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Small Cocoa Producers of Manabí: A Contribution from Intercultural Mediation to Productivity

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Abstract---The potentialities of intercultural mediation are presented as a contribution to the productivity of small cocoa producers in the Manabí province of Ecuador, analyzed from a qualitative, inductive methodology, under the interpretive paradigm, considering the characteristics of associations in the cocoa sector. The role played by the institutions related to this sector was identified, from their action with programs, both intervention and monitoring. Interview techniques were applied to representatives of the competent institutions, as well as focus groups with members of the associations. The results allow us to infer that there are indications of intercultural mediation in the production processes, exposed by national and international institutions and organizations; although this mediation is not structured with due planning and with professionals in the area, it is considered as a contribution to the productivity of the sector.

Keywords---associativity, cocoa, intercultural mediation, productivity, small producers.

Introduction

Traditional mediation throughout history has been related to the term "conflicts" and exposed as an alternative solution; the authors [Highton & Álvarez \(1998\)](#), present this mediation as a non-adversarial way in which a neutral third party assists the parties to negotiate to reach mutually acceptable results, this constitutes a structured effort to provide communication between the opposites. Contrary to this assertion about neutrality, under the intercultural mediation approaches defended by [Torremorell, \(2008\)](#), it is established that no person should have had the idea of being neutral, since it does not exist, nor will it exist, only when one is dead ([Adachi & Aihara, 1997](#); [Colwill & Rescorla, 1986](#)).

They make it known that recently, they started talking about impartiality rather than neutrality, as analyzed [Vieira & Vieira \(2016\)](#), but in turn there are authors who choose to speak of multipartiality, referring to the mediator's sense of empathy or affinity with all parties, stating that empathy is not neutral, that the act of mediating implies active listening and understanding of others, when speaking of intercultural mediation it is to admit that there will be transformation of the people involved in this process, in terms of attitudes, behaviors and actions. Therefore, they emphasize that the mediator cannot be neutral to the point of allowing inequality, he must show empathy with everyone, consolidating cultures ([Mollea et al., 2008](#); [Kongor et al., 2016](#)).

Intercultural mediation allows the meaning, logic and representations of the cultures in contact to be made explicit in a mutual way, in an appropriate environment of communication and predisposition to the collaboration of others [Vidal & Olmos \(2008\)](#), it has also been defined as a technique professionalism that aims to contribute to a better communication, relationship and integration between people or groups present in a territory, belonging to various cultures (VV.AA, 20081). From this definition, according to the cited author, three types of intercultural mediation can be defined:

- Preventive mediation that is applied to facilitate communication and understanding between people with different cultural codes intervenes in the resolution of conflicts of values, between minorities cultural and the majority society or within the minorities themselves.
- Creative mediation that consists of a process of transformation of the rules to the creation of new rules, new opportunities based on new relationships between the parties.

Intercultural mediation is proposed as an alternative resource to the division of spaces by groups or ethnic groups, to the annihilation of minority cultures, for which they hold power, which creates a shared society, where equal rights are compatible with the diversity of conceptions and cultural forms of living in the world, this mediation can occur, between foreign populations and institutions of the host country, between services of the host society and foreign citizens or between people and organizations. Its functions being to promote the circulation of communication to the negotiation of contractual agreements, to promote the resolution of conflicts and to defend the rights and interests of a specific public. In this sense of favoring communication beyond being an attempt to resolve

conflicts, [Herrero & Paris \(2003\)](#), argue that the conflict should not be expected to arise for mediation to take place, is a form of prevention, thereby multiplying the possibilities of action with communication between people, adding that these communication possibilities favor the creation of a space for coexistence ([Sani, 2015](#); [Redmond, 2000](#)).

According to the theory of [Torremorell Buqué \(2003\)](#), who describes intercultural mediation, it can be conceived as the interrelation and cooperation between social entities, mediation can become an indispensable conduit for the existence of human communities based on effective practice of values of coexistence. In recent years, intercultural mediation and social intervention practices in Spain have given rise to a new conceptualization of this mediation seen as a work strategy and a training need. In the spaces of cultural diversity, represented by populations from technologically underdeveloped countries, it has meant that the training carried out in this field began with social movements, mainly non-governmental organizations, later being transferred to the administrative and academic field ([García Castaño & Barragán Ruiz-Matas, 2004](#)).

Synergy between intercultural mediation, productivity, and small producers

When talking about productivity in agriculture, emphasis is placed on the quality of the product, having higher quality attributes creates greater value for the consumer. Voluntary adoption by producers used to highlight quality to consumers are usually known as superior quality initiatives, from these initiatives production under ethical conditions and environmentally friendly production systems stand out ([Sepúlveda et al., 2016](#)). Consequently "these attributes - ethical production, organic production, voluntary quality standard (Premium Quality) and origin, are considered four superior quality attributes that could have a differentiating effect in the market" ([Sepúlveda et al., 2017](#)).

[Sepúlveda et al. \(2017\)](#), reveals that small producers who are aware of these attributes and produce with quality labels, give added value to their production and, at the same time, increase consumer confidence. In the Province of Manabí, 29.3% of farmers produce, or have produced with a quality label, stating that some of the small producers consider that producing with superior quality is a necessity to be successful producers. Given this appreciation, it becomes clear that those small producers who decide to venture into environmentally friendly systems do not orient their decisions on rigorously economic factors, confessing that the main benefit of producing with quality labels is to improve market access ([Akin & Hopelain, 1986](#); [Cassiman et al., 2010](#)).

In a study carried out, three basic variables are identified on which productivity depends: Administrative capacity, technological research and culture and the level of motivation of the members of the organization. In reference to this last variable "culture and motivation", intercultural mediation is highlighted as a rehabilitative tool, in the productivity of the associations of small producers, considering that these are usually a disadvantaged group in society, or as the second world names it rural, which means that this group, despite having the resources to produce the land, carry out little capitalized family farming, where

their production is only directed to local markets, accessing them with unfavorable exchanges (Macías, 2018).

Poor communication can be associated as a cause of this problem, therefore, community mediation is proposed as an attempt to solve this problem, which is understood by intercultural mediation and seen by Cerda & Giró, “as a means that gives an answer to the difficulties posed by solitary confinement ”(p. 152), presiding over communication as a primary factor in mediation, highlighted as “ a faculty that allows us to reinforce and enrich our identity through the possibilities that dialogue offers us, despite to any discrepancies that may exist ”(idem). Another important aspect is that small producers should seek training and education options as a strategy to achieve a sense of empowerment, since “training and capacity-building activities in terms of market functions, literacy and elementary numeracy can improve preparing small producers and facilitating their participation in markets.

Cocoa production

Agriculture plays a very important role in the economy of a country, and in most developing countries. Seen from the perspective of cultural identity, an ancestral pact with nature, as a way of life it has no monetary value, but in commercial statistics it is only considered an economic activity. The author Jiménez Abad (2014), states that "the globalization process has raised hopes, but also concerns about its ability to increase economic and political inequalities, modify power structures on a planetary scale, and cause the loss of cultural identities." Faced with this problem, the importance of intercultural mediation as an innovative, creative and preventive tool stands out, presenting identity as “our gateway to the social world, which is, paradoxically, also our great obstacle in the encounter with women, people who are different from us”.

Being the cultural identity of rural communities an important factor, because it is not only about generating wealth, energizing the economy, and seeking the development of a nation, it is about people and their survival as a culture. In Ecuador agriculture stands out for its relevant participation within the economic, social and productive sphere, starring in the economic history of the country, notably in the agricultural boom that the country experienced with the cocoa and banana boom, being one of the sectors that contribute significantly to the national economy, constantly contributing with levels between 8 and 9% in GDP (Monteros & Salvador, 2015). Considerably, the Ecuadorian economy has been linked to the production of cocoa from colonial times to the republic, being the oldest export product in the country. Cocoa is a relevant product worldwide, as it is the main input for the chocolate-producing industry. It is cultivated in underdeveloped countries that export to developed countries, which are in charge of its transformation and commercialization, “the production of cocoa represents one of the main items of the Ecuadorian agricultural sector, at least until when the banana boom began (1969) and the oilman (1972), generating resources and employment, contributing to the development and progress of the economy” (Rosero, 2002).

The National Association of Cocoa Exporters Ecuador [Anecacao \(2015\)](#), states that Ecuador, due to its geographical conditions and its richness in biological resources, is a producer par excellence of Cacao Arriba or also known as Fino de Aroma. Product that has managed to position itself as emblematic in the country, thanks to its fruity-floral flavor and fragrance, becoming famous among foreigners, who named it Cacao Arriba. Furthermore, its flavor in the international market has been recognized for centuries, Ecuador occupying 63% of the world production of Cacao Arriba. This production would not be possible without agricultural activities and especially the presence of small producers, considering that they are the protagonists of the competitive position that the country has gained, as expressed [Rosero \(2002\)](#), “90% of the surface cultivated cocoa corresponds to small farmers”.

This reality is also evidenced by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock of Ecuador [MAGAP], which announces that “Fine and Aroma Cacao is cultivated by 100,000 families. 99% are small producers (planting area less than 10 hectares) who with effort make the country a world leader in the sector” (Government of the Republic of Ecuador). Emphasizing that the role of small producers is important, thanks to them, economic growth is achieved, which is reflected in the increase in exports from the cocoa sector, reaching an annual average of 13.5% in value during the 2012-2106 period. FOB, and in tons 10.1%, ([Ecuador, 2012](#)). These small producers, for the most part, do not have an academic level that allows them to develop their activities more effectively and, due to the economic levels and needs in which they develop, generate a series of very complex problems to solve. That is why, for associativity to develop, it is necessary to articulate various elements, both at the level of legal frameworks, institutions, as well as the different agents of the economy, being essential, mediation between these different actors ([Kruijssen et al., 2009](#); [Abdullah et al., 2021](#)).

Hence precisely the role of the State as a policy maker and mediator, through its different institutions and government programs dedicated to providing support. In this regard [Lattuada et al. \(2015\)](#), states “the implementation of public assistance and development programs for small and medium-sized rural producers had an increasing importance in the promotion of associative forms of various types in rural areas”. Although many authors highlight the contribution of the State towards associativity, others also point out it as negative for the freedom of the market, where small producers participate, since by reducing the role of the State, correct prices can be achieved according to them. Particularly in Ecuador there is the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, (MAG) leading institution of the agricultural sector, in charge of promoting rural development and articulating “financial and non-financial services, facilitating the development of non-financial services markets, through public policy for commercial agriculture and peasant family agriculture prioritizing marketing, associativity and innovation services”.

In the province of Manabí, the associations of small producers are also supported by the Provincial Government of Manabí, which has within its powers “to promote agricultural activities and provincial productive activities”. In addition, in Ecuador the associations of small producers act together with the regulation of the Superintendency of Popular and Solidarity Economy (SPES) and the support of the National Institute of Popular and Solidarity Economy (IEPS), entities that

oversee providing support and guiding them. In its financing, with the vision of contributing significantly to their production levels and therefore to the rural development of their communities (Biletska et al., 2021; Eddy, 2017).

Materials and Methods

It was carried out through the interpretive paradigm, collecting qualitative data, under an inductive analysis, with the general objective of understanding the potential of intercultural mediation as a contribution to the productivity of small cocoa producers. The observation and the interview were used to study what are the main problems presented by the associations of small cocoa producers in the province of Manabí, the relationship that exists between the members of the groups, if they maintain a relationship with other cultures, highlighting that Despite being individuals from the same province or locality, they have different identities, levels of education, thoughts, or ideologies, they can be considered cultural differences; At the same time, they also wanted to know if the associations have a representative who fulfills the functions of a mediator, between them and the institutions in charge of providing support and intervening in response to their needs, and if these institutions have intercultural mediation processes or programs (Sabilah, 2016; Vocroix, 2021).

The case study was chosen, considering the associativity of small cocoa producers in the province, emphasizing that so far only related studies have been found, but not similar to the subject, highlighting that the results presented may be used as a guide and foundation. Future research. Documentary analysis was used, to achieve the desired results through analysis and synthesis, reliable sources such as documents, magazines, newspapers and official websites of Ecuador were reviewed on the institutions that promote and regulate the Ecuadorian cocoa agricultural sector. The techniques used were *focus group* and semi-structured interview, which allowed obtaining different perspectives from each of the small producers that make up the associations, reaching a diversity of responses (Rinartha & Suryasa, 2017; Morewedge & Kahneman, 2010).

Analysis and Discussion of the Results

For the development of the research, three associations of small cocoa producers were chosen, according to their organization, trajectory, and production levels, registered in the databases of the Provincial Government of Manabí. The selected associations are located in rural areas with difficult access, for which they had the support of both the Faculty of Administrative and Economic Sciences of the Technical University of Manabí, in a cooperation agreement with the Provincial Government of Manabi (GPM), through the Productive Development department. The sites chosen for the application of the focus group instrument correspond to the cantons of Bolívar, where 9 participants were chosen from association A, which registers 52 members of the Membrillo parish; in Pichincha, in association B, of 60 partners from the Piedra de Plata site, 11 participants were considered; and in Flavio Alfaro, 10 people from 4 associations of the Convent parish participated.

Table 1
Sample of the associations visited in the present study

Association	No. Of Partners	Participating in focus group	Canton	Location Parish		
Association A	52	9	Bolívar	Membrillo		
Association B	60	11	Pichincha	Pichincha	Piedra	de
Association C	Representatives of 4 associations	10	Flavio Alfaro	Plata site. Convento		

On the other hand, the interviews were developed individually, with the purpose of collecting information based on the opinions, expressions, experiences and knowledge of directors and corresponding officials of the Institutions and ministries related to the cocoa associations of the province of Manabí in order to collect data that serve as a comparison with the points of view of small producers. This sample was also taken under an intentional analysis, being the selected institutions and ministries: Institute of Popular and Solidarity Economy, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and the Provincial Government of Manabí, specifically the Department of Productive Development. Considered as the most suitable to provide the required information, being those who maintain contact, programs and projects with the objective of promoting, regulating, supporting the associativity and productivity of small farmers, these results are observed in table 2.

Table 2
Sample of the institutions visited in this study

Interviewees	Institution / Ministry	Academic Degree	Function carried out	Location
Interviewee 1	Institute of Popular and Solidarity Economy	Commercial Engineer	Director of the Institute of Popular and Solidarity Economy Zone 4.	IEPS Manabí-Portoviejo Offices
Interviewee 2	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock.	Agronomist in	Charge of the Zone 4 National Information System.	MAG Manabí-Portoviejo offices.
Interviewee 3	Provincial Government of Manabí, Department of Productive Development	Industrial Engineer	Director of Productive Development-GPM	Productive Development Offices GPM Montecristi-Manabí.

Among the results obtained from the small producers and the directors of the Institutions, they can be observed in table 3.

Table 3
Results obtained in the investigation

Small Producers	Directors of the Institutions.
<p>They state that they feel forgotten by the authorities, and that not all the competent institutions intervene in response to their needs.</p> <p>They argue that they do not receive support from all the institutions, some only get excited by presenting projects and then disappear.</p> <p>Certain associations feel that they do not have a strengthening as an organization.</p>	<p>They have technicians who constantly make field visits, to intervene, you must first identify the relevant needs, since it is not possible to intervene in all of them.</p> <p>They have projects, with which they have intervened and supported the associations, resulting in increased harvests.</p>
<p>They receive advice and training from certain international institutions and organizations.</p> <p>Two of the associations point to the export of their product.</p> <p>They are unaware of the conceptualization of interculturality and the potentialities that mediation encompasses.</p>	<p>Within their competencies they establish that they contribute and promote the organizational strengthening of associations.</p> <p>The interviewed institutions affirm that they constantly maintain training programs.</p> <p>The interviewees argue that they are not yet ready for export.</p> <p>They allude to intercultural mediation from an ethnic and ancestral perspective. An interviewee stated that interculturality must be viewed from empathy, from the logic of coexistence.</p>
<p>They do not have a good relationship with certain institutions, but they claim to feel supported by the GPM.</p>	<p>All the institutions interviewed affirm that they have good relations with the associations of small producers.</p>

According to what was identified through the focus groups in the three associations visited, opinions of the small producers could be found, where it was emphasized that they are properly organized. This has been the product of a positive evolution over time, since associativity is currently considered by them as an important factor to achieve common objectives that could not be achieved individually, correct with what is stated by Mincetur, cited in (Alburquerque & Rodríguez, 2015). In the case of the investigated associations this has been reflected, since they have been constituted under a regulated and directed structure based on statutes and assemblies, where decisions are made with the participation of all small producer members and under the conformation of directives that represent them. This evolution, in addition to the impulse and predisposition of the members, bears a certain relationship with the legal frameworks established by the State, through the laws implemented in the different governments, especially the organizational guidelines established in the Political Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (Del Ecuador (2008), where mediation is specifically described, as well as the Popular and Solidarity Economy law (Solidaria, 2014).

Given that, in the country in the same region, different cultures can be found, specifically in the cocoa sector, among the characteristics of small producers from

the cultural sphere, the Montubian customs stand out, an aspect mentioned in the interviews carried out with two of the managers. The montuvian culture that corresponds to the peasant dedicated to agriculture, allows to analyze the approach of the rural economy, where economic activities from both the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors intervene that generate income for rural households, which is related to what the International Labor Organization, such Montubian customs in the case of the small cocoa producer of the studied associations, it was known that within the economic activities that they carry out, these Montubian customs have been transformed, it could be affirmed that they have gone through all sociocultural mediations (family, community, personal, work) in correspondence with what was stated by [\(Vieira & Vieira, 2016\)](#).

This transformation has been generated according to how other national and international cultures have intervened in these associations, from the different links in the chain. Such is the case that knowledge, science and technology, which in the past were not so approached by sectors recognized as vulnerable, in the case of small producers, today have a broad participation in that sense since this new knowledge has been transmitted to them, with the mediation and intervention of State institutions and International Organizations, as they express it in the focus groups held to the aforementioned associations.

This has been the determining axis of the role played by Government Institutions and Programs related to small cocoa producers, since this role is clearly established from the guidelines stipulated in said legal frameworks. These could be corroborated by means of the interview carried out with the different directors of the participating institutions in this study, where they describe what their competences are and how they have been carried out in their participation periods. Two of the institutions interviewed expressed that, to intervene in the associations, they carry out evaluations and diagnoses that allow them to identify the main needs in which they can intervene, stating that there are limitations for which they cannot act in all stages of production. The managers acknowledge that their competences have not been fully complied with, in the case of one institution due to weaknesses in the institutionalist, as they affirm, and in the other two interviewees they agree that it has been due to lack of resources.

These institutions, although it is true they have fulfilled a role of mediators, through the human talent they have, they are not specialists in Intercultural Mediation from an academic training as such, but they have fulfilled certain characteristics that are described in the profile of a intercultural mediator, since the mediator figure starts from an innovative professional profile, highlighting that by acting on arguments of inequality, it establishes an engine of transformation of multicultural society that is, it establishes bridges of relational, preventive encounters, transformative and decisive in accordance with what was stated by [\(Aucancela et al., 2017\)](#). They have achieved this through the guidance they have had from their competencies, to resolve conflicts in the sectors in which they intervene, since the institutions interviewed have the function of supporting and promoting processes to generate productive and local development in general. In accordance with the declaration.

Regarding what was investigated in the focus group sessions, in which small producers expressed that the support of certain organizations has been important, due to the fact that studies have been carried out on agricultural activities, in particular their importance from the field of organic production, as well as they have also received training and contributions both in logistics and infrastructure, as is the case of two of the investigated associations. But the small producers of the three associations indicated that they have not been able to obtain benefits from all the government institutions in the same magnitude, because some have only come to excite them and when they observe many problems they do not give them the proper support and follow-up and even They do not finalize the projects they propose, since on certain occasions they only meet with meetings to demonstrate compliance with their functions. These only go so far as to generate expectations that are not met, except in the case of the Provincial Government of Manabí, from which they expressed that they have received support and accompaniment in various projects.

Through this analysis, it was possible to investigate that the interventions and application of programs, according to how small producers corroborate it, have allowed them to receive knowledge transfer from other cultures. When analyzing the information collected through the applied instruments, it was possible to identify some characteristics that could identify factors of intercultural mediation, which have had an impact on the productivity of the cocoa sector. Entre estos factores se puede mencionar la transformación, puentes sociales y el empoderamiento de los grupos minoritarios (Vieira & Vieira, 2016; Vieira, 2016). En las asociaciones visitadas se pudo indagar sobre la transformación que han experimentado los pequeños productores en el ámbito del conocimiento hacia nuevos enfoques de la producción y los mercados. Esto les ha conllevado a tomar nuevas decisiones en cuanto a sus procesos productivos, logrando identificar la importancia de sus costumbres y como éstas juegan un rol fundamental al momento de acaparar los gustos y preferencias de sus posibles consumidores, lo que hace también que los precios de los bienes que ofrecen sean más altos y les generen mayores beneficios.

Este empoderamiento de los pequeños productores se ha logrado a través de lo transmitido por las otras culturas que tienen mayor acceso a la ciencia y tecnología en niveles más avanzados. En este sentido la identidad cumple un papel preponderante en las nuevas estructuras de mercado, ya que son precisamente los factores culturales que poseen estos pequeños productores, lo que hace atractivo el producto hacia los consumidores, aspecto que se relaciona con lo argumentado en, donde se define la identidad como la puerta de entrada al mundo social. Respeto a la identidad, las costumbres ancestrales se recalcan como problemática manifestada en las sesiones de focus group, que los pequeños productores sienten preocupación, ya que actualmente muchos jóvenes optan por dedicarse a otras actividades, lo que podría a juicio de las autoras de esta investigación ser contraproducente en la preservación de sus costumbres y por ende afectar la sostenibilidad de la actividad agrícola.

El cacao ecuatoriano es consumido por los mercados internacionales por sus atributos de calidad superior (Sepúlveda et al., 2018). El Ecuador al tener el primer lugar como exportador de cacao fino de aroma, debe cumplir con

estándares de calidad establecidos por organismos internacionales, se destacan entre ellos el comercio justo y la producción orgánica, lo cual quiere decir que deben recibir un precio justo por los bienes que ofrecen, producidos en asociatividad, sin la presencia de intermediarios y en donde no deben intervenir químicos que afecten al ambiente. Mediante el focus group los pequeños productores expresan producir bajo estos sellos de calidad, además de indicar que reciben un mejor precio que cuando venden a intermediarios, quienes no les exigen tales estándares. Es el caso de dos de las asociaciones, mientras una de ellas todavía reconoce la presencia de intermediarios y la ausencia de sellos de calidad en la producción.

Las instituciones nacionales y los organismos internacionales se han convertido en mediadores de estas culturas diversas, convirtiéndose en puentes sociales que permiten la comunicación e interrelación entre estos actores. En relación con estos atributos la forma como han producido tradicionalmente es el principal elemento reconocido por las otras culturas, incluso las características de olor y sabor, por producirse el cacao junto a otros árboles frutales, esto ha permitido que el cacao fino de aroma sea considerado un producto emblemático en el país, acorde a lo que se presenta en (Anecacao, 2015). Todo este proceso se desarrolla en la mayoría de los casos en un ámbito familiar según lo reconocieron los pequeños productores mediante el focus group, y es afirmado por el Gobierno de la República del Ecuador, sosteniendo que el Cacao Fino y de Aroma en el país es cultivado por 100 mil familias, siendo el 99% de estos pequeños productores.

Los pequeños productores de dos de las asociaciones estudiadas manifestaron que con el aporte recibido con investigaciones de una institución gubernamental y de un organismo internacional, han logrado ser capacitados y orientados; y que se sienten capaces de apuntar a una autonomía, reconociendo que aún necesitan apoyo y seguimiento de varias instituciones y organismos, entre ellos el de las instituciones de educación superior. A través de esto se logra identificar el empoderamiento que han conseguido estos grupos minoritarios, logrado desde su propia identidad cultural y con la trasmisión de otras culturas y de nuevos enfoques científicos, creándose así una cultura de convivencia en donde se complementan más de dos culturas.

Bajo los términos de asociatividad, de acuerdo con lo indagado en las tres asociaciones, las reuniones que mantienen les permiten intercambiar diálogos, muchos de ellos en presencia de quienes cumplen el rol de mediadores, tal es el caso de líderes comunitarios, instituciones nacionales y organismos internacionales, lo que les ha conducido al conocimiento propio y de otras personas, relacionado esto a lo expresado por Torremorell (2008), como una característica de la mediación intercultural. El análisis de la productividad en esta investigación fue bajo los aspectos cualitativos que este término encierra, ya que esta no solo es vista como la generación de mayores volúmenes de producción, sino también la mejor calidad de lo que se produce, la cultura y el nivel de motivación de los miembros de la organización (Fajardo, 1995). Desde esta perspectiva, se logró abordar que la productividad en el sector cacaotero, según los manifiestan los pequeños productores en los focus group realizados en las tres asociaciones, así como en las entrevistas realizadas a directivos, tiene mucho que ver con la calidad del cacao que se produce en el Ecuador, con todas

las características descritas anteriormente, en donde prevalecen factores culturales.

Al comparar la perspectiva que mantienen los directivos de las instituciones competentes en el sector de pequeños productores de cacao con la de los miembros de las asociaciones, respecto a la Mediación Intercultural, se pudo indagar que los pequeños productores desconocen la conceptualización de la interculturalidad y las potencialidades que abarca la mediación. Por su parte dos de los entrevistados representantes de las instituciones aluden la mediación intercultural desde la perspectiva étnica y ancestral, detallando que en la provincia de Manabí prevalece la identidad de la cultura montuvia. Otro aspecto que destaca uno de los entrevistados respecto a la diversidad de cultura, son los niveles de educación con los que cuentan los agricultores, la mayoría apenas ha terminado la instrucción primaria, lo cual fue corroborado en el focus group. Esto de acuerdo con lo expuesto por el mismo directivo entrevistado, se convierte en una problemática ya que se crean ciertos espacios de desacuerdos cuando intervienen en las asociaciones, por lo que el trato para los pequeños productores debe ser abordado con altos niveles de tolerancia y respeto. A lo que también argumenta que no es igual relacionarse con un empresario industrial que con un agricultor.

Desde la perspectiva particular de uno de los entrevistados, este pensamiento de solo tolerancia debe cambiar, contrarrestando que la interculturalidad debe ser vista desde la empatía, desde la lógica de la convivencia, por lo que según su criterio se deben crear nuevas formas de convivencia orientadas por las instituciones del Estado, en donde se dé una relación más dinámica en la que se puedan intercambiar culturas y no solo tolerarse, aprendiendo unos de otros en esos espacios de convivencia, esto podría ser afin con lo expuesto por [Torremorell \(2003\)](#), en cuanto la mediación puede ser vista como una herramienta positiva para la existencia de comunidades basadas en prácticas efectivas de valores de convivencia.

Además este entrevistado pone de manifiesto que las diferencias no deben ser negativas al punto de distanciar a las personas, deben ser un complemento de unos con otros, enfatizando que es complicado llevar la teoría a la práctica, pues dentro de la convivencia las diferencias pueden sujetar tensiones y conflictos, coincidente con el criterio de [Vieira \(2016\)](#), que expresa que dichas tensiones y conflictos deberían ser tomadas desde un ámbito positivo, considerando que son parte de la naturaleza y de la normalidad de la vida. The potentialities of intercultural mediation can contribute significantly to the sustainability of the association to achieve such ends, since when establishing this in an organized way, it contemplates empathy, communication, transformation, and creation of new forms of coexistence, privileging the teamwork, cooperation, and respect for the differences that tend to be held between members of a group or community.

An argument of this study is that it would be very useful to implement these mediation strategies in production processes, aiming for small producer associations to achieve empowerment as the axis of their organizational strengthening, with leadership strategies and communication facilities, which could trigger optimal development, both at the level of your community and the

province. The focus of this research has been oriented to identify and analyze characteristics and qualities in relation to the categories studied; The limitations of the work are recognized since other aspects of a quantitative nature could be investigated in the future, which received a great contribution to the cocoa sector of Ecuador.

Conclusion

The research was aimed at understanding the potential of intercultural mediation as a contribution to the productivity of small cocoa producers. It was possible to analyze under all elements, characteristics of intercultural mediation, concluding that institutions and organizations play a fundamental role in this aspect, that they even have a determined legal framework that governs them, which can be highlighted as potentialities. But they are not properly structured, which in some way limits the development of these communities. According to what has been analyzed in the research literature within the theoretical framework, theories and information that correspond to intercultural mediation are addressed, as well as about productivity, but in the field of study it was not possible to identify investigations that relate both topics, which determines an important element of this work. The productivity studies in contemporary times, address quality as an important axis of it, identifying the relevance of cultural identity, organic production and fair trade based on associativity, so the insertion of a structured intercultural mediation In small producers, with the accompaniment of specialists on the subject, it could define productivity within these standards, given the contribution that it could make to the development of the rural economy, aspects analyzed in this work.

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