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## Current state of agricultural units: as a phenomenon and complexity

Estado actual de las unidades agrícolas: como fenómeno y complejidad

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### ABSTRACT:

This research identifies the current state of the Atlantic department's agricultural units, allowing knowledge of weaknesses and strengths. A subjective interpretation, a central point for knowledge and understanding of the systemicholistic reality of the study variable, is used as a methodology, based on the reflective analytical approach, with respect to the phenomenon and complexity, studied in the current theoretical references and classical disciplinary intellectual production. The findings show poverty figures, below the regional average, above the national average. The need to study the internal and external environment is concluded, considering technological progress and integration of the public and private of sector.

**KEYWORDS:** Current state of agricultural units, current state, external environment, internal environment.

### RESUMEN:

La presente investigación identifica el estado actual de las unidades agrícolas del departamento del Atlántico, permitiendo conocer las debilidades y fortalezas. Se utiliza como metodología una interpretación subjetiva, punto central para el conocimiento y entender la realidad sistémica – holística de la variable de estudio, partiendo del enfoque analítico reflexivo, respecto al fenómeno y

complejidad, estudiado en los referentes teóricos y producción intelectual disciplinares clásicos - actuales. Los hallazgos evidencian cifras de pobreza, inferiores al promedio regional, por encima del promedio nacional. Se concluye la necesidad de estudiar el ambiente externo e interno, considerando el progreso tecnológico e integración del sector público y privado.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Estado actual de las unidades agrícolas, estado actual, ambiente externo, ambiente interno.

## INTRODUCTION

Agricultural production units are under external and internal pressure, risking their survival. Outwardly, they are affected in their production model due to climate change, they are directly or indirectly aligned by the reality of international markets and their fluctuations, and they must increase their production yields to feed a growing population. Internally, agricultural production units suffer the consequences of the scarcity of vital resources to their activities, such as land suitable for farming, water and climate cycles that fit the biodiversity of each region. The resources and capacities they possess will be crucial for maintaining agribusinesses and create value in order to overcome poverty and hunger.

According to the United Nations (UN: 2020), in 2030 the world will have approximately 8500 million people who will demand food and water, which forces agro-industry to increase its production, having a more efficient use of the resources used in cultivation of food and animal husbandry; in addition to a climate that gradually becomes extreme due to global warming and causes storms, typhoons, prolonged droughts and floods.

The survival of agricultural units is a primary objective that concerns all actors, crucial for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030 (UN: 2015). These objectives were the ratification of the commitment of the countries of the world to end poverty and hunger, stated as the first and second target respectively. The NGO group Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (OXFAM), points out that the richest 1% of the world's population has a wealth that exceeds 6900 million people (2020), evidencing the gap between rich and poor today (BECK, 1999). The situations of hunger globally are also alarming, considering that in the world there are 820 million hungry people and nearly 2000 million have their food at risk (UN: 2019), a notorious problem in regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa with 1 in 4 people under extreme conditions of malnutrition and Asia with the largest population of people under this condition.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), states that Latin America and the Caribbean have made progress in food security, although poverty and malnutrition persists. In the case of Colombia, progress has been made in reducing the number of hungry people, from 4.2 million (9.7%) in the period 2004-2006 to 2.4 million (4.8%) in the three-year period 2016 -2018; in addition, the number of women of reproductive age with anemia has fallen from 22.1% in 2012 to 22.2% in 2016 (FAO 2019). However, the country faces challenges regarding the nutritional status of its population, such as low height for age among 500,000 children under five years and increasing obesity rates, from 6.3 million in 2012 and 7.5 million in 2016. FAO says that, following the fall in prices of raw materials, specially oil and coal, the country has suffered an economic slowdown that has led to an increase in monetary poverty figures, but extreme poverty has continued to fall between 2017 and 2018.

Colombia's, economic slowdown has been felt most strongly in the Caribbean region, which is located in the north of the country and has 22% of its population, contributing 15% to the Gross Domestic Product (BANCO DE LA REPÚBLICA: 2017 , pp 1-6, 33-35); its economic growth has been below the national average, leading to an increase in multidimensional poverty rates of 33.5% (regional average) compared to 19.6% (national average) in 2018, according to the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE: 2019, 2019), having an adverse impact on food security, violence and safety indicators (PÉREZ, FONTALVO, ACOSTA-LÓPEZ and VILLEGAS: 2018).

The department of Atlántico is no stranger to the situation of the Caribbean region, having figures of dimensional poverty, which, while lower than the regional average (the lowest in the region), are still above

the national average (20.1%). This condition is evident in its agricultural sector, which since the 1990s has lost weight in its economy and the number of cultivated lands has decreased (GOBERNACIÓN DEL ATLÁNTICO: 2016, pp. 62). According to the Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi (IGAC: 2016), there has been a misuse of the ground, incurring practices such as monoculture, which impoverishes fertile land through overuse or underuse. The department's agricultural production is based on small agribusiness or agricultural production units, which produce food for their own consumption and their surpluses are sold on national and international markets.

Therefore, it is necessary to identify the current state of the agricultural units of the department of Atlántico, allowing for knowledge of the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities, so that they can be studied in depth with other tools that lead to accurate forecasts, knowledge of the competition, organizational resources and capacities, and inclusion in value chains. This information collected is the basis for managers to devise strategies that help to achieve objectives.

Each company or unit is unique because it has different current status, which is evident when two companies in the same sector and competing in the same market, obtain different results. The way in which they use their strengths and resources is the key to seize the opportunities offered by the environment and their resistance to the threats they face. Allowing the identification of elements, resources and capacities in agricultural production units in Atlántico's department and the obtaining of competitive advantages that make it possible to increase their profitability and productivity. Therefore, the following question is asked: What is the current state of the agricultural units in the department of Atlántico that allows us to know their weaknesses and strengths?

#### **CURRENT STATUS: BASED ON THE REFLEXIVE ANALYTICAL APPROACH**

One of the main needs of managers is to know the current situation of their company. Reviewing inside and outside allows them to know the reality about the operation of the organization, compare with the rest of the industry and become the same, so that improvements are implemented to help gain competitive advantages and livelihood of the company. Several tools allow to know the current state of the organizations from different approaches, being necessary the combination of them to have a clear vision of what happens within companies and their environment, such as the study of the environment, analysis of strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats (SWOT), the five competitive forces, the vision based on resources (VBR) and analysis of the value chain.

Understanding the current state of organizations allows managers to design strategies that aim to achieve certain objectives, but these should not be built on a vacuum, but will correspond to situations in the external and internal environment of the company, otherwise the products and services they generate will fall into obsolescence (THOMPSON, STRICKLAND, JANES, SUTTON, PETERAF and GAMBLE: 2018; HERRERA, GUERRERO and RAMÍREZ: 2018; THOMPSON, STRICKLAND: 1999). Looking inside and outside the company, allow us to study trends and key facts, all in order to create value and competitive advantages sustainable over time (PORTER: 1998) while implementing strategies to obtain and preserve these advantages. In the external environment of companies there are opportunities and threats that successful managers are able to identify, since focusing exclusively on the internal operations of companies can lead unfavorable interpretations of the market trends and placing them in negative situations (WHEELEN and HUNGER: 2013). Effective management will have its sights set on both the external environment and what is happening within the company.

Constituted by factors and elements that are not part of the organization and that are difficult to influence, but may affect in a determining manner (RÍOS; RAMÍREZ, VILLALOBOS, RUÍZ and RAMOS: 2019), the elements of the external environment are a source of threats as well as opportunities for the organization. Therefore, the analysis of the current situation is an essential part of strategic management, posing challenges that managers must examine, focusing on how different elements of the external environment interact with the company (THOMPSON, STRICKLAND, JANES, SUTTON, PETERAF and GAMBLE: 2017).

Every organization is immersed in a system of political, legal, economic, socio-cultural and technological forces, which would be its macro-environment (INDACOCHEA: 2016 THOMPSON et al.: 2017). Adequately assessing its situation and perspective is necessary to analyze the macro-environment of enterprises, taking into account the conditions of the country, sector or industry in which the enterprise performs its socio- economic activity, since the environment conditions, the structure and attractiveness of the sector, which is necessary to weigh the strategic options (THOMPSON et al.: 2017; VILLALOBOS and RAMÍREZ: 2018; RAMÍREZ, CHACÓN and EL KADI: 2018).

The objective of the analysis of the external environment is to know the current situation of the company in the business environment and what the company must do to take advantage of the opportunities that arise in an environment that is constantly changing. This process is justified by the permanent innovation that the world is facing, leading countries to implement complex systems and use raw materials, machinery and more specific technology. Technological progress has led to the elimination of distances and barriers that prevent communication and exchange of goods and services anywhere in the world. Throughout history, the industrial development of these technologies has become the basis for the growth of countries, allowing the increase of competitiveness and productivity. For COLLADO, FOSSATI and SAEZ: (2018), technological changes determine competitive advantages by overcoming physical barriers and scarcity of natural resources.

For its part, the internal environment of the company allows to know the weaknesses and strengths of the company to take advantage of the opportunities that appear in the external environment and/or to take measures to prevent threats that are visualized in it. This implies performing two framework analyses, such as the value chain and the resource-based vision (THOMPSON et al.: 2017). The analysis of the value chain and the resource-based vision allow to know key components from inside the company, giving a deeper vision than the analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). The latter is a useful and proven tool for strategic analyses, after making an assessment of opportunities and threats from outside and knowing the weaknesses and strengths that are inside.

The effective manager must have the vision of what happens inside and outside the company, in order to know the operation and skills of the company and the innovations that happen in the industry (CHLADKOVA; FORMANKOVA: 2016), trying to anticipate trends and problems of the environment, implementing actions that keep the company in the forefront, maintaining competitive advantages and its existence in the sector. The identification of opportunities and threats is crucial to adequately understand the external environment of the company; their recognition in the current situation of the company should be complemented with other tools that allow for forecasts on the external environment and behavior of other competitors, such as the study of the environment or model of the five basic competitive forces. The strengths and weaknesses in the companies is the basis for knowledge of the internal environment and will be complemented with tools such as the resource-based vision and value chain analysis (See graph 1).

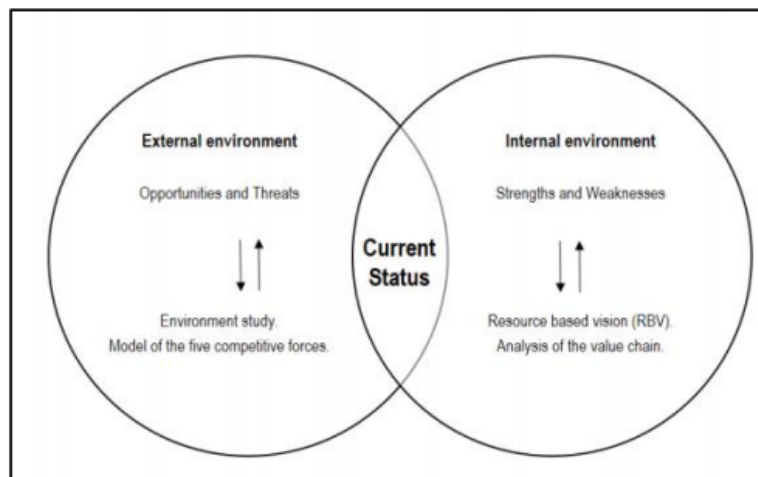


Figure 1: Current status, own elaboration (2020).

Analyzing the characteristics of the business environment requires studying its general environment and sector. A sector is made up of a number of companies that produce the same goods and services, sell them to similar customers and equivalent production methods. Management's ability to obtain information from the industry, understanding its dynamics and trends among different companies is the duty of strategic management.

SWOT analysis is one of the popular tools for studying the conditions in which a company and the sector in which it carries out its socio-economic activity are found. It is an acronym, has its correspondence in English (Strengths: fortalezas, Weaknesses: debilidades, Opportunities: oportunidades, Threats: amenazas) and is known as SWOT (INDACOCHEA: 2016). These provide the raw material for knowing the internal and external conditions in which a company or sector is located. Strengths and weaknesses refer to internal conditions, opportunities and threats to external conditions or those related to the overall environment of the company, its sector and industry.

This is a tool that provides the first inputs to determine the current state of the company, providing basic information to know a certain moment of the company or sector. The lack of depth is evident in several aspects of the items that compose it, such as the lack of strengths to derive an advantage, no matter how exceptional they are, probably do not generate a competitive advantage in the markets, since, in addition to being unique, they must play a decisive role in the functioning of the company. The focus of this tool is narrow to study the external environment, focusing on current customers and competitors without noticing relevant changes that occur, beyond the company's immediate environment, when it is required to redefine industry boundaries and possible competitive relationships.

SWOT focuses its attention on a particular moment in the company, only analyzes a photograph of reality and recognizes primordial elements, but is unable to recognize other elements of the composition of the same (VLADOS: 2019). At the same time, it attaches too much importance to one dimension of the strategy, focusing on a characteristic of the product or service they provide, ignoring key factors to succeed before competition.

By listing the company's attributes, managers get the basic information to perform an in-depth analysis. However, the analysis of strengths and weaknesses do not detail whether they are inherent to the company or are conditions present in the industry or environment, it may ignore that in the general environment there are circumstances that are both favorable and unfavorable and affect each company differently. This tool mentions the important issues, but does not lead to steps and actions needed to implement strategic changes.

For those who investigate, the current state is the diagnosis of the external and internal environment of the company, allowing to know the prospective and trends that occur in the exogenous and endogenous



organizational context. It is a two-way vision, interpreting external factors of the company and the way in which it is projected from the inside out. Therefore, it is an analysis that starts with the famous SWOT, providing information on opportunities and threats that underlie the external environment, factors that are beyond the control and influence of the company, but which have an impact on it.

In this sense, the diagnosis of the external environment combines other tools that provide a broad, retrospective and introspective vision, such as the study of the environment and identification of the five competitive forces, enabling knowledge of market trends, being the first step that managers must consider to design strategies that solve problems or help achieve objectives. It is up to management to think long-term, addressing the most urgent issues without losing focus on the organization's landscape. The analysis of the external environment is essential in choosing where and how to compete, how to use competitive advantages, market drivers, the market position of competitors, and the factors that determine the success of the competition.

The internal environment corresponds to an observation of structure, operation and resources available to the company. It must be seen to identify value generation in the units and capacities by the elements and resources. The combination of the previous components is the differentiation from one company to another, which would become properly channeled into competitive advantages. The term competitiveness is closely related to the variables of capacity and efficiency, that is, being able to generate more value with fewer resources and elements, providing totally differentiating attributes from the competition. The analysis of the current state should generate useful information for the design and implementation of strategies and these in turn, the achievement of certain corporate goals, such as maintaining a leadership position in the industry and/or market, greater profitability and survival of the company in the environment.

#### **CURRENT STATE OF AGRICULTURAL UNITS: AN APPROACH FROM THE PHENOMENON AND COMPLEXITY**

Agricultural production units must have people who know how to read the market and see what the competition is doing. The development of forecasts, the study of trends, will help to solve external problems that affect, while maximizing benefits and strengthening internal capacities. The combination of these will generate competitive advantages, obtaining a wider market share and leadership within the sector and the industry, minimizing error costs in the face of the phenomena of the global world, and the growing theory of complexity in organizations. Correctly implementing each tool to diagnose the current state is crucial to generate inputs that lead to solve problems in agribusiness, while helping to achieve objectives. For ALI and ISLAM (2014), the growth of agricultural units is necessary, as they respond to a market with a growing demand for food trying to allocate the greatest amount of resources to the countries and regions that require it, in order to feed a growing population and overcome poverty levels.

It is the responsibility of public and private sector entities to work together to identify opportunities and threats in the agribusiness environment, rapidly transmitting information that helps prevent emergencies and helps strengthen agricultural units. According to DA SILVA; GÓMEZ and CASTAÑEDA (2010), knowledge of the current state of agricultural units contributes to reach international markets, an opportunity arising from the release of world trade, and allows surplus production to be exported to various countries that do not have food self-sufficiency, while taking care of the particularities of each market.

Various instruments allow us to recognize the current state of agricultural units and demand a commitment from the people in charge of these organizations, hence the study as a phenomenon and the complexity of the variable studied in agro-industry, affected by social, economic, environmental and political factors. The external environment of agribusiness needs updated information on prices of surpluses produced in international and national markets; to know information about the climate and different meteorological emergencies that may occur at the place of the crops, to differentiate these events from those that occur regularly from those that are momentary or strange; be aware of opportunities in national and international markets, phytosanitary requirements of the markets that are interested in entering; define the strengths and

weaknesses of your rivals in the markets; this should generate forecasts regarding the scope, direction, speed and intensity in which the strategy to access new markets is developed.

In this regard, knowing the internal environment of agricultural companies is an essential task, since it allows them to know the strengths they would have to safeguard a position in the current market while entering a new environment, the weaknesses that must be minimized and that would mean a risk for the implementation of the strategy. This first input will be deepened with the understanding of the company's internal attributes, its elements, resources and capacities generated from these that have led to the acquisition of competitive advantage. Parallel to the above, structure the value chain within the company that allows to see the value created by the activities of the organization.

### STUDY OF THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

The effective manager must be able to recognize opportunities and threats of the external environment of their companies and pay attention to what happens outside them, realizing the phenomenon and complexity of the variable in an unstable and competitive market. The analysis of the environment requires permanently questioning the related postulates and following the rhythm of the changes that are generated in the external environment to acquire and sustain the comparative and competitive advantages, which is necessary to raise to project the company from its interior and thus to raise the best strategy.

A strategy can work at a given moment, but the frame of reference must be the external environment so that it does not lose connection with the current business situation, otherwise, it would be falling into assumptions, premises and beliefs without support or consistency that would invalidate the general theory of business. According to ANNIA, VILLALOBOS RAMÍREZ and RAMOS (2019) it is necessary that, in combination with different tools, an organization is created that is attentive to the environment in which it exercises its corporate purpose. The study of the external environment of agricultural units starts with the opportunities and threats identified in the SWOT and is deepened with other tools such as the study of the environment and model of the five competitive forces.

The study of the environment, aims to anticipate changes that are coming or are already occurring in the environment (DESS, LUMPKIN and EISNER: 2011). It focuses on trends and critical events before changes are noticeable to opponents, trying to be proactive and anticipating them (SUJOVÁ and REMEN: 2018). This analysis is the right combination of knowledge of the business and its customers and at the same time keeps an accurate and extensive vision, identifying emerging trends that influence the organization.

All this implies that managers should focus on trends such as globalization (ARZUBIAGA: 2018), which means an increase in the international exchange of goods, capital, information, people and ideas (RAMÍREZ, VILLALOBOS, VARGAS, RÍOS, LAY and FERNÁNDEZ : 2019); at the same time it presses governments to make laws with greater similarity, in order to equalize the rules, norms, values and income levels among the different countries of the world. Environmental monitoring analyzes the evolution of trends in the external environment, to track the sequence of events or the evolution of processes exogenous to the company. Competitive Intelligence (CI) helps to delimit and understand the industry by identifying strengths and weaknesses of the competition, including collecting data on rivals and interpreting them. The key to IC lies in anticipating the movements of competitors and reducing the reaction time to their actions (PLACER-MARURI; PÉREZ-GONZÁLEZ and SOTO-ACOSTA: 2016).

Environmental forecasting is the preparation for the design and execution of commendable and important projects for companies about the direction, scope, speed and intensity of environmental changes; in order to anticipate changes. Scenario analysis is a more in-depth approach than the facts in environment forecasting (YORI; DE HERNÁNDEZ and CHUMACEIRO: 2011), where different interests and disciplines are strategically combined, such as economics, psychology, sociology, politics, technology; in order to accurately dimension the external environment.

The study and monitoring of the environment allows us to know in an accurate way the particularities inherent to the company and the sector in which its socioeconomic activity resides, providing forecasts that



help managers to understand trends and gather information about competition. The competitive intelligence obtained from this tool allows to detect trends, evolution and sequence of events that generated them. Agribusinesses must pay attention to the environment, since it allows them to know useful information, such as new techniques, regulations, feedback from their customers about the products and services sold; data that allows them to maximize the company's performance.

On the other hand, the five competitive forces model analyzes the strengths, threats, weaknesses and opportunities of company's sector rivals and is the starting point for other analyzes that go deeper into various aspects, such as current and future competition. PORTER (1988) opened up a broader understanding of the term competition by including other actors that were not considered, mentioning, in addition to direct competition, another type of rivalry to what he called the five basic competitive forces.

Another important aspect is to know their concept of industry (PORTER: 1988) as a group of companies that offer to the market products that are close substitutes for each other, necessary for entrepreneurs to know the structure of the industry in which their company operates and to compete successfully. From the previous conception, the terms primary industry and secondary industry are derived, being the first a group of close competitors and in the second the indirect rivals. In line with the previous precepts, PORTER (1980,1988) combined principles of industrial economics and strategic behavior, obtaining as a result an analysis of five essential forces to analyze the behavior of competition in the industry, being this complementary to the study of the threats and opportunities for the sector: the degree of rivalry between the established companies within an industry (direct competitors), risk of entrance of new competitor, bargaining power of the buyers, bargaining power of the suppliers and proximity of substitute products in the industry.

The analysis of the five forces allows us to know if it is possible to create value in the industry or sector in which the company is immersed. If any of these five forces shows that it will be difficult or impossible to create value (PALAU and JATIB: 2003), or to change the industry, it will still be valid to devise strategies that will allow the company establish itself in that sector in the future, this being a key factor in determining the threats and opportunities and creating the appropriate strategy. The first force, degree of rivalry between established companies in an industry, refers to the direct competitors that a company has in a sector and the pressure that these exert on the performance and benefits to the company (DERFUS, MAGGITT, GRIMM and SMITH: 2008). If the intensity of this competition is greater, the profitability of companies in the industry is low because the existence of many companies in the same sector forces them to resort to tactics such as discounts on sales prices, increased services or guarantees to customers, introduction of new products and increased spending on advertising.

The risk for the entry of new competitors is the second force, with competitors not participating in the industry but having the capacity to intervene in the sector if they decide to do so. The entry of new competitors increases the installed capacity of the sector while assuming a high cost to achieve market positioning, meaning a risk in case the increase is greater than the market demand (MONTGOMERY and HARIHARAN: 1988), producing a decrease in prices and profitability of existing companies.

The third force or bargaining power of customers (buyers) is directly related to the monopsony, it means, the concentration of power by buyers. According to WHEELER and HUNGER (2013), the more the bargaining power of customers increases, either by pushing down prices or by demanding higher quality or services for the products purchased for the same value paid, the more bargaining power buyers acquire.

The fourth force, is the bargaining power of suppliers and is similar to the power of customers, when the bargaining power of suppliers increases, the attractiveness, the profitability of the sector also decreases (WHEELER and HUNGER: 2013). Price increases and decreases in the quality of products sold are means by which suppliers would put pressure on companies competing in an activity. The more specific a supplier's raw material or input is, or the fact that is dominated by a few suppliers, monopoly is generated by these (THOMPSON and STRICKLAND: 1999). If the inputs generated by the supplier are critical for the

company's activity or if it does not represent a significant customer, there is a disadvantageous relationship for the company.

The fifth force is the proximity of substitute products in the industry and these are goods and services that meet the same needs as the existing product from the customers' perspective, thus decreasing the profitability of the industry and expand the existing competition. Their existence represents a risk when substitutes entering the industry fulfil the same function at a lower cost (WHEELLEN and HUNGER: 2013). In this case, it is a question of analyzing to what extent they replace or displace the existing ones, taking as a strategy to counteract their adverse effect, the differentiation of the existing products with perceptible innovations for customers.

It should be noted that the five forces in Porter's model are not independent and they all influence and complement each other, depending on the industry or the time in which the companies are located (PORTER: 2008). All industries or sectors evolve and change over time, just as it happens in those sectors where implementing technological changes is simpler. In any case, it is necessary for companies to focus on the trends and events that are developing in the external environment, for management to have a proactive attitude towards change so that they can obtain and maintain the competitive advantages that will allow them to have a leading position in the sector.

The world's states and public and private institutions have an obligation to focus on the environment and take advantage of global trade release to acquire capital goods, technology and investment to increase agricultural production. Their study and permanent vigilance is key to obtaining knowledge that allows for better yields, taking advantage of the resources available and the way the market moves, analyzing consumer tastes and supporting themselves with interdisciplinary knowledge that manages to articulate innovation and new knowledge; at the same time they identify opportunities and threats and route them to the creation of value and profitability in agribusiness.

The analysis of the five forces helps agribusinesses to know their competition, the way they interact with customers and how they fit into the global supply chain, while identifying the entry of new competitors to the sector, measuring the dependence of production units on customers and suppliers. The external environment comprises everything under the control of the company and the agricultural production units must pay attention to what is being done in it. The current situation seen from the outside makes it possible to learn about opportunities that contribute to achieving certain objectives within the organization, expand and/or increase the profitability of the business.

The processes of globalization force companies to find opportunities outside the country where their economic activity takes place, integrating themselves into a global supply chain. At the same time, the changes that are taking place should not be seen as a threat that will put the existence of the company, at risk, but as an opportunity to improve and optimize processes, generating incomes that will allow the overcoming of hunger and poverty in food producing regions.

### STUDY OF THE INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

The SWOT analysis has shortcomings that prevent depth knowledge of the internal environment of the companies, limitations that do not allow managers to properly identify attributes and weaknesses of organizations. Listing the strengths and weaknesses is the starting point for developing a thorough analysis of the interior of the companies and not the intended purpose. It is a static image of a certain moment of the company that does not allow to look at the future, a tool that requires taking reactive action.

In order to analyze in depth the internal conditions in which the companies are, it is necessary to go beyond the enumeration of strengths and weaknesses, expanding their usefulness, functionality and context according to the market conditions. The differentiation in the way companies work is what allow us to know the reason why, despite the fact that companies share elements and functional units (marketing, human resources, logistics) they obtained different results, better performances from some with respect to others (DESS et al.: 2011).

Two tools are taken as a framework to know the internal environment of the companies: the resource-based vision and value chain analysis. In the first one, the company is analyzed as a series of elements and resources that lead to the generation of organizational capacities (TORRENS, AMAL and TONTINI: 2014). The resources must be valuable, useful, exceptional and almost irreplaceable for the company, and therefore difficult for the competition to imitate. Capacities are defined as the skills that companies possess to employ the elements and use the resources at their disposal, to be transformed into quality goods and services. The way in which these capacities are obtained, allows the company to be competitive in an industry. Competitiveness is understood as the relationship between capacity and efficiency, that is, generating value with fewer resources and, consequently, competitive advantages. These advantages must be preserved in order to maintain leadership in the sector.

The second tool breaks down the company's activities into a series of steps leading to the generation of value and then analyses the way in which the company's individual activities generate value (MAGADÁN-DÍAZ and RIVAS-GARCÍA: 2019 PORTER: 1985), their interactions and the links with other companies in the sector, suppliers and customers. These activities have been described by PORTER (1985) in his book *Competitive Advantage* in primary activities, which correspond to those that have a direct and material intervention in the manufacture of the product or service, it passes to the buyer, after-sales service is provided; and covers internal and external logistics, marketing, sales and service operations; and support activities, which are those that add value through interactions with primary or other support activities, including tasks such as technology development, human resources management and general administration.

The knowledge of the internal environment uses the study of the strengths and weaknesses, but it must be complemented with resource-based vision and value chain analysis. The resource-based vision allows to know the elements and resources, their interactions and the capacities that are generated. The product of this is to contemplate whether this leads to competitive advantage and how they should be preserved to ensure the permanence and leadership of companies in the sector in which they operate. The value chain clarifies the operation of the company, its activities and whether these generate value to the company and its customers, all these tools allow to know the current state of the companies, externally or internally, diagnoses needed to know in depth useful information to implement organizational strategies that lead managers to achieve objectives and/or solve problems.

The analysis of the current state generates the basis for comparing the company with respect to others, and for knowing the integral manner in which it responds to different stakeholders, as well as its performance and permanence in the sector, throwing up industry indicators, to adapt to complex environments. At the same time, the efficiency levels of the companies in the industry, will be known, as well as how they create or destroy value and how they obtain and maintain comparative and competitive advantages.

## **REFLECTIONS ON STUDIES OF THE CURRENT STATE OF AGRICULTURAL UNITS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ATLÁNTICO**

Agricultural production units identify their current state in a particular way, because their production processes involved forces that come from the external environment, without having any influence on them; but which condition the internal environment and, therefore, its structuring of elements, resources and capacities, as well as the value generation model. The external environment of these business units forces us to pay attention to the geography of the territories in which they carry out their productive process, since the climate, soil conditions and water supply are forces that pressure their socio-economic exercise. At the same time, there are pressures coming from global trade, turning food into new commodities in international markets, generating price escalation in the values of products and inputs, in addition to food price growth such as those registered at the beginning of the 21st century.

There is also a close relationship between food prices and climate change, causing crop losses, water shortage, prolonged droughts, alteration of the life cycle and biodiversity existing in each region, soil quality, extreme temperatures summers and winters, and floods and storms that devastate crops and generate

humanitarian emergencies (MARTÍNEZ: 2016). To all the above, agricultural production units must pay attention and care, considering these possibilities to develop forecasts and implement strategies to mitigate or solve the situation.

The internal environment of the agricultural units is conditioned by what happens in their environment, especially in the identification of the elements that make up the unit, the resources it has available for work and the capacities generated, analyzing whether there is value creation or destruction inside, since their recognition is the strength that helps minimize the weaknesses that exist inside, while being valuable for taking advantage of opportunities in the exogenous context of the companies.

Various studies on the current state of agricultural units, have applied formulas differently in each case. They refer to agricultural production units as being essential for meeting sustainable development challenges and producing fundamental goods for every society. The problems that originated these studies have been of environmental, economic, commercial and labor nature, identified with tools that were previously described.

Through a SWOT analysis, PADILLA, RUMAYOR-RODRÍGUEZ, PÉREZ-VEYNA and REYES-RIVAS (2010) conducted a study of the external and internal environment of the tomato industry in Zacatecas, Mexico; identifying public policies that stimulate sustainable competitiveness models. They demonstrated the need for high-level technologies combining organizational strategies and reaching international markets to take advantage of globalization and international trade liberalization.

The research, led by ALI E ISLAM (2014), aimed at better and more effective strategic management of the elements possessed by agribusiness in Bangladesh, focusing on an analysis of the internal environment and identifying the components of their value chains. It was found that a system comprising improved seed development to soil cultivation production and processing of various agricultural products, marketing and distribution, storage and transportation, new products development, export promotion, contributes to the industrial and economic development of the country. Value creation was found in the links of the value chain and improvement opportunities in key points such as poverty reduction, implementation of new technologies that optimize the production stages of agricultural inputs, processing of agricultural products, processing and conservation sectors, manufacturing and distribution.

Another case study was developed by RODRIGUES and BAKER (2012), focusing on the competition of the dairy company Grameen Danone Foods Limited (GDF) in different regions and countries of the world. The relationship between the release of the dairy industry in countries where the State owned companies and how these were absorbed by large consortiums that were monopolizing a percentage of the market, to the detriment of existing producers, was made clear.

RAMOS, POLO, ARRIETA and VÉLEZ (2018) identified the need for joint work between companies in the agro-industrial sector in the department of Atlántico, Colombia; in order to generate conditions that allow these companies to strengthen their internal structure to reach international markets, generating cooperation networks in innovation and the knowledge economy. This study points out the need to take advantage of the geographical benefits and a use of the elements and resources available. The correct knowledge of the current state of agricultural units is the basis for the design and implementation of strategies that contribute to the solution of problems and the achievement goals and objectives. As part of the study of the internal environment, it allows the knowledge of the elements, resources and capacities, to identify the competitive advantages created and to implement actions that help to preserve them.

As a reflection of the study of the current state of the agricultural units and their contributions to the department of Atlántico, these have urgent challenges that come from the external environment and difficulties in consolidating strengths and competitive advantages in their internal environment. The external environment forces the agricultural units to attend to market trends, consumer habits, and to monitor the work of the competition; foreseeing circumstances that would affect their production, such as climate change, rain and drought cycles, existence of water sources and soil conditions. On the other hand, the internal environment presses for the conservation of the elements, resources and capacities



that agribusinesses have, leaving aside practices that attempt against their own natural resources, such as monoculture or the use of land for agriculture in other economic activities; besides implementing organizational structures that allow them to integrate into global supply chains and strengthen value chains.

Agricultural production in the department of Atlántico has decreased since the opening of the economy, since before the 1990s, agribusiness did not develop sufficient strengths to take advantage of opportunities represented by the elimination of barriers that prevented access to international markets. At the same time, agricultural production units have suffered from the effects of climate change, with periods of drought and flooding that have devastated the urban and rural landscape of the municipalities, losing crops, fertile land, animal species and causing population displacement to larger cities. Although actions have been taken to mitigate and reverse the adverse results of these events, agriculture in the Atlántico economy has lost weight and has incurred in practices that are harmful to fertile soil, using it for industrial and housing projects, wasting the food production potential it has.

### CONCLUSIONS

Based on analytical reflective approach, regarding the phenomenon and complexity studied in the theoretical references and intellectual production of the classic-current disciplines, can be drawn that: (1) the current state of the agricultural units of the department of Atlántico is no stranger to the situation of the Caribbean region, with poverty figures that are lower than the regional average, but above the national average. Since the 1990s, the agricultural sector has lost weight in the departmental economy and at the same time, the number of cultivated lands has decreased, using the soil improperly, with monoculture practices, which impoverish the fertile land by over- or under-utilization; such production is based on small agribusiness or agricultural production units, producing food for own consumption and its surpluses are sold in national and international markets.

(2) The theory ratifies that several tools make it possible to know the current state of the organizations from different approaches, starting from the external and internal environment, in order to have a clear vision of what is happening within the companies and their environment, such as: the study of the environment, analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, the five competitive forces, the resource-based vision and analysis of the value chain. Being a fundamental part for the strategic management of human talent, posing challenges to the innovative, with green trends, orange economy, value generation, focusing on how different elements of the external environment interact with the company and its environment.

(3) Repeated technological progress has led to the lowering of barriers to the communication and exchange of goods and services anywhere in the world, with a tendency to be eliminated. The industrial development of these technologies has become the basis for the growth of the countries, allowing the increase of competitiveness and productivity, for that reason it is necessary the technological literacy in the human talent, specified by the present time as a technical competence to acquire to adapt to the new changes of the market, which will determine the competitive advantages when surpassing physical barriers and scarcity of natural resources.

(4) It is the responsibility of public and private sector entities to work together to identify opportunities and threats in the agribusiness environment, which will help prevent emergencies and strengthen agricultural units, their business networks, cluster and stakeholder. (5) Knowledge of the current state of agricultural units contributes to the reach of international markets, an opportunity that has arisen from the release of world trade to export surplus production to various countries that are not self-sufficient in food, while taking care of the particularities of the market.

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