



Participatory management and its impact on local development in the canton of La Libertad, Santa Elena province

Gestión participativa y su incidencia en el desarrollo local para el cantón La Libertad, provincia de Santa Elena

Stinly Elizabeth Oviedo Carpio

Economist, graduated from the University of Guayaquil, Master in Economics with mention in development and public policies from the technological university Ecotec, doctoral candidate in public management and governance from the University Cesar Vallejo. Professor at the State University of Milagro. [Orcid.org/0009-0004-7611-2436](https://orcid.org/0009-0004-7611-2436)

Nathyn Víctor Collins Ventura

Marketing Engineer graduated from the Peninsula de Santa Elena State University, Master in Business Administration graduated from the Universidad Tecnológica Empresarial de Guayaquil, Master in Management and Local Development at the Peninsula de Santa Elena State University, Doctorate in Administrative Sciences at the Universidad Nacional del Sur de Argentina, Doctorate in Public Management and Governance at the Universidad Cesar Vallejo, currently Director of the Academia Pensaris. [Orcid.org/0000-0003-3775-3439](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3775-3439)

Samuel Humberto Rendon Ampuño

Bachelor in Tourism Administration at the Peninsula State University of Santa Elena, Master in Tourism mention in Sustainable Management in Tourist Destinations at the Peninsula State University of Santa Elena, conducting research on Ancestral Cultural Heritage of the Parish of San Jose de Ancon, publishing Master in Public Administration at the Universidad Particular de Especialidades Espiritu Santo, PhD in Public Management and Governance at the University Cesar Vallejo, currently President of GADP San Jose de Ancon. [Orcid.org/0000-0003-3775-3439](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3775-3439)

Geovanna Lisbeth García Roldán

Commercial Engineer from the State University of Milagro, Master in Finance graduated from the University Santiago de Guayaquil, 8 years of experience in private enterprise, currently teaching at the State University of Milagro. [Orcid.org/0009-0002-1550-6904](https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1550-6904)

ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to evaluate the impact of participatory management on local development in the canton of La Libertad, Santa Elena province. Several techniques and tools were used to address the challenges identified and ensure the active and equitable participation of all sectors of the community in the decision-making process and project implementation. The study employed descriptive research based on qualitative data collection and analysis, including interviews with key local stakeholders, document review and participant observation. The results reveal that participatory management has had a positive impact on several aspects of local development. First, there has been a strengthening of the social fabric, with greater collaboration and solidarity among local inhabitants. This active participation has generated a sense of belonging and shared identity, fundamental for addressing common challenges and promoting more integrated and sustainable development. The need was identified to strengthen the technical and organizational capacities of local stakeholders, as well as to ensure adequate financial resources and maintain an ongoing commitment to citizen participation.

RESUMEN

El presente artículo tiene como objetivo evaluar la incidencia de la gestión participativa en el desarrollo local para el cantón La Libertad, provincia de Santa Elena. Se emplearon varias técnicas y herramientas abordando los desafíos identificados y garantizando la participación activa y equitativa de todos los sectores de la comunidad en el proceso de toma de decisiones y la implementación de proyectos. En el estudio se empleó una investigación de tipo descriptiva se basa en la recopilación y análisis de datos cualitativos, que incluyen entrevistas con actores locales clave, revisión de documentos y observación participante. Los resultados revelan que la gestión participativa ha tenido un impacto positivo en varios aspectos del desarrollo local. En primer lugar, se observa un fortalecimiento del tejido social, con una mayor colaboración y solidaridad entre los habitantes locales. Esta participación activa ha generado un sentido de pertenencia e identidad compartida, fundamentales para abordar los desafíos comunes y promover un desarrollo más integrado y sostenible. Se determinó la necesidad de fortalecer las capacidades técnicas y organizativas de los actores locales, así como garantizar recursos financieros adecuados y mantener un compromiso continuo con la participación ciudadana.

Keywords / Palabras clave

participatory management, local development, unsustainability, participation mechanisms, urban sustainability.

gestión participativa, desarrollo local, insostenibilidad, mecanismos de participación, sostenibilidad urbana

Introduction

Local development has become a crucial aspect to promote the well-being and progress of specific communities within a broader context. In the case of the canton of La Libertad, located in the province of Santa Elena, Ecuador, the implementation of a participatory management model emerges as a fundamental strategy to address the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities presented by its socio-cultural, economic and environmental setting.

In recent years, the need to actively involve the population in making decisions that affect their environment has been increasingly recognized and valued. As Adams (2020) points out, citizen participation not only strengthens the legitimacy of local policies, but also enriches the quality of decisions by integrating a diversity of perspectives and knowledge. In this sense, a participatory management model provides a structured framework for channeling this participation effectively.

The canton of La Libertad has a number of characteristics that make it suitable for the implementation of a participatory approach to local development. Its cultural diversity, natural wealth and economic dynamics make it an ideal laboratory for exploring new forms of governance that promote inclusion and sustainability. As suggested by Smith and Jones (2021), local contexts require solutions adapted to their specificities, and a participatory model allows for greater flexibility and responsiveness to community needs and aspirations.

For Tortajada Martínez, (2018), Participatory budgeting is a mechanism that the municipality promotes for the community to participate in decision-making, involving it in the management of local development, and strengthening its democratic culture, based on a transparent relationship between the actors involved in the process and generating trust for governance.

As a formulation system, of the public budget Quiroga, (2019) indicates that the Participatory Budget is a process in which the revenues of the municipality, which it receives by transfer from the central government, are put up for discussion in a way that allows defining investments and expenditures in accordance with the institutional development plan (PID). This process proposes that public and private institutions make available to the IDP the investment destined for the district through their programs and projects.

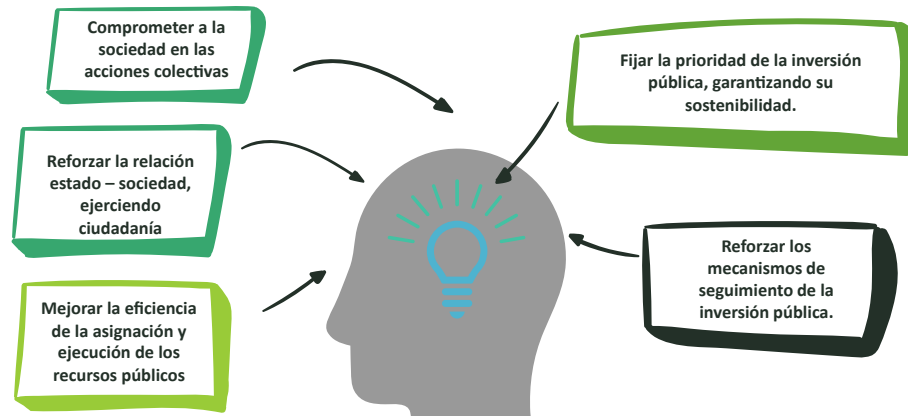
According to Schedler (2004), participatory budgeting is a process of direct, voluntary and universal democracy, in which the population can discuss and decide on the budget and local public policies. Citizens no longer limit their participation to voting every four years, but also make decisions and control the government's management.

Some researchers try to issue a general definition that can include the different

experiences of the Participatory Budgets. In this sense (Alfsen & Greaker, 2017)in conducting a study in Europe on participatory budgets, mentions that participatory budgets should have three criteria: that participation involves discussions on the public budget; it must be organized at the level of the entire city, and not only at the neighborhood level; and finally, it must be repeated over time.

Finally, Ordoñez Aguirre, (2011) states that the budget is conceived not only as the financial expression of the government plan, as the political proposal condensed in priorities, but also as an instrument to promote integral and sustainable development, through the budget should comply with local development policies adequately harmonized.

Alulema Alvarado, (2018) indicates that with the eagerness to make better use of state resources, participatory processes are applied, and in this way work in tune, both citizens and government entities, so from this reasoning, primary objectives of participatory budgets are derived.

Illustration 1. Objectives of the participatory budget

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Source: (Alarcon Perez & Gonzalez Becerra, 2018)

According to Schedler, (2004) citizen participation is based on three principles that work with a notion of participatory budgeting involving a structure and process of community participation.

- a) participation open to all citizens, without any special status attributed to community organizations;
- b) combination of direct and representative democracy, whose institutional dynamics attribute to the participants themselves the definition of internal rules; and,
- c) to make resources available for investments in accordance with a combination of general and technical criteria (i.e., making the decisions and rules established by the participants compatible with the technical and legal requirements of government action).

In Ecuador, the Constitution of the Republic is the guiding framework for the actions of the public sector and a guideline for the private sector; the main characteristic of the Constitution is to guarantee the exercise of rights, especially for citizens, which makes them the center of attention and delivery of public services in parameters of quality and warmth, applying principles of efficiency and effectiveness, universality, equality, inclusion, gender equity, non-discrimination, and solidarity, among others of equal relevance.

In the Ecuadorian scenario, citizen participation is implemented as a Constitutional right; therefore, governmental structures adopt this mandate and build new administrative, technical, internal normative and operational processes to guarantee the exercise of the citizen's right to participate in public decision making in national and local scenarios.

The capacity for self-organization and self-definition is open to the community. Organizational structures begin a challenge, so to speak, to promote actions that encourage citizen involvement in the ever-increasing participatory decision-making in coordination with governmental bodies.

According to Alulema Alvarado, (2018) although citizen participation is considered as a formally established mechanism, it does not mean that within the territories there are no other ways to exercise it; for example, during the public management cycle (planning, budgeting, execution and evaluation). In the case of budgeting, there are some mechanisms that could be implemented; it would be useful to strengthen the existence of observatories, including the participation of academia.

These have not been particularly explored in the context, if there are executable budgets based on planning, it would be essential that the execution can be observed and monitored from the point of view of the institutions and interested citizens. There are also other mechanisms that can be carried out as a result of the participation related to the budget monitoring: citizen commissions or advisory councils (Mafla, 2019).

According to the same law, in addition to the participatory budget mechanism, citizens can participate individually or collectively in the empty chair, popular assemblies, citizen assemblies, public hearings, consultative councils and sectoral citizen councils; to these formal mechanisms are added others, depending on the localities, interests at stake, type of actors, depending on the management model of the authorities.

Starting from the common element, the intervention of the citizenry in decisions on the spending priorities of a local administration, (Mora SanMiguel, 2018), define four shared characteristics of participatory budgets:

1. The purpose of participation is to discuss public finances; all participatory budgets have the common objective of reflecting on the use of public resources.

All experiences are developed in scenarios involving a set of territorial subunits (neighborhoods and districts) and a general space that includes them all (the city).

3. The experiences are periodic, implemented continuously, annually or with other periodicity, and always in a stable manner.

4. The process includes the accountability of the results of the process, allowing citizens to assess the management of the rulers and the effects of their participation (Tortajada Martínez, 2018).

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The formulation and approval phases contemplate the mandatory processes in each decentralized autonomous government: provisional revenue estimate, final revenue calculation, investment priorities, preparation of the preliminary draft, resolution of the participation instance, knowledge of the legislative body, presentation of the final draft budget, treatment in the budget committee, debate in the legislative body.

For Alarcón Pérez & González Becerra, (2018) local development is a set of economic, social, cultural, political and territorial processes through which a community, from its own potential and the opportunities provided by the environment, accesses well-being, without exclusions or discrimination, and guarantees the conditions so that future generations can also do so. Local development appears to provide solutions to the problems that exist in the locality, for this it is necessary to take into account the specific characteristics of the territory that are essential and must be considered to focus development towards the community; therefore, it is a factor of democracy and sustainable development, which does not arise by chance, but as a result of the previous state of affairs, as a different and alternative route of national and regional development (Pérez & Hernández, 2015).

Local and community development is an important link in the sociocultural development of society. The United Nations Organization (UNO) has made an emphatic and profound statement in this regard, considering that the feeling of identity with the community, with its purposes and objectives, is a precondition for generating and sustaining community development. It is a process

aimed at creating conditions of economic and social progress for the entire community, with the real participation of its stakeholders in improving their standard of living.

According to Sotelo, (2017) local development is a process of multiple objectives, which are: efficiency in the allocation of resources for territorial competition; equity in the distribution of income and balance of the environmental setting for the conservation of the territorial productive system. Therefore, participation is considered as a process in which the community commits itself to the transformation of its own reality and assumes the tasks that correspond to it. Local development as a process is of great importance in the organizational and educational sense: organizational, because it requires the reorientation of existing institutions or the creation of new types of institutions, and educational because it implies the change of attitudes and practices that hinder socioeconomic improvements.

Tortajada Martínez, (2018) mentions that local development is one of the most significant factors in the creation of networks that favor the quality of life of the inhabitants and the care of resources, being its axis of transformation, the local space, that is, the space in which each person can act. Therefore, it has the necessary elements to carry out this improvement of space and society of which it has been made the protagonist, with the need to involve global actors as well as local agents and the local population.

Local development has several aspects to be analyzed, such as the productive profile, the type of municipality and locality, the predominant economic circuits, the management model, the social policies, and the way in which the process itself takes place. All these elements will determine where a territory is heading and what conditions it has to generate economic growth with social inclusion and local development.

According to Burton, (2017) local development processes as any genuine process have to be inserted in the concrete historical conditions of each community, favoring true development which is that which places man not only as an actor but as the center and sole purpose of this process in all its dimensions: economic, political, social, cultural, spiritual, in short, as a multidimensional and complex process.

Table 1. *Dimensions of local development*

Dimension	Local development
Economic	Transformation of the economic structure of the territory, as well as the equitable distribution of income.
Policy	The interventionism of public agencies in order to promote development through their incentives or support.
Social	Refers to gender, age and form of social organization.
Cultural	The cultural heritage it possesses, the territory is relevant to its study, as well as its identity.
Spiritual	Religious belief.

Prepared by: author

Source: León and Sorhegui (2009)

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Local development is currently becoming one of the most important endogenous growth strategies, especially in the context of socio-labor insertion. Its importance makes it necessary to dedicate a study on this concept under a bottom-up approach, that is, highlighting and analyzing the role played by the set of agents of a given locality in its economic and social development and growth, making the most efficient use of available resources (Chen, 2019). One of the key conditions for local development, for its materialization, is the ascertainment of local development objectives; the general objective proposed in the field of local development is the transformation of the economic and social system of a locality. Local development processes have emerged and have been transformed in accordance with the territory's own capacity; the community's development potential is the main asset of the local society.

Materials and Methods

In this study, a qualitative approach was adopted to understand the factors associated with participatory management and its impact on local development in the canton of La Libertad. This understanding was achieved through an exhaustive literature review focused on the variables under study. On the other hand, a quantitative approach was applied in order to identify the critical elements linked to local development; in addition, different practical and experimental methods were used to investigate the current situation of the participatory mechanisms implemented in the canton of La Libertad.

This approach allowed the gathering of information on the research topic and the development of strategies appropriate to the context. This was achieved through direct observation of the object of study and interviews with the people involved.

This approach facilitated the formulation of conclusions based on the study variables, in order to identify the critical aspects associated with participatory management and its impact on local development in the canton of La Libertad.

In the present study, a population of 48,671 was considered, which corresponds to the number of inhabitants of the canton of La Libertad between the ages of 20 and 64 years, which is 50.73% of a total of 95,942 data obtained in the Inec 2010.

Formula for sample calculation.

The sample was made by applying the following formula:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q \cdot N}{e^2 \cdot (N - 1) + Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q}$$

The sample size is 356 people to survey in order to know in depth about the object of study, with a confidence level of 95%, a margin of error of 5%, and with a 50% probability of being fulfilled, and a population of 48671 corresponding to the number of inhabitants of the canton of La Libertad between the ages of 20 to 64 years which is 50.73% of a total of 95,942 data obtained in the Inec year 2010.

Various sources and methods of data collection were used in the development of the research on participatory management and its impact on local development in the canton of La Libertad. These are described in detail below:

This technique was carried out with the purpose of obtaining an in-depth understanding of the actions implemented to strengthen local development in the canton of La Libertad. A questionnaire was conducted with experts in the study area to identify the critical factors relevant to the research.

Indirect observation was used to identify the factors associated with participatory management and its impact on local development in the

canton of La Libertad, in order to highlight the central problems of the study.

Surveys were conducted among the 31 MSMEs and the inhabitants of the canton of La Libertad. These surveys, which consisted of 4 identification questions and 10 research questions, were aimed at evaluating participatory management and its impact on local development in the canton of La Libertad.

Documentary and virtual review: An exhaustive review of secondary sources such as books, scientific articles, theses and related documents was carried out. This provided theoretical support for the research and the proposal designed, providing a solid frame of reference on the topic of study.

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Results

Social management emerges as a critical factor in promoting sustainable local development in the canton of La Libertad. The results reveal significant findings that highlight the importance of this approach in strengthening the community and promoting sustainable growth. One of the main findings is the fundamental role played by social management in promoting active citizen participation in local decision-making processes. This active participation not only allows for a more equitable representation of community interests, but also strengthens the sense of belonging and collective identity.

The results of Illustration No.-2 show that 80.65% of the people surveyed consider that social management is the key factor for local development, thus allowing them to improve their living conditions; only 19.35% consider that other factors improve the sustainable development of the canton. It was determined how social management facilitates the creation of strategic alliances between different local actors, including municipal authorities, civil society organizations and the private sector. These collaborative alliances allow for better coordination of efforts and resources to address local challenges more effectively, thus promoting more comprehensive and sustainable development in the canton of La Libertad. The capacity of social management to foster collaboration and cooperation among different local actors emerges as a crucial outcome for the successful implementation of policies and programs aimed at improving the living conditions of the population.

Social management contributes to strengthening democratic and participatory governance in the canton of La Libertad. By involving the community in decision-making and accountability, it promotes greater transparency and legitimacy in the management of local affairs. This outcome is fundamental to ensure more equitable and sustainable development in La Libertad canton, while strengthening the population's trust in local institutions and their capacity to promote community well-being.

In the canton of La Libertad, several factors act as significant barriers to the effective implementation of participatory strategic planning. These factors include the lack of human and technical resources specialized in facilitating participatory processes. The shortage of trained personnel to lead and coordinate community consultation activities can limit the quality and effectiveness of strategic planning, making it difficult to include diverse local perspectives and needs in the process.

In addition, the lack of political will represents another major challenge in the implementation of participatory strategic planning in canton La Libertad. The absence of a strong commitment from local authorities may result in insufficient allocation of resources and institutional support to carry out meaningful participatory processes. This lack of political leadership can undermine the legitimacy and effectiveness of participatory strategic planning, leaving the community unattended and voiceless in decisions that affect their future.

The results show that 58% of the people surveyed indicate that the main factor preventing the implementation of participatory strategic planning in the canton of La Libertad is the lack of political will, while 19% state that compliance is hindered by the lack of specialized human and technical resources. It is evident that 13% of the respondents consider that it is due to the absence of a solid commitment, and 105% state that it is due to the lack of knowledge of participation mechanisms.

The lack of awareness and sensitization on the importance of citizen participation and strategic planning in local development is identified as another factor that hinders its implementation in the canton of La Libertad. The lack of understanding about the benefits and relevance of these processes can limit the community's active participation and commitment to participatory strategic planning. Therefore, additional

efforts are needed to educate and sensitize the population on these issues, thus encouraging greater participation and commitment to participatory strategic planning in the canton of La Libertad.

The analysis of the perspectives of participation mechanisms to strengthen local development in the canton of La Libertad reveals a series of opportunities and challenges in the process of citizen involvement. First, there is a growing interest and awareness among the inhabitants of the canton about the importance of their participation in local decision making. This interest reflects a collective will to actively contribute to the development of the community and promote the common good.

However, despite the recognition of the importance of citizen participation, there are significant challenges in the effective implementation of participation mechanisms in the canton of La Libertad. One of the main challenges is the lack of adequate infrastructure and resources to facilitate and support these participation processes. The scarcity of physical spaces, adequate technology and trained personnel can hinder the inclusion and equitable representation of all sectors of the population in local decisions.

In addition, there is a need to strengthen the capacity of local stakeholders to participate effectively in decision-making processes. This includes training in leadership, negotiation and conflict resolution skills, as well as access to relevant and timely information on the issues under discussion. Strengthening these capacities can promote more informed and meaningful community participation in building more inclusive and sustainable local development in the canton of La Libertad.

According to the surveys conducted, it was determined that 42% of the respondents consider that there is a growing interest and awareness of citizen participation, while 31% consider that it reflects the strengthening of participation capacities, and 27% indicate that there is a recognition of the importance of participation.

3.4 Design of a participatory management model to strengthen local development in the canton of La Libertad, province of Santa Elena.

The proposed model MGPLLCLL - 2024, is a metamodel of own authorship that has the name by its acronym identified as: participatory management model to strengthen the local development of the canton La Libertad, province of Santa Elena, developed in the year 2024, aims to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants. The model is designed in relation to the criteria determined in this research, thus allowing to improve the critical factors that affect sustainability.

The main objective of the proposed participatory management model is to strengthen local development in the canton of La Libertad, promoting the active participation of the community in decision-making and project implementation. It seeks to generate inclusive and democratic spaces where the different local actors can collaborate effectively to identify needs, define priorities and work towards finding solutions to the common challenges faced by the community.

The model is based on the principles of citizen participation, transparency, inclusion and sustainability. It proposes an integrated approach that involves all sectors of society, including municipal authorities, community leaders, civil society organizations, entrepreneurs and citizens in general. Community participation will not be limited to consultation, but will promote their active involvement in all stages of the local development process, from the identification of needs to the evaluation of results.

The key factors of the model are described below:

Programs and projects: This factor focuses on the identification, design, implementation and follow-up of concrete initiatives that respond to the needs and aspirations of the community, actively involving the different local stakeholders throughout the process.

Participatory Strategic Planning: Based on the results of the diagnosis, a participatory strategic plan will be developed to establish the canton's development priorities in the short, medium and long term. This plan will be developed in a collaborative manner, with the active participation of the community in the definition of objectives, goals and concrete actions.

Creation of Participation Spaces: Permanent spaces for citizen participation will be established, such as consultative councils or working groups, where the different local stakeholders can discuss,

propose and make decisions on issues relevant to the development of the canton of La Libertad.

Training and Capacity Building: Training and capacity building activities will be carried out for local stakeholders in order to empower and prepare them to participate effectively in participatory management processes.

Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation: A participatory monitoring and evaluation system will be established to allow continuous follow-up of the actions implemented and their impact on local development. This system will involve the community in data collection and analysis, as well as in the evaluation of results, in order to ensure transparency and accountability in the process.

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Promotion of Alliances and Cooperation: The creation of alliances and cooperation between different local actors, as well as with governmental institutions, international organizations and the private sector will be promoted. These alliances will make it possible to broaden the scope and effectiveness of the actions undertaken, as well as to guarantee the financial and operational sustainability of the participatory management model.

This model recognizes the importance of education, technology, expert advice and community participation as fundamental elements in achieving a balance between the fiscal, environmental and social needs of aquaculture enterprises. By integrating these components, it seeks not only to strengthen business sustainability, but also to contribute positively to the sustainable development of St. Helena, ensuring harmony between economic growth and respect for the environment and the community.

The findings of this study on participatory management and its impact on local development in the canton of La Libertad reveal an enriching panorama that highlights the importance of this approach in promoting inclusive and sustainable development in the community. The active participation of the population in decision-making processes and project implementation has emerged as a fundamental element to strengthen local governance and improve the quality of life of the inhabitants. As Rodriguez, (2021) points out, citizen participation not only strengthens the legitimacy of local policies, but also enriches the quality of decisions by integrating a diversity of perspectives and knowledge.

One of the main results of this study is the strengthening of the social fabric and community cohesion in the canton of La Libertad. The active participation of the different local actors has fostered a sense of belonging and shared identity among the inhabitants, thus promoting solidarity and collaboration in the search for solutions to common challenges. This result is consistent with the literature that highlights the crucial role of social capital in local development (Gutiérrez & Martínez, 2020).

In addition, there has been a positive impact on improving the quality of life of the population. Citizen participation in the identification of needs and the implementation of projects has made it possible to more effectively address local problems and meet community demands. This outcome is fundamental to ensure that development is people-centered and responsive to their aspirations and needs (Smith & Jones, 2021).

Another relevant aspect is the strengthening of local governance, since the collaboration between local government, civil society and the private sector has allowed for a more efficient and transparent management of resources, as well as greater accountability to citizens. This result is fundamental to promote a more democratic and participatory public management (Fernández et al., 2023).

However, it is important to recognize that the implementation of a participatory management model also faces challenges and limitations. Among these challenges are the need to strengthen the technical and organizational capacities of local stakeholders, as well as to ensure adequate financial resources and maintain an ongoing commitment to citizen participation. These aspects must be addressed comprehensively to ensure the long-term sustainability of this approach in the canton of La Libertad.

The results of this study suggest that participatory management has a positive impact on local development in the canton of La Libertad, promoting the strengthening of the social fabric, improving the quality of life of the population and strengthening local governance. However, continued commitment and concrete actions are required to overcome the challenges and limitations identified and to ensure the long-term sustainability of this approach in the community.

Conclusions

Participatory management has proven to be an effective tool for strengthening the social fabric and promoting community cohesion in the canton of La Libertad. The active participation of the population in decision-making and project implementation has fostered a sense of belonging and shared identity among the inhabitants, contributing to the construction of a more united and supportive community.

The incorporation of citizen participation in local management has significantly improved the quality of policies and projects developed in the canton of La Libertad. The diversity of perspectives and knowledge contributed by the different actors involved has enriched decision making, making it possible to identify more relevant and effective solutions to local problems.

The canton of La Libertad has a wide range of endogenous resources, both natural and cultural, that can be used in a sustainable manner to promote its economic and social development. Diversification of the local economy, through the promotion of sectors such as tourism, sustainable agriculture and handicrafts, helps reduce dependence on vulnerable economic activities and generate employment and business opportunities for the local population.

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