



Tensions between individual and collective agency in initiatives aimed at reducing food insecurity: The case of informal settlements in Quito, Ecuador

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SUSTENTO

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Introduction

Title: Tensions between individual and collective agency in initiatives aimed at reducing food insecurity: The case of informal settlements in Quito, Ecuador.

Research network & team of authors: SUSTENTO and Chaire Fayolle-Magil in Construction

Gonzalo Lizarralde > Université de Montréal
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SUSTENTO research network.
Enhancing the resilience of alternative food systems in informal settings in Latin America and the Caribbean through bottom-up initiatives in the built environment.



Introduction

Relevance: Context of food insecurity in Ecuador in relation to the impacts of Climate Change and the governmental measurements to contain the pandemic (Covid-19), from March 2020 to March 2022.

“The pandemic caused by the new Coronavirus will result in an increase of hunger and poverty in the CELAC countries” FAO & CELAC (2020). *CELAC stands for Latin-American and Caribbean States Community.*

Climate change effects and measures to manage the Covid-19 crisis are heavily affecting **vulnerable communities** in informal settlements in the **Global South**; where people were confined for long periods, impacting the economic activities of the informal sector.

Therefore, **food insecurity** and poverty increased among those communities, erasing the progress achieved in the last decades.



Image 1: Individual orchard, located at the neighborhood “La Lucha de los Pobres”. Quito – Ecuador, March 2022.

Introduction

Relevance of the studies: Food Sovereignty and Poverty & Inequality, two important elements and their evolution to understand Food Insecurity in Ecuador, from 2009 to 2020.

2009

Food Sovereignty Law instituted. It aims to “establish the mechanisms by which the **State shall ... guarantee to its people... the self-sufficiency towards healthy, nutritious and culturally appropriated food, in a permanent way**” Ecuador, (2009, pp.4).

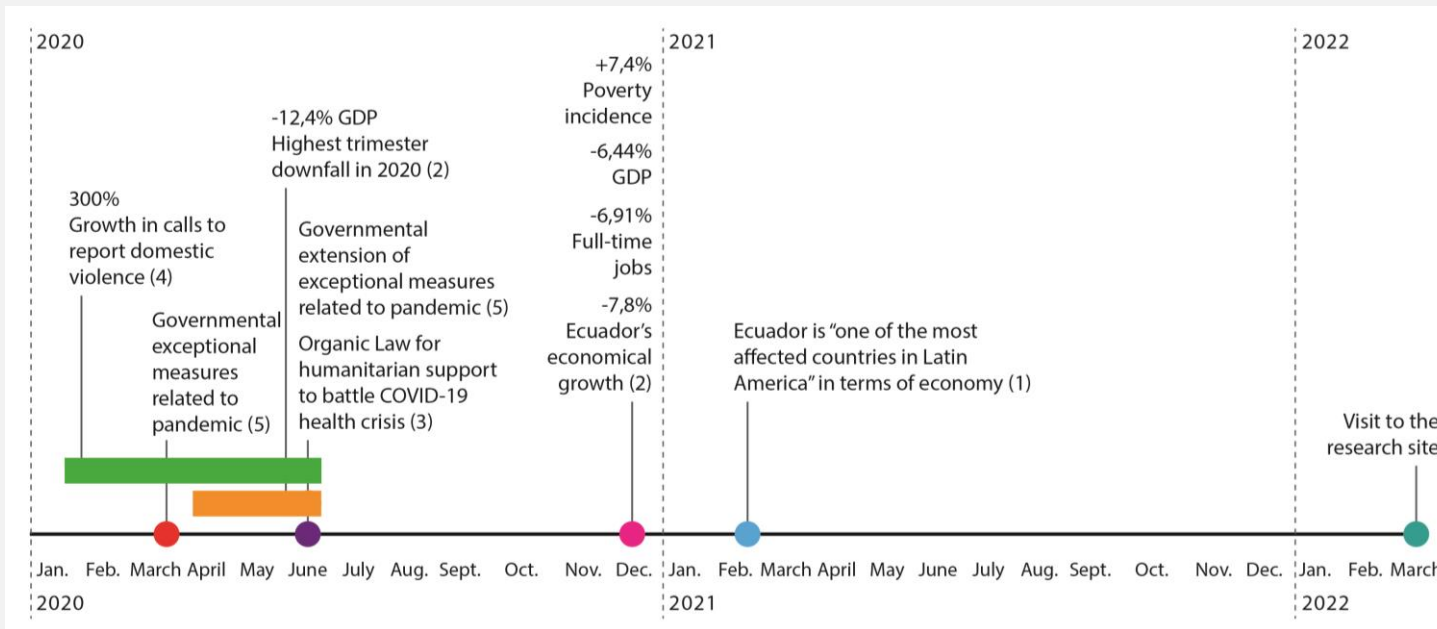
2020

Ecuador becomes **almost completely “self-sufficient (in terms of) agricultural products”**. They “import... 2,7% of (those) products” FIAN Ecuador et al. (2020, pp. 30).

“Ecuador is one of the Latin American countries where the growth of **poverty and extreme poverty** would be more pronounced... (It) is one of three countries in Latin America where **inequality** will grow the most” FIAN Ecuador et al. (2020, pp. 18).

Area of study

Research field > Country: Overlapping of ongoing multidimensional crisis caused by the pandemic, and its interconnection to previous existing structural weaknesses from Climate Crisis.



- Sources:
- 1) Arévalo Ávila et al., 2021
 - 2) Banco Central del Ecuador, 2020
 - 3) Asamblea Nacional del Ecuador, 2020
 - 4) SURKUNA, 2020
 - 5) FIAN Ecuador, 2020

Model 1: Timeline of the impacts of COVID in the territory of Ecuador. Gabriela Gonzales Faria, June 2022.

Area of study

Research field > Neighborhoods: “Argelia Alta” and “La Lucha de los Pobres” in Quito, Ecuador.

- Informal origin.
- Extremely vulnerable to effects of climate change: landslides and flooding.
- Public and private spaces that are home to individual and collective efforts to generate alternative food systems.

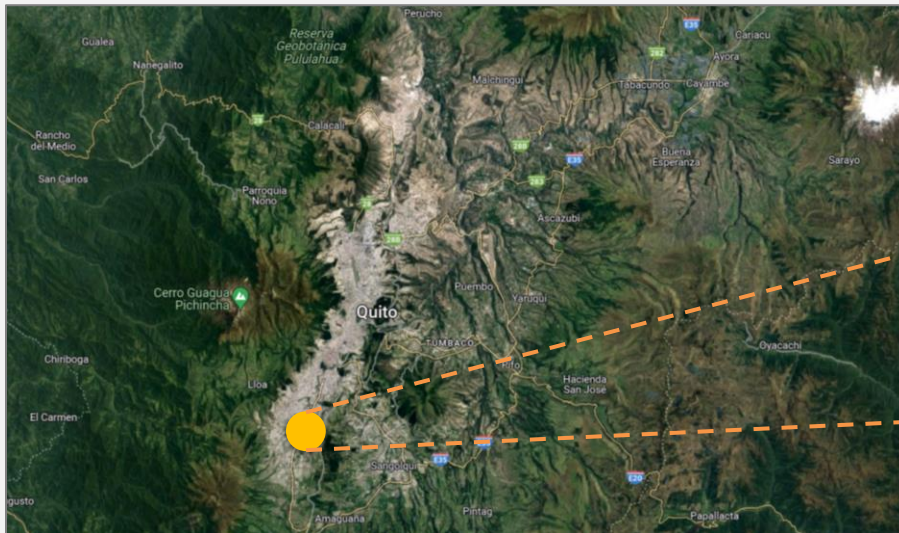


Image 2: Satellite view of the city of Quito – Ecuador. Obtained in May 2022.



Image 3: Satellite view of “Argelia Alta” (#1) and “La Lucha de los Pobres” (#2). Obtained in May 2022.



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Methodology

Main objective: Understand the socio-cultural dynamics that influence bottom-up initiatives to establish and maintain urban orchards as an alternative food system, a strategy to face food insecurity in uncertain times.

Secondary objective: Contribute to larger ongoing research projects of SUSTENTO.

Research question: What factors promote or impede these initiatives of urban orchards and the food security of those residing in informal settings?

Methodology: Approach empiric-descriptive, as well as inductive.

Types and sources of data: Mixed methods.

Quantitative data > to support the relevance and to understand the context of the main problem, by studying official documents and reports.

Qualitative data > main source of data. Intended for understanding and describing inductively, the body of empiric discoveries, through interviews to residents and experts, and focus groups with residents and community leaders.



Image 4: Community urban orchard, "La Lucha de los Pobres". Quito – Ecuador, March 2022.

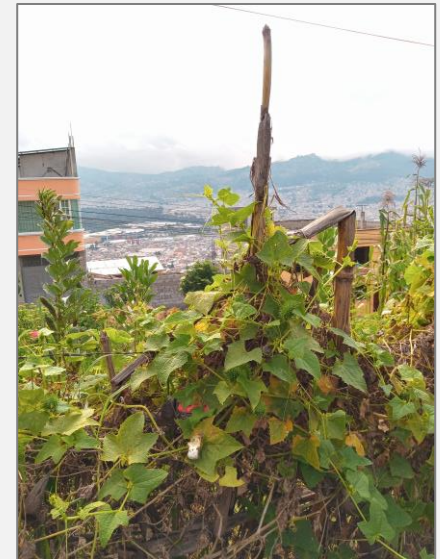


Image 5: Individual urban orchard, "La Lucha de los Pobres", at calle 7. Quito – Ecuador, March 2022.

Collected data

Collected data:

- Quantitative data collected from official documents (such as Food Sovereignty Law) and reports from local and international institutions.
- Qualitative data obtained in site, by 9 interviews to residents and 5 to experts, and 4 focus groups were held with residents and community leaders. Also, visits to the neighborhoods and their orchards.

Three scenarios of alternative food systems (urban orchards) were found on site:



1

Image 6: Community urban orchard at Argelia Alta, Quito – Ecuador. March 2022.



2

Image 7: Individual urban orchard at La Lucha de los Pobres, Quito – Ecuador. March 2022.



3

Image 8: Individual urban orchard at La Lucha de los Pobres, Quito – Ecuador. March 2022.

Collected data & Findings

Three typologies of urban orchards:

1 Community/public urban orchard

2 Individual/public urban orchard:

3 Individual/private urban orchard:

Plot / land tenure	Held in plot officially given to the Association of urban farmers as part of an imposed social initiative to private companies (Holcim).	Held in subdivided public plots with no other use. The participants' houses face this plot. They chose size of their garden according to intention/capacity of farming.	Held in whatever available spaces participants have in their houses (balcony, patio, etc.). They followed an online workshop held by local NGO "Ayriwa".
Operation	Before the pandemic.	Before the pandemic.	During the pandemic.
Farming type	Two types of soil farming: farrows and beds. Bioagriculture practice	Traditional soil farming: farrows.	Pot farming.
Destination	Farmers Biological market.	Internal consumption.	Internal consumption.
Participants	Association members (<i>mingas</i>).	Family members and friends.	Family members.
Threats and challenges	Not enough participants. Tools and products stolen. No differentiation between bio and non-bio produce.	Products stolen. Mismanaged plots endangers others (weeds and plagues). Landslides. Access to seeds.	Small production, hard to scale up. Hard access to bigger plots to cultivate (land tenure). Floodings.
Neighborhood	Argelia Alta.	La Lucha de los Pobres.	La Lucha de los Pobres.

Collected data & Findings

Five variables in the tensions found:

1 Community/public urban orchard:

2 Individual/public urban orchard:

3 Individual/private urban orchard:

	1 Community/public urban orchard:	2 Individual/public urban orchard:	3 Individual/private urban orchard:
1) Land tenure	Public: City owned land borrowed to the Association.	Public: City owned land borrowed to the participants.	Private: House spaces adapted for this activity.
2) Pandemic regulations	Interruption due to mandatory confinements.	Interruption due to mandatory confinements.	Uninterrupted, held inside participants' houses.
3) Type of collaboration	Collective, by the members of the Association.	Individual / familiar. The amount of people involved oscillates.	Individual / familiar. The amount of people involve didn't oscillate.
4) Knowledge / training	Traditional knowledge and technical training (City's initiative).	Traditional knowledge, acquired informally.	Traditional knowledge and technical training (City's initiative).
5) Policies	Commercialization of bio-agricultural products aligned with Food Sovereignty Law.	Food Sovereignty Law would be aligned to this activity.	FSL and ICT are combined into this specific initiative: online workshop developed during pandemic to encourage urban agriculture.
Challenges	Engaging long-term participants.	Access to seeds.	Land tenure.

Results

1) Common tensions between participation and management of urban orchards.

- In Argelia Alta, they went from 50 families at the beginning of the Association (2006), to 3 women in March 2022. The younger population has no interest in this activity (too physical and low remuneration compared to other jobs they have access).
- In Calle 7 (LLDLP) the smallest plot intended for individual urban orchard is misused (garage).
- Also, in the group of 20 individual urban orchards at Calle 7 (LLDLP), some orchards are better taken care of and are more productive than others (composting area, diversity of crops, scale of food production, weeds in the terrain, etc.).
- Farmers from both types of public orchards have reported stolen gardening tools and food products.

2) Collective action in alternative food systems is challenged by difficulties to integrate stakeholders, regulations, and lack of resources (mainly land tenure) to coordinate efforts.

But it is also encouraged by traditional practices such as *mingas*, which have social and cultural value among residents.

- In the focus groups (LLDLP), neighbors stated they prefer to farm individually rather than collectively. This provides them with necessary freedom to manage all their responsibilities.
- Local leader at LLDLP, stated that she would be up to initiate an orchard in abandoned public plots, if she receives guaranties that no one will take that land from her. She participates in the individual-private urban orchard program.
- In Argelia Alta, mingas are held regularly (efficient mechanism to coordinate collective efforts into urban farming).

Recommendations

Residents are in constant debates about the advantages and disadvantages of generating individual or collective solutions to food security, as stated in the focus groups and interviews in both communities.

A better understanding of these tensions is required to reinforce alternative food systems in the region. Specifically, to strengthen the initiatives that are in place and to prevent common breaking points for the ones to come; so that the intended goal of Food Sovereignty Law could be attained, considering the increasing needs of vulnerable communities in Ecuador.

Post-covid strategies are a popular subject in recent electoral campaigns and politic debates. Food security should be one of the issues addressed in those future policies and plans.



Image 9: Interview to participants at Community-public urban orchard at Argelia Alta, Quito – Ecuador. March 2022.



Image 10: Abandoned public plot at LLDLP, Quito – Ecuador. March 2022.



Image 11: Compost workshop held at one of the community centers in LLDLP, Quito – Ecuador. March 2022.

Further exchanges

SUSTENTO

Enhancing the resilience of alternative food systems in informal settings in Latin America and the Caribbean through bottom-up initiatives in the built environment.

<http://www.grif.umontreal.ca/afs/index.html>

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Image 12: Small crop from the community-public urban orchard at Argelia Alta, Quito – Ecuador. March 2022.