditions. (Rodriguez 2014).

However, fair trade promotes an alternative trade that encourages the consumption of products that take into account criteria such as: payment of a fair price to producers, equal

opportunities, fair labor practices, respect for the human being and the ecosystem. It also offers the possibility of capacity development and diversification, through alternative marketing networks such as: (Krier 2006)

- The relationship between producers and organizations that carry out the import or export, being a direct alternative that eliminates intermediaries.

- Alternative Trade Organizations (ATOs), which, through agreements, purchase products under fair trade conditions in the southern producing countries.

- Private companies affiliated with the Fairtrade Label Organization - FLO that import, under the criteria of fair trade, from southern producers.

According to Medrano and Cotera (2013), fair trade in Ecuador has developed as a process through which the growth of disadvantaged sectors is promoted through the optimization of human resources and the creation of organizational capacities, implementing new forms of I work in order to improve their working conditions, thus guaranteeing a series of fair conditions for producers and compliance with a series of rules for distributors, so that the inequalities existing in the international market are broken and the intermediaries that are avoided are avoided. They make trade not fair. In Ecuador, fair trade has opened roads for entrepreneurs to earn a decent living by giving them the opportunity to reach social and economic development. (Galeano, 2006).

Since 2007, fair trade is part of the so-called Social and Solidarity Economy, considering significant changes in the socio-economic development of Ecuador, through the application of a State model that breaks with the paradigms of the economic and political current capitalist, thus allowing to open spaces for social action from what has been called the Sumak Kawsay or the Good

Living. (SEPS 2019); where the consolidation of a “social and solidarity economic system” is established, and the “promotion of a new trading system that is based on justice, solidarity, complementarity”, in order to promote a fair trade model for the benefit of important productive sectors within Ecuador. (García 2011)

According to the CECJ (s / f) in Ecuador, fair trade accounts for approximately 1% of total non-oil exports, groups certified organizations and companies and includes agricultural products and plantations with a fair trade seal. The members that form fair trade have two types of certifications: a) Fairtrade Fair Trade that is based on an alternative to conventional trade that differs in cooperation between producers and consumers and b) The SPP - Symbol of Small Producers starts in the 2006 by the CLAC (Latin American and Caribbean Coordinator of Small Fair Trade Producers) with the support of the Fair Trade and Solidarity Economy Movement of all continents, with the aim of grouping together producers from Latin America and the Caribbean, and favor the recognition of its market worldwide (CECJ 2014).

According to PRO ECUADOR (2019), Ecuador is one of the main banana producers and exporters worldwide, registering at July 2019 in exports a value of 1,939,238 thousand dollars FOB; Since the banana is part of the Fairtrade, the markets for this certified product have expanded with constant growth.

In order to respond to the development needs of the environment, in the context of the social economy, it is identified as one of the axes of interaction, the popular and solidarity economy sector, based on the dynamics of the popular economy and solidarity start from exclusion and inequality scenarios towards inclusive and real actions (Mora-Alfaro 2007).

Article 1. of the Organic Law of Popular and Solidarity Economy of Ecuador - LOEPS (2011), defines it as:

Form of economic organization, where its members, individually or collectively, organize and develop processes of production, exchange, marketing, financing and consumption of goods and services to meet needs and generate income, based on relationships of solidarity, cooperation and reciprocity, privileging the work and the human being as the subject and purpose of his activity, oriented to good living, in harmony with nature, over appropriation, profit and capital accumulation. (p. 3)

Likewise, article 18. of the Organic Law of Popular and Solidarity Economy (LOEPS), refers to the organizations of the associative sector, also called solidarity companies, constituted by natural persons that develop similar or complementary productive economic activities, which produce and they sell goods or services in solidarity and self-managed. The solidarity company is a self-managed associative form, which, based on the principles of solidarity and trust, seeks to consolidate the company project and the development of an economic activity. (Galindo, Gutiérrez, & Trujillo 2012).

The popular and solidarity economy is made up of different organizations such as community, associative and cooperative sectors, as well as popular economic units (LOEPS 2011). All these clusters, mostly involve actions of production and commercialization of goods and services, being micro and small producers the fundamental actors that intervene in the economic processes of this system, the same ones that through the application of fair trade have as aim to improve their level of income and welfare through the payment of a fair price for their products, as well as a work environment with gender equity and rights. (SEPS 2019).

## THE STRATEGY CONCEPT

The concept of strategy for Sierra (2013), is the determination of the goals and objectives of a long-term company, the actions to be undertaken and the allocation of resources necessary to achieve these goals. While for Koontz, Weihrich and Cannice (2012), strategy is defined as the way in which the basic long-term objectives in a company are determined, the instrumentation of the courses of action and the allocation of the necessary resources to achieve those objectives. For Coulter (2010), he defines it as the plans on how an organization will do what the business has to do, how to compete successfully, and how it will attract its customers to achieve the objectives (p.163).

Zimmermann (2001), determines companies and public institutions, associations and cooperatives as organizations that seek quality as a competitive strategy, through the design of activities that seek to improve quality, increase productivity, reduce costs and greater consumer satisfaction. Zimmermann's definition characterizes the necessary actions that an organization wants to be in the future, and on the other Koontz (2012), determines it as a means that is directed towards a planning and control of the facts, in accordance with these definitions, the strategy is It is based on a plan to interact with the competitive environment in order to achieve organizational goals. (Porter 2007; Daft 2011).

## COMPETITIVE STRATEGY

Every organization needs to have a horizon to go, it cannot compete without a mission, objectives, policies, strategies that guide it, so that it is essential to build from the beginning the business philosophy and strategic planning of an organization that facilitates through analysis, both internally and externally, to know what are the objectives that are expected

to be obtained in the future and that is when the competitive strategy that constitutes the main guideline to take possession of the market and define its segment arises (Peraf and Strickland 2012; Daft 2011) . Porter (2010), defines the competitive strategy as the set of offensive and defensive actions that are put in place to reach a position of advantage over the rest of the competitors as a result of a sustained competitive advantage over time and greater profitability. For Coulter (2010), it is the strategy in which the organization will compete in its business through a factor that distinguishes it; that is, the competitive advantage based on a predominant factor that differentiates the organization.

A company obtains a sustainable competitive advantage when it meets the needs of consumers more efficiently or effectively than its rivals, the good or bad performance of an organization is directly related to the scope of its strategy and the perfection with which it is executed. Among the other definitions we can distinguish those that base the existence of a competitive advantage in the comparison of results, with other companies within the same economic activity (Peraf and Strickland 2012; Coulter 2010)

## PORTER'S COMPETITIVE STRATEGY

The model of the competitive strategy of Porter (2010), defines the competitive strategy as the taking of offensive or defensive actions to create a defensible position in an industry, in order to successfully face the competitive forces and generate A return on investment. The concept of competitive advantage determines the ability of companies to offer a better product or at a lower price than rivals, creating a differentiating and unique value among its competitors.

The most important competitive strategies that are acquired within the framework of

the global strategy for the organization are defined as: differentiation, cost leadership and focus. Cost leadership, which is the strategy that a product offers in the market at a lower price compared to the offer of the opposing companies. Differentiation, which is an attractive option for companies that want to build their own niche in the market and focus on buyers looking for peculiar product characteristics other than those offered by opposing companies. Approach, which consists of specializing in a certain market segment and offering the best product based on the requirements of a segment. (Porter 2010).

## **KOTLER'S COMPETITIVE STRATEGIES**

The life of an organization is not easy unless it competes in a market without opponents, that is why a company must be in constant innovation and seek to diversify its briefcase of products, suppliers and customers every time. Kotler establishes four types of competitive strategies according to business conduct or position: leader strategies, challenger strategies, follower strategies, and specialist strategies. *a. Leader strategies:* the leading company or leader in a sector is the one with the largest market share. This type of organization requires a competitive strategy that allows it to maintain its position in the market. *b. Challenger strategies:* companies that occupy a second or third position in the sector also called "trackers" and that seek attack strategies to challenge the leader or other competitors that present clear disadvantages in an attempt to increase their customers. *c. Follower strategies:* organizations do not seek diversification as a strategy but specialization in a very specific segment of the market. It focuses on the segments in which it obtains a greater response and enjoys a better position. *d. Specialist strategies:* those organizations that

seek to differentiate themselves by specializing in a segment of clients, with little appeal to the competition and with a high growth potential. (Kotler 2012).

## **MINTZBERG COMPETITIVE STRATEGY**

A company's strategy is the action plan that management applies to obtain a market position, Mintzberg (2013), points out six types of strategies: *a. Undifferentiation strategy:* companies that have no intention of copying their competitors. *b. Differentiation strategy* in image distinctive perception of products or services in the mind of the consumer. *c. The differentiation in quality* that is achieved through high performance of their products. *d. Differentiation in design* where product and design characteristics are identified through research and development. and. Differentiation in price is viable only through the achievement of low costs, to then be able to offer low prices. *f. The differentiation in support,* companies create a group of complementary products to the main ones, with the aim of offering a broader service to meet the needs of their customers in the segment.

The analysis of the external competitive environment of the associations is determined, which identifies the opportunities and threats that compromise the company. Which, together with the internal operational analysis allows to strengthen the strengths and weaknesses, and allows us to generate strategies based on the current situation of the organizations.

## **METHODOLOGY**

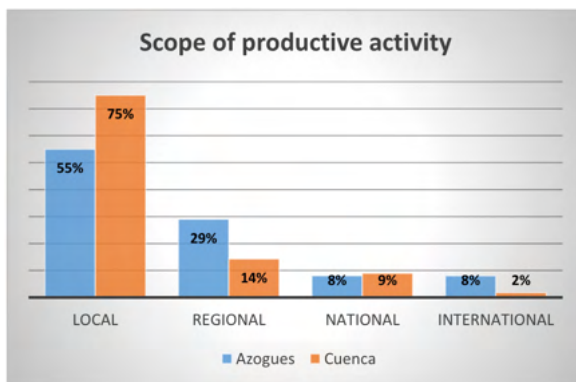
The research was based on the descriptive exploratory method, based on a meeting with the legalized associations before the Superintendence of Popular and Solidarity Economy of the provinces of Cañar and

Azuay, where it is sought to identify the characteristics that define these organizations and verify whether they comply with the ten principles of fair trade.

The instrument applied was an interview with the administrators of the associations, based on the organizational dimension, political dimension and human dimension, resulting in an approach to the current situation of these organizations and then applying Porter's strategic model, which allows identify the competitive advantage of each association as a strategy of insertion into the international market, based on three dimensions: cost leadership, differentiation and focus; partnerships must conform to at least one strategic dimension that allows them to be competitive and sustainable in the market.

## MAIN RESULTS

Popular and solidarity economy organizations are born as a result of the creation of the Superintendence of Popular and Solidarity Economy (SEPS) in 2012. In the cities of Azogues and Cuenca, provincial capitals of Cañar and Azuay, the largest generation of organizations production was presented in 2013 (46% on average of the total registered in the SEPS) (SEPS 2018), focusing its economic activity on the production sector (82% on average), especially in the agricultural and livestock sector, textile and artisanal, maintaining its production locally (55% in Azogues and 75% in Cuenca), as can be seen in graph No. 1



Graph No. 1. Scope of productive activity in Azogues and Cuenca.

Source: Direct research, cities Azogues and Cuenca. UTPL (2018).

Very few are the organizations of the sector, which maintain their scope of commercialization at national and international level; those who maintain it are organizations created several years before belonging to the SEPS and already maintained a market at that level when they were legalized, such as associations of agricultural producers, food producers and handicraft producers (straw hats toquilla).

A differentiating aspect among the cities of analysis is found in the gender of the partners that make up the organizations, with an important participation of 53% of the male gender in Azogues and 70% of the female gender in Cuenca; relatively young people whose ages range between 31 and 50 years.

In these regions, associativity is effectively used as a cultural part of its inhabitants, which is why the level of difficulty in product development is relatively low. Certain aspects such as: technology, obtaining raw material, specific training in production issues and obtaining machinery and equipment for the association, present certain difficulties, which are manageable compared to a level of production matched to the local market in who participate.





Graph No. 2. Difficulties in product development, associations of Azogues and Cuenca.

Source: Direct research, cities Azogues and Cuenca. UTPL (2018).

and for this to comply with the principles that This form of commercialization demands, it becomes a priority for both associations and public support organizations.

### MAIN OBSTACLES TO FAIR TRADE

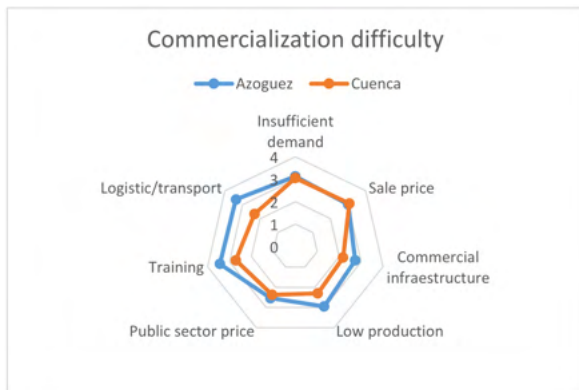
The associations encounter some obstacles when assessing whether their products are suitable for being part of fair trade; The lack of continuous training in diversification and quality processes in production and commercialization, result in the fact that the products are not valued within the domestic market and therefore a fair payment for this is not achieved.

Marketing at the local level presents a greater concern for associations as opposed to production; Ignorance in marketing and sales issues, as a result, insufficient demand for products, sales prices well below the common market, and costly transportation of production to markets, result in low and low-motivating profit percentages. for the partners, causing them to make the decision to leave the association in most cases.



Gráfico No. 4. Productos aptos para comercio justo, asociaciones de Azogues y Cuenca.

Fuente: Investigación directa, ciudades Azogues y Cuenca. UTPL (2018).



Graph No. 3. Marketing difficulties, associations of Azogues and Cuenca.

Source: Direct research, cities Azogues and Cuenca. UTPL (2018).

The bargaining power with customers is relatively low, so that their productive and commercial stability is strongly affected, both in the level of income and economic profits, as well as in the working conditions offered to the partners, presenting an unmotivating picture. in the active participation of the members and therefore in the generation of new products.

Especially in the textile sector, the raw material must be imported to ensure the quality of the garments, increasing production costs that cannot be recovered at the time of sale; When talking about a fair price, the public sector (an important client of the associations) determines the budget amount available to access the products / services of

Although it is true, at the local level, the associations have stability both in the production and in the commercialization of their products, however, it is sought that these associations form part of the fair trade chain,

the associations, limiting their bargaining power.

The administrative issue is a latent weakness in organizations, they consider improving their organizational philosophy, communication and leadership with the aim of guaranteeing decision making and good management of the organization's resources. Likewise, both in Azogues and in Cuenca, the associations have neglected the creation of a commercial identity and the application of marketing systems that allow them to identify themselves in the market, therefore, they are governed by informal activities that generate economic losses and limit your commercial capacity.

They could be considered to be small associations, where lack of knowledge does not allow them to see the opportunities that a quality certification, the search for new markets, new suppliers, use of technology and a good use of social networks can offer them.

### **MAIN STRENGTHS OF FAIR TRADE ENTRY**

The associations of the popular and solidarity economy of Azogues and Cuenca comply with the principles of fair trade, although they are aware that they must be improved and strengthened, they have an important participation of women as active members (47% in Azogues and 70 % in Cuenca) and are classified as a relatively young population; The experience they have gained since its creation allows them to value the importance of knowledge and its management in organizations.

They consider it important to completely eliminate child labor and discrimination within organizations, maintain a strong teamwork and the necessary experience for the production of goods / services accompanied by a solid infrastructure. They maintain a local market of public and private institutions and a

diversified production field to offer; creativity and ancestral knowledge are reflected in their creations, as well as the sense of social, family and environmental responsibility by sticking to fair business practices, by forming as productive associations, they seek to improve the working conditions of their partners and ensure that fulfill their rights as producers and marketers.

### **PORTER'S COMPETITIVE STRATEGIES**

The associations have strengths that would allow them to enhance their quality, production and brand positioning, as distinctive within the competition in economic activity to which they are dedicated so that, through these strengths, the associations identify and develop their competitive advantage that facilitates their positioning in the local, national and global market.

By making an analysis of Porter's competitive strategies, cost leadership within organizations can be evidenced through the Law of Popular and Solidarity Economy, which regulates associative work and the equitable distribution of resources, allowing associations they can compete through strategic alliances for economic activity, giving the opportunity to meet unsatisfied demand with high production; The law allows them to manage these types of strategies internally and facilitates the association in an agile and efficient way without neglecting the geographical location of the case study associations, the natural resources they possess and the ease of transport and communication, Cuenca It is the third most important economic city in the country, facilitating its participation within the market share and negotiation with suppliers and customers.

Otra de las estrategias de Porter, es el enfoque, por el cual las asociaciones buscarán

nuevos segmentos de mercado no satisfecho en el que puedan acceder, basándose en una producción cultural, autóctona de la región y la utilización de productos endémicos que son valorados en el mercado exterior, las empresas textiles y artesanales juegan un papel importante en este tipo de estrategia,

The differentiation, in a first stage, with the support of the Superintendence of Popular and Solidarity Economy, would be subject to obtaining a fair trade certification, in order to develop and strengthen each of the principles of this form of commercialization that guarantee your permanence in the market. It is very important, the creation of your business identity and associative sustainability as a hallmark in meeting the demands of an international market.

Government and non-governmental organizations, directly related to the actors of the popular and solidarity economy, must develop interrelated strategies, aimed at enhancing knowledge in terms of production and diversification of products, to encourage the use of technology in favor of commercialization. effective (e-commerce) and the creation of international networks that favor the administrative and productive process of these organizations.

## CONCLUSIONS

The concept of associativity has, within the cities of Azogues and Cañar, an optimal practice due to the culture and regionalism of these sectors, a key factor for their development and sustainability in the local market; However, the vulnerability of these associations is evident in the face of an international market whose quality requirement obliges them to obtain certifications and therefore to a radical change in the productive chain of the associations under study.

It is essential to carry out an analysis of the organizational capacities in the actors

of the popular and solidarity economy of Azogues and Cuenca, in the sense of creating an organizational culture focused on international expansion, through promoting the greatest strength of these organizations, such as so is the sense of associativity.

The important role that the administrators of these associations play in seeking intrinsic and extrinsic change strategies in the partners of their organization, should lead to a productive, economic and personal assessment that guarantees the strengthening of the associations and their permanence in the market.

Fair trade management is protected in three sectors: government, private and popular and solidarity economy actors, therefore, its actions must contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the National Development Plan and therefore to the principles of fair trade, under continuous supervision that seeks the fulfillment of the objectives for which these organizations were created.

These organizations, due to their structure and already existing in the market, should take advantage of the proposed strategies in order to focus all their practices towards the improvement of their production for the satisfaction of the needs present in potential customers, taking into account that Ecuador is a Developing country favored as a supplier of products to developed countries through fair trade.

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