



## Agricultural and rural entrepreneurship: concepts for modeling development

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### Summary

The world of business has become an extremely dynamic environment in which the only constant is change. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the situation is obliging the actors to enhance their strategies and visions for correcting the long-standing weaknesses of the productive sectors. The concept of entrepreneurship, meaning the individual or collective capacity to develop sustainable enterprises, is an important focus of research that is making it possible to undertake concrete actions in aid of the productive sectors. This article looks at the ideas involved in entrepreneurship and the important function that the latter is playing in the overall development of our hemisphere. It also considers ways of promoting enterprise development as part of the strategies for agrifood chains and rural territories.

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## Introduction

The causes of growth and development have long been a subject of debate among experts.

The study of the causes of economic growth<sup>2</sup> intensified following Adam Smith's publication of "The Wealth of Nations" in the 18th century. Smith affirmed that the effects of the division of labor were the principal cause. Other investigators, such as Thomas Malthus and David Ricardo, believed that natural resources placed certain constraints on the development of opportunities.

In the 20th century, other factors emerged as drivers of growth: investment in human capital (education and training), infrastructure, technology and innovation. Today, economists continue to search for options, while at the same time acknowledging that there are no magic solutions (World Economic Forum 2004).

Today, no one doubts the contribution that small and medium-sized enterprises make

to the economy, productivity, innovation, employment, the development of the social fabric and prosperity in general. Nevertheless, the indices for enterprise creation in Latin America<sup>3</sup> are low compared with the figures of developed countries. For example, every year 2.5 times more enterprises are created in Asia than in this region (Kantis *et al.* 2001).

"Enterprise development is arguably more sustainable, more cost-effective and more attuned to community development than its sister economic development strategies of business attraction and business retention" (Lichtenstein *et al.* 2004).

For that reason, people look to entrepreneurship to provide innovative alternatives that complement development,<sup>4</sup> mainly to increase the concentration and exploitation of business opportunities that should increase income in rural areas.

This article describes the conceptual elements of entrepreneurship, the actors involved and ways of promoting

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- 2 The theory of growth, which dates back to the Classical School, seeks to explain how economies evolve.
  - 3 Specifically in the case of the agricultural sector. As long ago as 1975, Murcia and Araujo suggested that the slow development of agriculture in Latin America was due to the small number of enterprises that existed. They called for efforts to encourage farmers to develop greater business awareness.
  - 4 While acknowledging that all development strategies are bound to be characterized, to some extent, by a multi-factorial complexity that is due to profound changes in communications, transportation, technologies and trade.

entrepreneurship within agriculture and rural life in regions where more opportunities are needed to allow people to improve their socioeconomic conditions.

## What does “entrepreneurship” mean?

Enterprise research draws a distinction between the tasks involved in creating an enterprise (entrepreneurship) and those required for its (operational or strategic) management.

Entrepreneurship is the capacity to develop ideas and achieve success with them. Innovation, the acceptance of change and risk, the mobilization of resources and the tapping of opportunities are just some of the factors involved in creating a competitive or sustainable enterprise. As the Commission of the European Communities (2003) has noted, the entrepreneurial spirit<sup>5</sup> is the asset responsible for creating employment, competitiveness and the potential to exploit any sector or business.

Bernier and Hafsi (2003) describe entrepreneurship as a process in which

an agent manages to conceptualize and implement an idea, notion, service, product or activity. Stevenson *et al.* (1999) see it as the pursuit of an opportunity, regardless of whether enough resources are available. Other authors relate it to an individual's efforts to turn a vision into reality, regardless of the possibilities of success. This could suggest that anyone can be an entrepreneur, or at least has the capacity to develop that vision in order to create his own enterprise. However, it is clear, as will be seen below, that in different situations some individuals will have better options or conditions that they can take advantage to create enterprises or develop innovative products or services through them.

Besides what could be interpreted as an individualistic interest, entrepreneurship can be seen as a collective phenomenon in which society as a whole can exploit the practice of contributing to general well-being by means of social investment in new products and services. Sight must not be lost of the fact that the principles of enterprise promotion include justice and equity, with respect for dignity, and the commitment to life without violence, to sustainable development and to business ethics (*Iniciativas de Desarrollo Empresarial*, 2003).

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5 They define it as follows: “Entrepreneurship is the mindset and process to create and develop economic activity by blending risk-taking, creativity and/or innovation with sound management, within a new or an existing organisation. (Commission of the European Communities 2003:7).



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## Who and what is an entrepreneur?

An entrepreneur is someone who is able to balance the economically desirable with the technologically/operationally feasible, someone who takes a calculated risk to seize an opportunity or meet an unsatisfied need in hopes of establishing a sustainable business.

No ideal profile for an entrepreneur exists but certain psychological traits or characteristics are usually associated in theory with a business-minded person. Some of the most common traits are high levels of motivation and energy, confidence, initiative and problem solving skills, and the ability to set goals and take moderate risks (Table 1).

**Table 1. Terms commonly used to characterize a potential entrepreneur.**

• Has initiative (“founders”)	• Hard worker
• Has a sense of opportunity or is intuitive (e.g., focused on niches)	• Experienced
• Independent	• Expects to succeed (self-effective)
• Motivated	• Uses resources efficiently
• Dynamic	• Problem solver
• A leader	• Knowledgeable
• Has a strong character	• Involved
• Simple (does not seek to generate complexity)	• Systemic thinker (visionaries)
• Honest	• Responsible
• Goal and results-driven (achievement)	• Open to partnerships and teamwork
• Constant, committed and persevering (tenacious)	• Determined to take risks (tolerates, runs and/or accepts risks)
• Gets on well with others	• Creative and imaginative (differentiator)
• Energetic	• Innovative and able to turn ideas into reality
	• Flexible and adaptable
	• Agent of change

According to Robbins and Coulter (2005), entrepreneurial personality traits include the capacity to fight to achieve one's goals, to be autonomous and convey a message, to act quickly, to distance oneself and be objective, to create simple and practical solutions, to take risks, to have clear values, to obtain results and to act positively, exhibiting enthusiasm and optimism.

Other authors (such as Filion 2000 and Timmons 1978) suggest that entrepreneurs are tenacious, can live with uncertainty, make good use of resources and are imaginative, moderate risk takers and results-oriented.

Based on more than 100 variables applied to four Latin American and four Asian countries, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and others

determined that the most important indicator was previous work experience. In other words, only individuals who have already acquired a certain amount of experience will succeed in becoming small and medium-scale entrepreneurs. The authors of the study also include people who related with entrepreneurs, have networks of contacts and systems for managing relations with their employees, and exert strong control over the people around them.

## Agricultural and rural entrepreneurship

An "agricultural entrepreneur" is an individual or group with the right to use or exploit the land or other related elements required to carry out agricultural, forestry or mixed activities (Suárez 1972).

The term "entrepreneurship" is of recent origin and is not used often within the context of rural territories. Wortman (1990) asserts that "rural enterprise" is not only one of the newest terms in this field but also a term that has been used incorrectly.<sup>6</sup> His definition includes the creation of new organizations that introduce new products, create new markets, or use new technologies from rural areas (Wortman 1990:330).

### Some examples of successful enterprises in the region

- Honey in Chile (exported to Europe)
- Asparagus in Peru
- Pouch tuna in Mexico
- Marketing of coffee and its by-products (Cafe Britt-Costa Rica)
- Agrotourism in Argentina

<sup>6</sup> Kent and Rushing (1999) deplored the fact that entrepreneurship was largely ignored, poorly presented or partially interpreted in educational texts, while Gladwin *et al.* (1989) said that the 20 most used books on the principles of economics contained only a few paragraphs on the subject and over 50% of them ignored it completely.



Entrepreneurship strategies are regarded as tools for developing new forms of society as part of comprehensive agrarian reforms. They entail, among other things, acquiring land, ascertaining the characteristics of the beneficiaries, establishing a timeframe, creating enterprises, generating wealth and achieving a constant improvement in living conditions. The transition from traditional agriculture to more modern, business-oriented operations undoubtedly includes addressing the factors that hold back rural territories, such as the low incomes and investment in such areas, the migration and aging of the population, limited investment in science and technology, the low levels of education of some of the actors, the levels of linkages/isolation and poor infrastructure.

Lichtenstein *et al.* (2004) identified some of the possible obstacles to rural entrepreneurship as: a) the size and density of rural territories; b) the social and economic makeup of communities; and, c) the territories' links or ties with the outside world (Dabson 2002).

Rural territories<sup>7</sup> are the natural space where many traditional agricultural activities take place, but also the place where the actors develop and carry out other, non-agricultural activities



that influence the way of life in their area. Viewed in that light, potential rural entrepreneurs must visualize the opportunities and be aware of the risks around them, identifying, among other things, their own potential and the institutional and market potential. This links individuals to their immediate social surroundings and makes them responsible for their own development.

Therefore, some territories will offer superior opportunities for potential entrepreneurs - actors, even farmers, who are likely to accept in a better way the need for entrepreneurship in their production activities.

Converting traditional or "artisanal" agriculture to mass production entails not only increasing volumes, labor and cultivated areas to achieve economies of scale, but also identifying other types of

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7 The term "territory" is used to describe an area where a population has settled and is exploiting the resources available. If there are neither people nor activities, the area is simply a physical-political space (land).

strategy that have more to do with product innovation.<sup>8</sup> For example, agricultural researchers in the United States found that small-scale systems based on family farms<sup>9</sup> could not be organized as large-scale, standard production lines for homogenized products (Lyson 2004).

With regard to the role that small enterprises play in the rural world, Lyson (2004) also says that communities whose economic base is composed of a plethora of small, locally-owned businesses will exhibit higher levels of social, economic and political prosperity and well-being than communities where a few large companies dominate the economy and there is little or no local ownership.

This shows the importance of improving the formulation of specific public policies, especially those in aid of small producers, inherently linked to rural work, family farming and, in particular, the entrepreneurial approach. All actors in the productive sector need to have an entrepreneurial mindset.

## How can entrepreneurship be promoted?

Individualized work with a small farmers' organization, and that organization's work with sustainable enterprises, calls for a number of activities, including appropriate technical assistance, access to credit, the formation of self-managed working committees and social organization geared to raising awareness of local solutions, the provision of basic education, capacity creation and *in situ* enterprise training (planning, management, marketing, control and evaluation).

However, before attempting to promote entrepreneurship, it is necessary to identify the reasons why individuals or groups want to be entrepreneurs. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2003), some people seek to take advantage of opportunities<sup>10</sup> or be opportunity entrepreneurs (a positive vision), while others do so out of necessity<sup>11</sup> as necessity entrepreneurs (a negative vision).

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- 8 Clear links already exist between certain territories and the quality of their products, such as coffee in Colombia, tequila in Mexico and other activities that have demonstrated the levels of entrepreneurship of farmers in specific areas of the Americas.
  - 9 A number of variables, such as social relations, the division of labor, land and climate, are an obstacle to standardized of agroindustrial operations.
  - 10 An opportunity is an attractive option capable of grabbing an individual's attention. The concept of opportunity is closely linked to the term entrepreneurship. It is viewed as an option for improving one's income, realizing one's ambitions and enhancing one's quality of life by means of a commercial or business undertaking.
  - 11 In this case, necessity refers to the absence of the conditions required to lead a reasonable life. As Cedeño (2004) says, the enterprising act may stem from the individual being exposed to a difficult situation, concerns, problems or disappointments that he regards as challenges rather than a source of regret.



The dominant logic of a future entrepreneur –his expectations, preferences, assumptions, opinions and view of business– can lead an enterprising person to maintain the *status quo* or conserve entropy. Put simply, people interested in developing their enterprise or implementing new ideas within one that already exists receive a boost from macro issues, such as the clear presence of an environment in which there are good business opportunities, and from specific aspects such as family support, pressure from friends or extreme situations like the lack of employment and the need for resources and recognition.

It has been suggested that people who do not become entrepreneurs out of necessity do so by opening the so-called “black box” of innovation, acquiring a brilliant idea in a deliberate manner or through a meeting or lengthy reflection. This triggers a reaction, with the individual considering his real needs and real interest in becoming an entrepreneur, and then proceeding to implement the

idea and consolidating it over time (competitiveness) (Bygrave 1997).

According to the Inter-American Development Bank, some of the factors that stimulate entrepreneurship in Latin America are family traditions, the social context, the size of the economy, per capita income, the quality of the macro-economy, the availability of capital and work, the communications media, specialized services, sector diversity, the educational system, the abilities and competencies of individuals, the red tape involved in doing business and enterprise models. This gives some idea of the complexities and interconnecting issues involved in a subject like this.

In general, the three critical agents to be considered in promoting entrepreneurship are:

- The individuals and different characteristics related to the entrepreneur and his or her interests that motivate commitment to a cause or action.





to advisory services and extension are of key importance.

- The policy environment, which ideally should ensure macroeconomic stability and facilitate enterprise creation.

The Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI), on the other hand, suggests four components for enterprise development strategies (Dabson 2005):

- Social aspects such as the construction of networks, contacts, teams, family members, follow-up to key leaders and individuals.
- The environment, which incorporates the context or world of opportunities, creativity, competition, resources, government policies, and consumers and other actors in the production chains.<sup>12</sup>
- Community culture of support by means of tools and resources to identify and build upon the goods available in rural territories. There has to be connection to the wider region to achieve sufficient scale and strengthen the role of local communities.
- Focus on specific entrepreneurs, not merely general programs. In the territories, entrepreneurs' levels of education, skills, motivation and preparedness vary considerably.

Other authors suggest factors such as:

- The human capital, its characteristics, age, education level and experience.
- The physical and financial assets related to ownership of machinery, animals, land and buildings.
- The situation of marketing institutions responsible for dealing with imperfections in the market, contracts, organization and access to information. Their function with regard
- Systems orientation to guide entrepreneurs through the formalities, instead of entangling them in a web of red tape and individualized bureaucracy.
- Connection between policy-making and community success.

A working model to strengthen agricultural entrepreneurship should include four consecutive steps: a) the organization of

12 Based on Bygraves' model of the entrepreneurial process (1997).



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producers; b) the organization of support services; c) marketing (learning by doing); and, d) the provision of credit (Mendoza 2006).

The concern for small-scale producers suggests that policies need to be based on four pillars: a) education and training; b) business networks that link entrepreneurs to suppliers and sources of capital; c) resources; and, d) infrastructure and institutional support (Escalante and Turvey 2006).

Some of the optimal conditions for rural enterprise development are as follows:

- A competitive territory, which calls for training programs, information and assistance for enterprising, or potentially enterprising, entrepreneurs. Sources of financing and adequate infrastructure are also required, and people must embrace the idea that limited but sustainably exploitable resources are available.
- A buoyant market where there are options in terms of services and the acquisition of inputs and the marketing of finished products. Another essential ingredient is access to information about not only prices but also the commercial opportunities available.
- Diversity of business projects: serving a market entails designing

plans with adequate strategies as regards organization, production and marketing.

In the initial stages of rural enterprise development, the optimal form of enterprise organization for a given group will depend, among other things, on the market and marketing opportunities identified, and on the goals and life strategies of the households that make up the group. In this context, the entrepreneurial activities of organized small producers must be compatible with their life strategies (Junkin *et al.* 2005:6).

An enterprise strategy built around these factors makes it possible to generate a comprehensive analysis for the organization's future business plan and a complete understanding of the opportunity costs, be they economic or social.

In the IDB's experience, enterprise projects at the national level should have three specific objectives:

- a) Dissemination of the enterprise culture. This calls for a profound transformation of society that affects the entire population, making people aware of the importance of motivation and competencies for creating enterprises.<sup>13</sup>

13 The options are likely to include media campaigns, the dissemination of successful experiences, case studies, public recognition of entrepreneurs and the development of enterprise competencies in lower, complementary and higher education.

- b)** Enterprise creation. This is more quantifiable, as it is possible to ascertain the number of enterprises founded in the short term. The aim is to establish processes for creating and formalizing businesses in specific sectors.<sup>14</sup>
- c)** Support for the survival/growth of recently created enterprises (Angelelli and Prats 2005). This concerns the mechanisms that should be implemented to ensure a minimum mortality rate and strengthen the capabilities of enterprises that are already in operation.<sup>15</sup>

The options mentioned by Lichtenstein *et al.* (2004) to promote enterprises include enterprise incubators, programs for micro and small enterprises, manufacturing networks, enterprise support centers, seed capital, revolving funds, technological strategies and networks of retired professionals.

In the case of the rural milieu, all the literature<sup>16</sup> reviewed suggests that enterprise training should be based on less structured (i.e., less classical) courses. Enterprise training should be based on practical solutions that make it possible to interact with the real business world, learn to learn, acquire experience and use

multidisciplinary resources and abstract concepts. Since education promotes culture, the desire to be an entrepreneur may manifest itself not only in higher education but also at the secondary level and in daily life, with people ready to acquire core competencies, learn about successful cases and develop new businesses.

If enterprise promotion programs are to have a positive impact on the development of new businesses, they should contain at least the following elements:

- A practical description of enterprise competitiveness and its sustainability in a global world, as a function of small enterprises in a global economy.
- The concept of enterprise development, specifically how to identify opportunities, explore ideas and use limited resources effectively in rural areas.
- A general strategy for the culturalization of self-employment and enterprises in society, as part of rural development programs with a territorial approach.
- The application of business situations, risk assessment techniques and the eventual generation of plans for specific territories, connecting them with markets.

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14 Some of the methods that can be used are business meetings, systems that provide information about opportunities, access to State purchases, technical assistance, the preparation of plans, personalized advisory services and access to credit.

15 Refers to the provision of infrastructure and services, the elimination of red tape and the training of enterprise specialists who provide assistance within organized groups, chambers of commerce, financial entities, etc.

16 Practical pedagogical styles are reiterated in research on the psychological traits of entrepreneurs. Authors such as Mullan and Long (1987), Haines (1988), Stumpf (1991), Giba (1993), Hood and Young (1994) (in Pablo and Osvaldo 2004) all endorse experience and real projects.



- Enhancement of the abilities and characteristics of enterprising people, such as motivation, self-control, leadership and a mindset geared to change, by means of practical training programs.

In short, the strengths required for successful entrepreneurship depend to a great extent on the individual, the opportunity and the individual's resources. To paraphrase the idea put forward by Csikszentmihalyi (1998) in his book *Creativity*, luck is simply being prepared to take advantage of the opportunity that presents itself in a specific space at a specific moment in time.

The results would be as follows:

- a. People value self-employment more highly and regard the creation of new agricultural businesses as a good way to generate wealth.
- b. More and better agricultural enterprises in rural areas.
- c. More prosperous rural territories with falling poverty and migration indicators.

Modeling rural development calls for not only a country proposal aimed at the modernization of national institutions, but also greater efficiency in the distribution of income in the communities, and increased productive capabilities and structural change incorporating the practices of modern societies. In the short term, and leaving all rhetoric aside, the goal has to be a new, inclusive model or an improved model that supports the transformations needed, so that populations with fewer resources can take advantage of market opportunities.



## In conclusion

For the last 30 years (1980-2010), interest in enterprise development and promotion has intensified and the issue has become such a priority that governments, academia and the private sector have been obliged to include programs to address it in their development agendas.

Over the last three decades, the approach to the study of entrepreneurship has gone from a vision of risk to a productivist



and income support model, followed by a focus on opportunities and profits, job creation, the human approach and, finally, innovation. Although the fact that entrepreneurship drives change in economies has been recognized since the beginning of the century, it is only more recently that it has become a focus of attention in rural areas.

One of the factors that has to be considered when focusing on agricultural entrepreneurs are the local actors in rural territories, which are different from urban areas. One element often missing from strategies designed to link agriculture with markets is the active involvement of producers and their organizations. Instead, they are merely the passive recipients of infrastructure, services and training. The success of enterprise initiatives will depend on what producers' organizations achieve, hence the importance of focusing on entrepreneurs and their self-management, and competency creation. A strictly economic, market-oriented approach, disconnected from the communities and families of producers, would be of little use.

There is now some degree of clarity as to the importance of comprehensive proposals that include the culture, networks, services, education, competencies, resources, markets, technical assistance, inputs, the characteristics of enterprises, the environment, etc., all closely related to a cyclical transfer of knowledge. The use of assets and combinations of assets –be they natural, physical, financial, human, social, political or institutional– will determine the real conditions for adequate



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economic growth and the reduction of poverty, especially among the most vulnerable groups.

A number of adjustments are needed to create a model that offers all productive sectors and their territories equal opportunities - be the latter urban or rural, agricultural or non-agricultural, large or small. There must be a climate of competition, an efficient state, clear rules and less red tape for businesses, the elimination of monopolistic action, more enterprise promotion, increased technical and scientific knowhow, more and better infrastructure and the effective incorporation of existing SMEs into the global economy.

The most interesting models are those that entail the creation of rural centers, networks of enterprise facilitators, community training programs, distance learning technologies and business support systems.

In this case, the construct of major corporations, senior management, capital intensity and sophisticated technological systems is replaced by another involving small-scale producers who are often invisible as far as national accounting is concerned but who need to be linked to the market.

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## ► **Entrepreneuriat agricole et rural : concepts pour une modélisation du développement**

**L**e monde des affaires a démontré qu'il est l'un des secteurs les plus ouverts à la transformation et au dynamisme. Il exige des acteurs de meilleures stratégies et visions pour combler les lacunes dont souffrent les secteurs productifs de la région. Le concept d'entrepreneuriat, signifiant la capacité individuelle ou collective de créer des entreprises durables, est important pour la recherche et permet de réaliser des actions concrètes qui profitent aux secteurs productifs. Le présent article aborde la question de la promotion de l'entrepreneuriat, non seulement dans le but de définir le concept et de démontrer son importante fonction dans le développement de notre continent, mais également sous l'angle des différentes manières de promouvoir l'entrepreneuriat en tant qu'élément des stratégies visant les filières agroalimentaires et les territoires ruraux.

## ► **A empresariedade agrícola e rural: conceitos para modelar o desenvolvimento**

**O** mundo dos negócios tem demonstrado ser um dos ambientes de maior transformação e dinamismo. Exige dos atores melhores estratégias e visões para resolver deficiências provocadas pelos setores produtivos da região. O conceito de empreendedorismo, entendido como a capacidade individual ou coletiva de desenvolver empresas sustentáveis, é relevante para a pesquisa e permite executar ações concretas que beneficiem os setores produtivos. Aborda-se o tema da promoção empresarial, não apenas com o interesse de conceituá-lo e compreender sua importante função no desenvolvimento de nosso Hemisfério, mas, também, quanto às formas de promovê-lo como parte das estratégias nas cadeias agroalimentares e territórios rurais.

## ► **La empresariedad agrícola y rural: conceptos para modelar el desarrollo**

**E**l mundo de los negocios ha demostrado ser uno de los ambientes de mayor transformación y dinamismo. Exige a los actores mejores estrategias y visiones para resolver deficiencias arrastradas por los sectores productivos de la región. El concepto de empresariedad, entendido como la capacidad individual o colectiva de desarrollar empresas sostenibles, es relevante para la investigación y permite desarrollar acciones concretas que beneficien a los sectores productivos. Se aborda el tema de la empresariedad, no solo con el interés de conceptualizarlo y comprender su importante función en el desarrollo de nuestro hemisferio, sino también en las formas de promoverlo como parte de las estrategias en las cadenas agroalimentarias y en los territorios rurales.