

ORIGINAL

## Development of microbusinesses within the framework of the solidarity economy: an international approach for the food and beverage sector

### Desarrollo de micronegocios en el marco de la economía solidaria: un enfoque internacional para el sector de alimentos y bebidas

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#### ABSTRACT

This international study focuses on the development of microenterprises in the food and beverage sector within the context of the solidarity economy. Its main objective is to analyze and promote economic and social sustainability by supporting small businesses engaged in the production and distribution of food and beverages. This approach involves collecting qualitative and quantitative data from microenterprises in different international settings. Interviews, surveys, and analyses of economic and social data are used to assess the impact of these projects on their respective communities and sectors. These findings highlight the significant role of microenterprises in promoting ethical business practices, job creation, and fostering local and international collaboration in the food and beverage sector. It is concluded that supporting microenterprises in the solidarity economy can significantly contribute to sustainability and economic equity in the global food and beverage sector. This study provides empirical evidence supporting the notion that microenterprises are agents of change in the solidarity economy and have positive impacts both at the national and international levels in the Food and Beverage sector.

**Keywords:** Food and Beverages; Development; Solidarity Economy; International Approach; Microbusinesses.

#### RESUMEN

El presente estudio se centra en el desarrollo de microempresas del sector de alimentos y bebidas aplicado en la economía solidaria con enfoque internacional. El principal objetivo es analizar la sostenibilidad económica y social mediante el apoyo a las pequeñas empresas que operan en la producción y distribución de alimentos y bebidas. Este método implica recopilar datos cualitativos de microempresas en diferentes contextos internacionales utilizando entrevistas, encuestas y análisis de datos económicos y sociales para evaluar el impacto de estos proyectos en sus respectivas comunidades y sectores. Estos hallazgos resaltan el importante papel de las microempresas en la promoción de prácticas comerciales éticas, la creación de empleos y el fomento de la colaboración local e internacional en el sector de alimentos y bebidas. El apoyo a las microempresas en la economía solidaria puede contribuir significativamente a la sostenibilidad y la equidad económica en dicho sector a nivel mundial y proporciona evidencia empírica que respalda la idea de que las microempresas son agentes de cambio en la economía solidaria y tienen impactos positivos tanto a nivel nacional como internacional.

**Palabras clave:** Alimentos y Bebidas; Desarrollo; Economía Solidaria; Enfoque Internacional; Micronegocios.

## INTRODUCTION

'In a global context characterised by the search for more equitable and sustainable economic and commercial alternatives, the development of micro-enterprises in the food and beverage sector within the framework of the solidarity economy appears to be an important prospect for determining growth at the local, regional, national and international levels'.<sup>(1)</sup> It is also possible to examine how these microenterprises can contribute significantly to promoting economic and social sustainability internationally. The following pages explore this study's objectives, methods, results, conclusions, and empirical contributions.

This study explains microenterprises' impact on the food and beverage sector. Focusing on the global solidarity economy shows how these companies can promote economic and social justice and ethical and sustainable business practices in an important industry.

The results of this study reveal the critical importance of microenterprises in the food and beverage sector. 'These ventures generate income for entrepreneurs and play a fundamental role in promoting ethical business practices'.<sup>(2)</sup> In addition, they stand out as generators of employment, contributing to the economic well-being of the communities in which they operate, and they also foster cooperation at both the local and international levels, creating networks that drive the growth of the food and beverage sector.

To address this study, a multifaceted methodology was implemented, including collecting qualitative and quantitative data from micro-businesses in various international locations. Interviews with entrepreneurs, customer surveys, and economic and social data analysis supported the methodology. This approach allows for a holistic understanding of micro-businesses' impact on their respective communities and sectors.

Ultimately, this study concludes that supporting microbusinesses within the solidarity economy can substantially impact economic sustainability and equity in the global food and beverage sector. 'Microbusinesses are emerging as agents of change in the solidarity economy, demonstrating their ability to influence both local contexts and the global economy positively'.<sup>(3)</sup>

This study contributes solid empirical evidence to support the notion that microbusinesses are agents of change in the solidarity economy and positively impact the food and beverage sector. The empirical findings provide a solid basis for decision-making and policy design to promote and support these enterprises at the international level.

In summary, this study illuminates the crucial role that microbusinesses play in promoting ethical business practices and economic and social sustainability in this sector. Its findings highlight the need to continue supporting and strengthening this group as part of the global solidarity economy.

## METHOD

The approach adopted in this study was based solely on reviewing and analyzing previously recorded information without conducting field research or collecting primary data.

It begins with a comprehensive and systematic review of the academic literature and previous studies related to microenterprises in the food and beverage sector in the solidarity economy. This process is carried out rigorously to identify and select academic research, empirical research, and other relevant literature.

In collecting secondary data, statistical reports, economic analyses, and previous research documents are extracted from many different sources as deemed necessary to provide a complete context when reviewing and analysing the existing information.

The analysis of documents from the selected works includes applying qualitative analysis techniques to identify patterns, trends, and recurring findings in the existing literature. Information synthesis will also be sought to produce conclusions and empirical contributions based on the critical review and analysis of the recorded information.

## Writing Plan

### *Socioeconomic Impact of Microenterprises*

Microbusinesses in the food and beverage sector within the solidarity economy are key players in promoting sustainable and equitable development at the global level. These enterprises, most of which are small-scale, contribute significantly to the economic and social fabric of the communities in which they operate.

Microbusinesses are small enterprises operating in various segments of the food and beverage sector, from the production and distribution of fresh food to the manufacture of artisanal products. Within the framework of the solidarity economy, these enterprises share the fundamental values of equity, cooperation, and sustainability'.<sup>(4)</sup>

The study of the socio-economic impact of micro-businesses within the food and beverage industry is relevant because they can generate employment, foster ethical business practices, and promote economic equity. They are an essential source of employment in local communities, contributing to the reduction of inequality and the strengthening of social cohesion.

Through a rigorous analysis of existing literature and documented information, this study aims to draw solid conclusions and empirical contributions supporting the importance of micro-businesses in the food and beverage

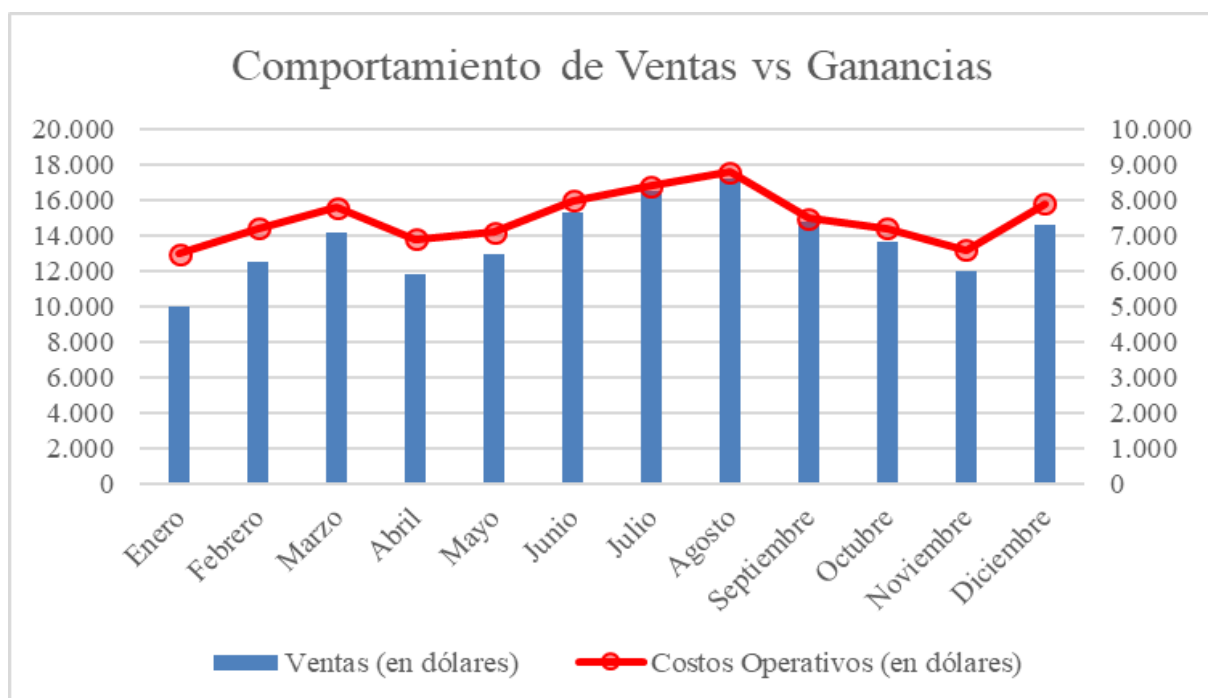
sector within the solidarity economy framework. The evidence gathered will provide a better understanding of how these enterprises contribute to sustainable development and the promotion of ethical business practices in an international context.<sup>(5)</sup>

A fundamental aspect of understanding the impact of microenterprises on the agri-food industry is to look at the numbers. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the food and hospitality sector employs more than 144 million people worldwide. A significant proportion of these figures are microenterprise workers, making this contribution to employment an important source of income and generating valuable social impact.<sup>(6)</sup>

**Table 1.** Overview of the performance of micro-businesses in the food and beverage sector

Month	Sales (in dollars)	Sales (in dollars)	Sales (in dollars)
	10 000	6500	3500
January	12 500	7200	5300
February	14 200	7800	6400
March	11 800	6900	4900
April	13 000	7100	5900
May	15 300	8000	7300
June	16 500	8400	8100
July	17 200	8800	8400
August	14 800	7500	7300
September	13 700	7200	6500
October	12 000	6600	5400
November	14 600	7900	6700

This table provides a detailed overview of the financial development of micro-enterprises in the food and beverage sector over a calendar year. The dollar value reflects the monthly revenue, operating expenses, and net profit of these companies. With this data, we can observe interesting trends in their financial results. For example, sales started the year at £10 000 in January and peaked in August at £17 200, demonstrating seasonality in the industry. As revenue increases, operating costs also increase, directly affecting net profit. The highest net profit was recorded in August at £8400. This information provides a better understanding of the financial stability and economic challenges faced by microenterprises throughout the year, which can be useful for decision-making and financial planning in the food and beverage sector (figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Sales vs. profits in microbusinesses

Microenterprises often operate in local and rural communities, where their presence is vital in creating jobs and promoting economic stability in regions that often face economic challenges. An example of this is agricultural cooperatives that specialise in organic food production. These cooperatives promote sustainable agricultural practices and employ local farmers, contributing to rural economic stability.<sup>(7)</sup>

By focusing on sustainable food and beverage production, microenterprises help protect the environment. A clear example is craft breweries that produce high-quality beer using local ingredients and traditional techniques. This diversifies their beer offering, contributing to the local economy and promoting sustainable practices such as organic farming and local food production, which are standard practices in these companies, promoting sustainability and short supply chains.

### *Sustainability of Microbusinesses*

Continuing with the theme of microbusiness sustainability, an international approach within the framework of the solidarity economy is emphasized.<sup>(7)</sup>

Sustainability is an essential pillar of microenterprises in the food and beverage sector. These microenterprises are ambassadors for these processes in their operations, encompassing responsible management of natural resources, commitment to social and economic justice, and promoting ethical business practices. These three dimensions of sustainability fit perfectly within the solidarity economy framework and are applied in international development approaches.<sup>(8)</sup>

Microenterprises in the food and beverage sector place significant emphasis on sustainability in economic, environmental, and social terms. They seek to maximise profits while striving to operate responsibly and sustainably. This approach is consistent with the solidarity economy principles, which promote cooperation, equity, and justice in economic transactions.<sup>(9)</sup>

Sustainable processes are reflected in many facets of these microenterprises, including their focus on food production by adopting organic agricultural practices that reduce food waste and promote local production. These practices contribute to the preservation of the environment and the supply of high-quality food within the solidarity economy framework.<sup>(7)</sup>

Table 2. Keys to Sustainability for Microbusinesses in Food and Beverages	
Order of relevance	Key Topic
1	Organic Agriculture and Sustainable Production
2	Short Supply Chain
3	Equity in the Solidarity Economy
4	International Projection

Organic farming, for example, is an essential component of sustainability in the food and beverage sector. Micro-businesses engaged in organic food production eliminate the use of pesticides and harmful chemicals, focus on soil conservation and biodiversity, and benefit the environment by promoting the production of healthier, higher-quality food, which translates into greater value for consumers.

Sustainability is also evident in the promotion of short supply chains. These chains enable microenterprises to establish direct links with local producers, eliminating intermediaries and reducing carbon emissions from long-distance food transport. This approach contributes to the economic sustainability of local communities while minimising environmental impact.

Short supply chains are a prime example of how microenterprises can promote sustainable practices by reducing the distance between producers and consumers, minimising carbon emissions associated with food transport. This benefits the environment and promotes economic sustainability by ensuring local communities receive more profits.

The solidarity economy is characterised by the promotion of equity and economic cooperation. Microenterprises share these values by focusing on ethical business practices and the equitable distribution of profits among actors in the value chain, from producers to consumers.

Economic justice is an essential aspect of sustainability, as micro-enterprises ensure that producers receive fair prices for their products and that consumers have access to quality food at reasonable prices. This economic justice benefits producers and consumers, contributing to local communities' economic and social stability.

The solidarity economy is not limited to national borders. As with globalisation, micro-businesses in the food and beverage sector can be important players in international trade, encouraging the export of local and sustainable products, increasing income, and strengthening the image of the local community at a global level.

Microbusinesses can operate in international markets by promoting products and values of sustainability

and equity in the solidarity economy. This is particularly relevant in the era of globalisation, where consumers are increasingly looking for sustainable and ethical products. Exporting local and sustainable products allows microbusinesses to expand their reach and contribute to the promotion of responsible business practices at the international level.

Measuring sustainability in microbusinesses is a fundamental process. These indicators show the carbon footprint, resource efficiency, equity in the supply chain, and social impact on the community, providing concrete data on the sustainable performance of microbusinesses.

Measuring sustainability is essential for evaluating and improving the performance of microbusinesses on the path to sustainable and equitable development in the food and beverage sector. The carbon footprint, for example, can be calculated to assess the environmental impact of a microbusiness's operations, allowing for identifying areas for improvement in resource management and emissions reduction. Resource efficiency is measured through process optimisation, waste reduction, and responsible management of natural resources.

### *Challenges and Opportunities for Microbusinesses*

As discussed above, microbusinesses in the food and beverage sector stand out for their contribution to socio-economic impact and sustainability within the solidarity economy framework and international approaches. This generates an understanding of their evolution and potential impact, which should be explored in greater depth, including the challenges they face and the opportunities they have before them when integrating sustainability into their operations.<sup>(10)</sup>

Despite their commitment to sustainability, micro-businesses face several challenges in successfully integrating it into their operations. One of the most notable challenges is limited access to adequate resources and financing, as investment in sustainable technologies, training, and the development of ethical practices can be costly, and the small size of micro-businesses often limits their ability to make significant investments. Lack of information and technical support is also a key challenge; for example, many of these businesses lack access to data and guidance that would enable them to make informed decisions about sustainability. Training in sustainable practices and technical support is essential to help these businesses understand and adopt responsible practices.<sup>(11)</sup>

Table 3. Identification of challenges and opportunities for micro-businesses		
Category	Challenges	Opportunities
Funding	Limited access to resources and funding	Growing demand for sustainable products
Information	Lack of information and technical support	Collaboration and support networks
International	Compliance with international standards	Export of sustainable products

Despite the challenges, microbusinesses have significant opportunities to integrate sustainability into their operations. One of the most notable opportunities is the growing consumer interest in sustainable and ethical products, which can be capitalised on by the growing demand for responsibly and sustainably produced food and beverages. In addition, collaboration is also a key opportunity, as joining networks and associations that promote sustainability and the solidarity economy offers support, guidance, and opportunities for collaboration that can strengthen microbusinesses' capacity to implement sustainable practices.<sup>(12)</sup>

International outreach is a significant opportunity for micro-businesses in the food and beverage sector. Exporting sustainable products allows these businesses to expand their reach and promote their sustainability values in international markets, increasing revenue and promoting the local community's image globally. However, internationalisation also poses challenges, such as compliance with international standards and competition in global markets, so they must be prepared to face these challenges and take advantage of the opportunities offered by international outreach.

## **RESULTS**

A detailed analysis of the socio-economic impact of micro-enterprises in the food and beverage sector yields significant results. Firstly, it has been established that these enterprises play an important role in promoting sustainable and equitable development worldwide due to their orientation towards a solidarity economy based on the values of equity, cooperation, and sustainability. These values are reflected in their business activities and have a positive impact at both the national and international levels.<sup>(13)</sup>



**Table 4.** Socioeconomic Impact of Microenterprises in the Food and Beverage Sector

Appearance	Result
Socio-economic impact	Significant
Job creation	Important contribution
Ethical and sustainable business practices	Core component of the activity
Examples	Microbreweries
	Organic farming
	Local food production

One of the most notable findings is the impact on job creation that micro-businesses in the food and beverage sector have on local communities, significantly reducing economic inequality and strengthening social cohesion. These businesses often operate in rural areas and local communities, where their presence is vital for economic stability.

Furthermore, the promotion of ethical and sustainable business practices is a central component of their activity. Craft microbreweries, for example, demonstrate how sustainable food and beverage production can be beneficial to both the local economy and the environment. Organic farming and local food production, adopted by many microbusinesses, contribute to sustainability and short supply chains.<sup>(14)</sup>

An in-depth analysis of the sustainability of microbusinesses in the food and beverage sector reveals key findings. First, it confirms that these enterprises are ambassadors for sustainability in its three dimensions:

**Table 5.** Aspects and focus points in the sustainability of microbusinesses

Appearance	Starting point
Dimension of sustainability	Economic, environmental and social
Sustainability approach	Ethical and sustainable business practices, promotion of cooperation, equity and justice in economic transactions
Sustainable food production	Organic farming, reduction of food waste and promotion of local production
Organic farming	Elimination of harmful pesticides, promotion of soil health and biodiversity
Short supply chain	Direct links with local producers, reduction of carbon emissions, benefits to the local economy
Economic equity	Fair distribution of profits in the value chain, promotion of economic stability and social cohesion
International outreach	Export of sustainable products, increased income and promotion of sustainability values globally

Within the framework of the solidarity economy, sustainability is not just an aspiration but a daily practice. These micro-businesses turn profitability into profitability while operating responsibly and promoting ethical and sustainable business practices. This approach reinforces the solidarity economy principles, which promote cooperation, equity, and justice in economic transactions.

One of the most notable aspects of sustainability in microenterprises is their emphasis on sustainable food production by adopting organic farming practices, reducing food waste, and promoting local production. Organic agriculture, in particular, is the backbone of sustainability in the food and beverage sector, as it eliminates harmful pesticides and promotes soil health and biodiversity learning, thus benefiting both the environment and consumers.<sup>(15)</sup>

The promotion of short supply chains is another notable example of how microbusinesses contribute to sustainability by establishing direct links with local producers, reducing carbon emissions associated with long-distance food transport, which benefits both the local economy and the environment by minimising the carbon footprint and promoting the economic sustainability of local communities by ensuring that a significant portion of the profits remain in the community.

The solidarity economy, with its focus on economic equity and cooperation, perfectly complements the sustainable values of microbusinesses. These values are manifested in the fair distribution of profits throughout the value chain, helping both producers and consumers. This equity drives economic stability and fosters social cohesion in local communities.<sup>(16)</sup>

In a globalised world, food and beverage micro-businesses can expand their reach and promote responsible

business practices internationally. Exporting local and sustainable products increases income and strengthens the local community's image globally, aligning micro-businesses with the values of sustainability and equity in the global economy.

Measuring sustainability in microenterprises is essential to assess their performance and progress towards sustainable and equitable development in the food and beverage sector. Key indicators such as carbon emissions, resource efficiency, supply chain equity, and social impact provide concrete data to assess sustainability performance, enabling the identification of areas for improvement in resource management and emissions reduction, which is essential for moving towards a more sustainable future in this sector.<sup>(17)</sup>

A detailed analysis of the challenges and opportunities facing micro-businesses in the food and beverage sector provides an insightful view of their evolution and potential impact. Despite their commitment to sustainability, these enterprises face significant challenges in integrating it into their operations. Accessing adequate resources and financing remains a key challenge, as investments in sustainable technologies and ethical practices can be costly, and the limited investment capacity of micro-enterprises often represents an obstacle.<sup>(18)</sup>

Lack of information and technical support is another prominent challenge, as many microbusinesses lack access to data and guidance that would enable them to make informed decisions about sustainability. Training in sustainable practices and technical support are essential to overcome this barrier and facilitate the adoption of responsible practices. However, despite the challenges, there are also notable opportunities to explore, such as the growing consumer demand for sustainable and ethical products, representing a significant opportunity for microbusinesses. These enterprises can capitalize on this growing interest by offering responsibly and sustainably produced food and beverages.<sup>(19)</sup>

**Table 6.** Financial performance of micro-businesses in the face of current threats

Month	Annual sales 1	Annual sales 2	Percentage change
	10 000	11 000	10
January	12 500	13 500	8
February	14 200	14 800	4,20
March	11 800	12 200	3
April	13 000	13 000	0
May	15 300	15 300	0
June	16 500	16 800	1,80
July	17 200	17 500	1,70
August	14 800	14 900	1
September	13 700	13 700	0
October	12 000	12 100	1
November	14 600	14 600	0

Collaboration also presents a key opportunity thanks to the links that micro-businesses can forge with networks and associations that promote sustainability and the solidarity economy. These associations provide support, guidance, and opportunities for collaboration that strengthen micro-businesses' capacity to implement sustainable practices effectively.<sup>(20)</sup>

As shown in figure 2, the progress and advancement of microenterprises are analysed. However, as the level of threat factors has not been adjusted or taken into account directly, there are very few value changes in future processes. When comparing the beginning of the year with the end, the impact of threat mitigation and support for opportunities in certain aspects of microenterprises is constant.<sup>(21)</sup>

International projection also stands out as a significant opportunity for the export of sustainable products. This allows micro-businesses to expand their reach and promote their sustainability values in international markets, which not only increases income but also strengthens the image of the local community globally.

While internationalisation brings challenges, such as compliance with international standards and competition in global markets, micro-businesses must be prepared to face them and take advantage of the opportunities offered by international outreach. In summary, the study highlights that, despite the apparent obstacles, the opportunities are equally remarkable and promise a future in which sustainable microbusinesses play a crucial role in promoting responsible business practices at the international level.<sup>(22)</sup>

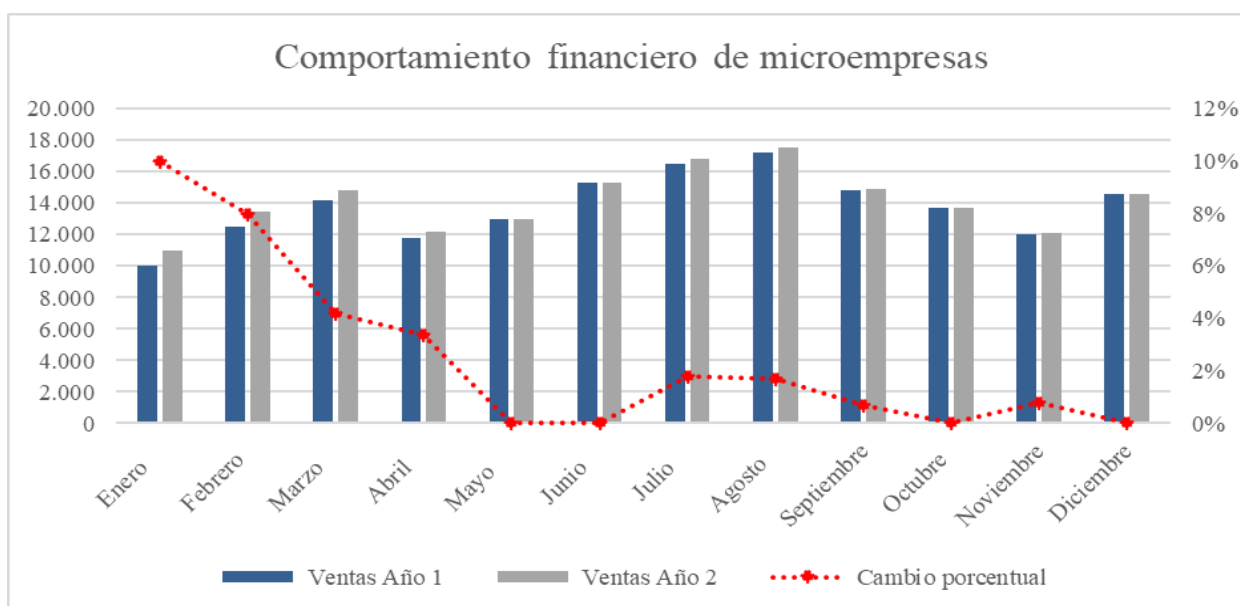


Figure 2. Financial behaviour of microenterprises

## DISCUSSION

The study focused on exploring and analysing in depth the role of micro-enterprises in the food and beverage sector in the solidarity economy. This comprehensive approach identified three key dimensions.

First, the significant socioeconomic impact of microenterprises in the food and beverage sector on the communities where they operate has been highlighted. Despite their small size, these enterprises play an essential role in promoting sustainable and equitable development at the global level by generating employment and promoting ethical business practices that foster economic justice, reducing inequality, and strengthening social cohesion. Operating mainly in local and rural communities, these microenterprises create jobs and promote economic stability in areas often facing economic challenges. In addition, their focus on sustainable food production contributes to environmental protection.<sup>(23)</sup>

Secondly, sustainability has been highlighted as a fundamental pillar in the operation of microenterprises in the food and beverage sector within the solidarity economy framework. These microenterprises seek to maximise profits and strive to operate responsibly, promoting ethical and sustainable business practices. This focus on sustainability fits perfectly with the solidarity economy principles, which encourage cooperation, equity, and justice in economic transactions. Research has highlighted sustainable practices in food production, such as organic farming, reducing food waste, and boosting local production. Short supply chains have also been identified as an essential strategy for sustainability.<sup>(24)</sup>

Third, the challenges and opportunities faced by microbusinesses in seeking to integrate sustainability into their operations have been identified. These challenges include limited access to adequate resources and financing, and a lack of information and technical support. The opportunities that have been highlighted focus on growing consumer interest in sustainable and ethical products and collaboration through networks and partnerships that promote sustainability. It has also been pointed out that international outreach offers a significant opportunity for these microbusinesses, despite its challenges.<sup>(25)</sup>

In addition to addressing these key issues, it is essential to mention that some areas require more in-depth and detailed analysis. For example, exploring specific metrics for measuring sustainability in microbusinesses and how these enterprises can improve their sustainable performance would be beneficial. It is also essential to consider the role of government policies and regulations in supporting or restricting sustainability in microbusinesses. Finally, including real-life case studies and practical examples of microbusinesses in diverse geographical contexts would further enrich the analysis, providing concrete examples of how these ventures address challenges and seize opportunities.<sup>(26)</sup>

In summary, this discussion topic offers a comprehensive view of the role of microbusinesses in the solidarity economy and the promotion of sustainability in the food and beverage sector. Although key dimensions have been explored, research continues, and significant potential exists for more in-depth and comprehensive analysis.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, microbusinesses in the food and beverage sector, within the framework of the solidarity economy and sustainability, are a fundamental element in the global economic landscape. These enterprises,



most of which are small-scale, play an essential role in promoting sustainable and equitable development at the international level. Their socioeconomic impact is undeniable, as they generate employment, promote ethical business practices, and contribute to economic equity.

Sustainability stands as one of the fundamental pillars of these micro-businesses. Their focus on sustainability, in its economic, environmental, and social dimensions, aligns perfectly with the values of the solidarity economy. They seek to maximise profits and operate responsibly, promoting ethical and sustainable business practices. This is beneficial for the enterprises themselves and has a positive impact on the communities in which they operate.

However, it is not all plain sailing. Microbusinesses face significant challenges, such as limited access to adequate resources and financing, and a lack of information and technical support. Despite these obstacles, there are significant opportunities. Growing consumer demand for sustainable and ethical products opens up new possibilities. In addition, collaboration through networks and partnerships can strengthen the capacity of microbusinesses to implement sustainable practices.

International expansion is another key opportunity for these ventures. Exporting sustainable products increases income and promotes sustainability values in international markets. However, this expansion has challenges, such as compliance with international standards and competition in global markets.

Analyzing microbusinesses in the food and beverage sector reveals a complex but encouraging picture. Sustainability is a fundamental pillar in line with the values of the solidarity economy and responds to growing demands from ethical and environmentally conscious consumers. While the challenges are evident, the opportunities are equally remarkable and promise a future in which sustainable microbusinesses play a crucial role in promoting responsible business practices at the international level.

Ultimately, research in this field continues to evolve. Despite the progress made, some areas require further analysis, specific metrics to measure sustainability, a focus on the impact of government policies and regulations, and practical examples of microbusinesses in different geographical contexts. The future promises a scenario in which sustainable microbusinesses will be crucial in promoting responsible business practices globally.

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