

Responsible Investment in Agriculture Principles and Food Systems

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The Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (CFS-RAI) are shown as suitable instruments to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in rural areas. Local Action Groups (LAGs) have proven to be effective governance structures for the implementation and management of rural development projects based on participation and collective action.

Keywords: Local Action Group ; multi-stakeholder partnerships ; governance ; sustainable rural development ; Working With People ; Responsible Investment

1. Background

Since the creation of the United Nations (UN), efforts have been made to improve the living conditions of the world's inhabitants, initially focusing on poverty and food security. After reaffirming and expanding these needs in year 2000, with the approval of the Millennium Goals, later, in 2015, the SDGs ^[1] were approved based on the participatory construction of the UN member countries.

Solving the problems of hunger, poverty and inequality is so complex that it implies the solution of other collateral problems to achieve a comprehensive solution from the SDGs. The main scenario of actions to solve these problems is rural areas, where 80% of the population live in extreme poverty and 75% are moderately poor ^[2].

Faced with problems of land grabbing worldwide ^{[3][4]}, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) coordinated the elaboration of the CFS-RAI Principles with the participation of different actors from countries across five continents ^[5]. These principles, adopted in 2014, contribute to the implementation of the SDGs in rural areas.

The SDGs and the CFS-RAI principles promote sustainability in all its breadth ^{[1][5]}; however, as it is a concept accepted by society, its achievement is complex. In this sense, it has been pertinent to incorporate sustainability in project management, given that projects show a growing relationship with human activities. Unfortunately, the methodologies to assess the sustainability of projects have different interpretations and are not always aimed at measuring intrinsic sustainability ^{[6][7]}.

The implementation process of the CFS-RAI Principles is still ongoing and for some years the Polytechnic University of Madrid (UPM) and FAO have been coordinating strategic action through an international network of universities linked to companies and other civil organizations ^{[8][9]}. Since 2016, academia has proven to be an important ally in raising awareness of public and private actors about CFS-RAIs and implementing sustainable rural development projects aligned with the SDGs ^{[10][11]}.

Several factors affect the overcoming of problems in the rural population, mainly limited land tenure ^[12]. Faced with this situation, small producers have the alternative of improving their opportunities for development through organizational strengthening and leadership ^[13]. In this regard, the LAGs emerge as a new experimental way of approaching sustainable rural development within the framework of the LEADER initiative as innovative and versatile organizational structures that bring together the actors of a territory from a balanced participation in development planning and management decisions ^[14]. These structures have proven to generate spaces for good governance and efficiently contribute to development in rural territories of the European Union ^[15], Mexico ^{[16][17]} and Argentina ^[18].

Poverty is concentrated in the rural areas of Peru and has increased with the COVID-19 pandemic ^[19]. Despite the efforts of different governments to reduce poverty, the interventions were not very sustainable due to the lack of organization and

disarticulation between actors within the territories [20]. In addition, these actors and local institutions lack the processes and competencies to articulate government structures aimed at generating projects from the rural communities themselves.

UNMSM, in its vision of contributing to Peru's decentralized development, created the RDCs [21], where it has been carrying out processes to strengthen sustainability from a bottom-up approach and to structure local organizations based on a relationship with agricultural producers in the Mantaro Valley, in the province of Jauja [22]. As in all rural areas, the population of Jauja has problems that go beyond the problems of the agricultural sector. The solution to these problems has been shown to be effective through collaborative actions between different actors in the territory [23], creating organizational structures in which academia and research play an important role [16][17][24]. In this sense, the UNMSM RDCs have the conditions to improve the link with the needs of the rural population through joint R&D&I projects from the research groups [25].

The UNMSM began the implementation of an R&D&I model in sustainable rural development in its RDCs, with the Program for the Improvement of the Quality and Relevance of Higher University and Technological Education Services (PMESUT), financed by the Inter-American Development Bank [26]. The model applies the WWP approach, with the collaboration of the research group **Planning and Sustainable Management of Rural-Local Development (GESPLAN)** of the UPM and its more than 30 years of experience, to unite knowledge and action in R&D&I projects consistent with the needs of the population. The process emphasizes research groups and the development of skills to consolidate new organizational structures and strengthen governance by projects with the actors of the territory. In addition, the model incorporates the LEADER specificities, the development of skills in project management and the elements of the research universities, oriented to the establishment of living laboratories, where the solutions to real problems of rural society, from project management, reinforce the link between UNMSM and society, favor the generation of knowledge of high scientific value and provide an appropriate environment for quality professional training for undergraduates and postgraduates [26].

The methodological approaches of **Working With People (WWP)** and LEADER have contributed to the sustainable development of rural territories, with improvement of the organizational structure of the population, articulated with academic institutions, giving rise to the efficient planning and management of development projects [16][17][18]. Furthermore, WWP is also a powerful methodology that enhances the implementation of the CFS-RAI principles [8][27][28].

The sustainable development of rural territories requires projects that contribute to development, but first an environment of good governance must be consolidated [29], with contributions from community social innovation [30][31] that not only favors the optimal development of projects, but also facilitates the implementation of the CFS-RAI Principles with potential empowering effects on the results of the projects and fully aligned with the SDGs.

2. The CFS-RAI Principles as an Embodiment of the SDGs

The FAO promotes greater investment in the different links of the agri-food chain for various food products in order to improve food security. However, producing more food is not so simple, because there are many different agri-food systems in different countries, with different contexts and problems. Encouraging food production without considering sustainability has triggered problems of land grabbing [32], labor exploitation [33], pollution [34] and land degradation [35]. For this reason, FAO involved various interest groups of nations from five continents in the consensual elaboration of a set of principles that allows sustainable management of the system. As a result of this initiative, the ten CFS-RAI Principles were approved in October 2014 [5].

A year after the adoption of the CSA -IRA Principles, the United Nations, with the aim of addressing global problems, approved the SDGs, a set of 17 goals and 169 targets, the result of negotiations between the 193 member countries, who commit to fulfill them until 2030 [1][36]. The SDGs aim to achieve a world of well-being for human beings without prejudice to other beings or compromising the availability of resources for future generations.

To contribute to sustainability, the SDG targets are important, and it will be necessary to define targets and indicators for the CFS-RAI principles. However, it is even more important and a challenge for the scientific community to generate methodologies that can measure sustainability without interpretive differences [7].

The SDGs are ambitious and complex to achieve in an integral way, since some goals and their indicators are incompatible [37]; for example, goal 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure) uses a large amount of energy from fossil fuels and affects objective 13 (Action for the climate). Eight years into the 2030 goal, progress on the SDGs is variable and seems insufficient to achieve the targets [38], a fact that is worrying, given that there is a commitment from nations to meet the SDGs.

The CFS-RAI principles are voluntary and rural-oriented, to promote the sustainable development of agriculture and food systems. The CFS-RAI principles are integrated and are important drivers in the achievement of the SDGs. In this regard, **Table 1** shows how the CFS-RAI Principles relate to the SDGs. It should be noted that all the CFS-RAI principles contribute to SDG 1 and, conversely, none of them with SDG 9. Each principle is different in its association with the SDGs, but together all the CFS-RAI principles promote in an important way the achievement of the SDGs.

Table 1. Relationship between the SDGs and the CFS-RAI Principles.

Principles CFS-RAI ¹	SDG ²																
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1	X	X	X			X	X	X		X		X	X				
2	X	X		X			X	X		X		X		X	X	X	
3	X			X	X		X			X				X		X	
4	X	X		X			X	X		X				X		X	X
5	X	X			X									X			
6	X	X	X			X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X		X
7	X	X						X		X	X				X	X	X
8	X	X	X			X	X	X			X	X		X			
9	X									X		X				X	
10	X				X					X	X		X	X	X	X	

Rural territories are poorer ^[2] and have greater difficulty in achieving the SDGs, for this reason it is pertinent to disseminate and implement the CFS-RAI Principles in rural areas as a means to achieve the SDGs, with the participation of universities in the management of this process. In this regard, GESPLAN-UPM, by virtue of letters of agreement with FAO, leads the process of dissemination and implementation of the CFS-RAI Principles, through a network of 20 universities in 10 countries, managing to gradually insert the CFS-RAI Principles in curricular plans, as well as connecting and influencing companies to adopt the principles in their development plans ^{[8][9][27][28][39]}.

UNMSM is part of the network of universities led by GESPLAN-UPM to disseminate and implement the CFS-RAI Principles ^[9], through outreach activities in its five RDCs ^[21]. In the RDC El Mantaro, groups of livestock producers such as the **Association of Guinea Pig Producers of the Center (ACRICUCEN)** and the *Network of Women Producers and Entrepreneurs of the Province of Jauja (RAMPEJ)* improve their knowledge and progressively advance towards implementing the CFS-RAI Principles in their organizations.

In Peru, there is progress in SDGs related to poverty reduction, access to basic services, access to education and health insurance, with increased coverage, but poor quality. On the other hand, there is limited progress in SDGs related to climate change, responsible consumption, sustainable production, conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity ^[40]. This scenario is intended to promote the dissemination and implementation of the CFS-RAI Principles in rural territories to balance the progress in the SDGs.

3. Local Action Groups

The management of the territories depends on the structures of government and the decisions of the authorities. These descending structures, the predominance of technical aspects and the exclusion of the population in decisions limit sustainable development ^[41]. Subsequently, the concept of government evolved into governance, which projects a scenario where the interest groups or stakeholders of a territory participate in a balanced way ^[42], in correspondence with the priority problems and needs of the population. This new concept is consistent with sustainable development and requires new organizational structures.

Ancient civilizations practiced communal living, but evolution modified Peruvian social behavior towards individualism to the detriment of collectivism, affecting representativeness and governability ^[43], and causing social conflicts and delay in rural development. Fortunately, universities have the capacity to reverse this situation ^[44].

Faced with the failures of interventions for sustainable rural development, the LEADER community initiative was born in 1990, with an innovative proposal to manage resources through the participation of public and private interest groups, with civil society playing a leading role in the planning and management of development through projects. LEADER had three versions that successfully evolved to cover an important area of the European rural territory ^[45] and, given its success, it was positioned in the European Union's rural development policies and plans.

The LAGs comprise a set of seven specificities of the LEADER initiative: innovation, proximity management and financing, networking and cooperation, LAGs and the bottom-up, territorial and integrated approaches ^{[17][46][47]} that work together to enhance rural development results.

The bottom-up approach breaks paradigms and empowers rural people to make decisions together with other actors ^[48]. LAGs facilitate interaction between actors in the territory and practice governance ^[29], encouraged by the application of the WWP metamodel ^[48], resulting in a rich social learning process, useful for leading the community towards sustainable rural development. However, in some contexts, the bureaucratic and administrative burden slows down results ^{[49][50][51]} and when stakeholder participation is unbalanced and becomes politicized, the LAG loses its reason for being ^[52].

LAGs are organizational structures made up of representatives of the stakeholders of a territory, with balanced and representative participation of the entire population, that is, representatives of the public administration, private company, organized civil society and other representative groups of the territory. These stakeholders learn to interact and collaborate with each other under the coordination of a promoter, which is usually the university, with the common interest of developing the territory. The LAG members have responsibility and decide on the planning and management process of the territory's development, requiring the development of competencies, a process that begins with the participatory diagnosis defined in six steps ^{[17][26]}:

- Location and characterization of the territory and communities.
- Prioritization of problems and opportunities.
- Identification of available resources.
- Analysis of the condition of the available resources.
- Prioritization of development initiatives on endogenous resources.
- Implementation of projects that promote the integral development of communities.

The LAGs operate with legal recognition and depend on the legal framework of each country and the assessment made by the LAG members to choose a legal-administrative figure. Conventionally, the General Assembly is the highest authority of the LAG and it is its responsibility to define the structure, statute and internal regulations; it also elects the board of directors, in charge of project management, and the technical team, to support the planning, selection and evaluation of projects ^[46].

4. Working with People Approach (WWP) and the CFS-RAI Principles

The WWP metamodel ^[48] promotes planning processes for sustainable rural development and from its three dimensions: ethical-social, political-contextual and technical-entrepreneurial, it values the participation, interaction and contribution of people, with varied functions and roles within a territory, which leads to social learning capable of aligning collective interests towards the pursuit of the common good. Social learning is the key innovative element that nurtures the conception of projects and allows knowledge to be translated into action. The WWP promotes the formation of groups based on common interests, representing the political, public-administrative, private-entrepreneurial and social spheres ^[53]; and encourages interaction between actors based on behavior regulated by the principles of respect and priority for people, guaranteeing the social good and sustainable development, and bottom-up, multidisciplinary, endogenous and integral approaches ^[48].

The WWP metamodel has successfully solved rural problems in different contexts ^{[54][55][56][57][58]}, and improved the governance of rural organizational structures to promote private entrepreneurship in highly depopulated rural areas of Spain ^[59], as well as entrepreneurship in public-private partnerships ^[60]. The WWP metamodel can also be applied to the analysis of cases of food production sustainability ^[61], to analyze and propose models of sustainable rural development

[62][63], and could facilitate the analysis of the implementation of the CFS-RAI Principles in relation to the three dimensions of WWP (Table 2).

Table 2. Relationship between the CFS-RAI Principles and the dimensions of the WWP.

CFS-RAI Principles	Dimensions WWP ¹		
	E-S	P-C	T-B
1. Contribute to food security and nutrition.	X		
2. Contribute to economic development and poverty eradication.			X
3. Promote gender equality and women's empowerment	X		
4. Enhance the participation and empowerment of young people.	X		
5. Respect tenure of land, fisheries, forests and access to water.		X	
6. Conserve and sustainably manage natural resources, increase resilience and reduce disaster risks.		X	
7. Respect cultural heritage and traditional knowledge, and support diversity and innovation.	X		
8. Promote safe and healthy agricultural and food systems.			X
9. Incorporate inclusive and transparent governance structures, processes and grievance mechanisms.		X	
10. Evaluate and address impacts and promote accountability.		X	

Source: Adapted from PMESUT [26].

5. LEADER Specificities

The LEADER Community Initiative emerged in the early 1990s as an innovative proposal for rural development in response to a situation of territorial and socio-economic imbalance in Europe and the failure of top-down, engineering-based planning models. LEADER is based on neo-endogenous rural development and its results are influenced by social innovation and social learning management [64]. LEADER comprises seven specificities capable of generating change and contributing to the development of Europe's rural areas [46][47][63]:

- Territorial approach. It delimits the territory and identifies problems, needs, resources, opportunities and potential for development, and communication between actors is important.
- Bottom-up approach. It considers the participation and decision of the population in project-based planning and development.
- Multisectoral and integral approach. Different economic and social sectors participate in complementarity and synergy.
- Local Action Group. Equally made up of representatives of the private and public actors of the territory. It articulates local actors for the planning and management of development.
- Innovation. Creative way of adding value from projects that develop products and services from endogenous resources, as well as new markets.
- Proximity management and financing. Action of the LAG to channel the decision of the population, simplify the management of funds and resources and improve control and monitoring.
- Networking and cooperation. Share knowledge and experiences with groups in other contexts to promote learning and linkages between groups.

The LEADER initiative had three successful stages [46] to consolidate and integrate the general rural development policy of the European Union and to be replicated in Mexico [17] and Argentina [18]. However, in some contexts there were imbalances in favor of managing authorities [51], which prioritize their interests before the interests of the population [52], or increase bureaucracy [49][50], undermining governance and the contribution to sustainable rural development.

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