

Mujer rural y participación en Medellín¹

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Mulheres rurais e participação em Medellín

 **Gleidy Alexandra Urrego Estrada**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7040-0048>

Institución Universitaria Colegio Mayor de Antioquia
gleidy.urrego@colmayor.edu.co
Medellín- Antioquia

 **Jazmín Andrea Gallego Castaño**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7233-3491>

Institución Universitaria Colegio Mayor de Antioquia
jazmin.gallego@colmayor.edu.co
Medellín- Antioquia

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Andrea Sarmiento Bohórquez

Style correction
Nataly Marcela Muñoz Murcia

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RESUMEN

Este escrito tiene como propósito identificar en el territorio los procesos de participación de la mujer rural en Medellín, para ello se orientó la metodología desde el enfoque cualitativo basado en la observación y análisis de prácticas, los modos y medios de vida que tejen las mujeres en los territorios rurales, a fin de interpretar el problema objeto de este estudio. A modo de resultado, la participación de la mujer rural en Medellín se convierte en un espacio posibilitador de procesos colectivos que las convocan a ser -hacer parte de la transformación de los territorios, a través de estrategias colectivas que buscan inclusión, reconocimiento y protección de bienes comunes. Como conclusión se tiene que la participación de la mujer rural es clave en procesos de soberanía alimentaria, reconocimiento simbólico, monetario y social de las actividades sociales y productivas asociadas al cuidado, a la no violencia y la discriminación en espacios como lo doméstico, lo público y lo institucional.

Palabras clave: territorio; mujer rural

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to identify the processes of participation of rural women in Medellín in the territory, for which the methodology was oriented from the qualitative approach based on the observation and analysis of practices, ways and livelihoods that women weave in rural territories, in order to interpret the problem object of this study. As a result, the participation of rural women in Medellín becomes an enabling space for collective processes that summon them to be part of the transformation of the territories, through collective strategies that seek inclusion, recognition and protection of common goods. In conclusion, the participation of rural women is key in processes of food sovereignty, symbolic, monetary and social recognition of social and productive activities associated with care, non-violence and without discrimination in spaces such as the domestic, public and institutional spheres.

Key words: territory; rural women; gender; Political participation

RESUMO

O objetivo deste artigo é identificar os processos de participação das mulheres rurais de Medellín no território, para isso a metodologia orientou-se a partir da abordagem qualitativa baseada na observação e análise das práticas, modos e modos de vida que as mulheres tecem nos territórios rurais, a fim de interpretar o objeto problemático deste estudo. Com isso, a participação das mulheres rurais em Medellín torna-se um espaço posibilitador de processos coletivos que as convocam a fazer parte da transformação dos territórios, por meio de estratégias coletivas que buscam a inclusão, o reconhecimento e a proteção dos bens comuns. Conclui-se que a participação das mulheres rurais é fundamental nos processos de soberania alimentar, reconhecimento simbólico, monetário e social das atividades sociais e produtivas associadas ao cuidado, à não violência e sem discriminação em espaços como o doméstico, público e institucional.

Palavras-chave: território; mulheres rurais; Gênero; Participação política

Background

Women as socially relevant subjects in both the private and public spheres have gained great recognition in recent years for their capacity for agency and for driving social processes in the region. These processes result in various practices related to the discussion of land tenure, production processes, the circular economy, closed economic circuits, participation, and culture, who have implemented productive, social,

and political projects for the preservation of ways of life and livelihoods in the political arena, that is, in institutional, formal, and bureaucratic spaces, as well as in territorial spaces where goods and services that give effect to constitutionally recognized rights are managed and allocated.

In this vein, the objective of this paper is to identify the processes of rural women's participation in Medellín. In this sense, the hypothesis assumes that women, individually and collectively, are not only beneficiaries of social welfare actions (passive recipients) but also direct agents of development (active participants, dynamic contributors). Thus, from the development of public policies in government institutions to activism that seeks to influence politics in the streets and neighborhoods, women inhabit multiple territories and generate practices within them. However, this does not mean that all political, cultural, relational, and economic obstacles have been overcome, which lead to phenomena, processes, and practices of exclusion and structural violence, and in extreme but increasingly common cases, to the violent elimination of their bodies as a kind of economy of punishment functional to power structures that feed on patriarchal and heteronormative references.

Among the areas for reflection is the historical backwardness of rural areas, which has led municipal administrations to focus their attention on territorial contexts, where men and women develop their skills and productive activities, demanding decent living conditions in order to remain in the territory. The rural world, as a complex and intersectional territory, exacerbates the vulnerability of rural women due to their gender and other factors such as poverty, unpaid domestic work, machismo, armed conflict, the sociocultural invention of race, and other historical situations that determine their modes and roles in social life.

It should be noted that gender inequality (Arboleda, 2022) represents, according to ECLAC (2019), a problem at the national and international level that hinders the timely fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), framed within different social topics, such as economic autonomy, access to land, and working conditions. This represents the gender gap between men and women. However, these issues are located in the city of Medellín, which has 30% urban territory and 70% rural territory (Medellín City Hall & National University, 2010).

This rurality is embodied in five townships: San Cristóbal, San Sebastián de Palmitas, Santa Elena, San Antonio de Prado, and Altavista. These are located on the slopes of the district, where territorial traditions are carried out around the use of rural land through farming as a productive process. In this sense, a discussion centered on gender equality and land rights (Gómez and Sanabria, 2020) is problematized, ranging from biological differences and sexual roles in different societies and a matter of asymmetrical power relations, language, and dominant forms of government. However, what interests this paper is to reflect on women, those considered rural who are framed within the settlement and habitat of a territory characterized by agricultural productive activities and peasant ways of life.

It is pertinent to note that the issue of gender, as indicated by Ramírez (2008), who proposes two feminist currents that define women and gender: cultural feminism and post-structuralist feminism. In the first current, the term is attributed to Alice Echols (1989) and is defined as feminist essence, with gender as a matter of identity that suggests determinism, marked by a binary and dualistic view of sex in which the body is subject to universal laws that are cultural rather than biological, since they are determined by meanings

“This paper aims to reflect on women, specifically those considered rural, who are part of the settlements and habitats of a territory characterized by agricultural production activities and rural lifestyles.”

Cultural feminism allows women to assert themselves and view many feminine characteristics as positive, as it values many characteristics associated with women. The downside of this trend is that it does not allow for a distinction between characteristics that are inherent to women and those that have not been able to develop due to male oppression (Ramírez, 2008, p.309).

The second school of thought problematizes femininity as an essence, since defining women as a given entity creates stereotypes (Zabala et al, 2023). This school of thought is framed within plurality and difference, which denaturalizes sex as a dominant biological issue. “According to post-structuralism, there are many differences, but most of them are social and cultural, and it is neither good nor advisable to divide people into two large groups, one of men and one of women, as this stereotypes both classifications (Ramírez, 2008, pp. 309-310). In fact, as Simone de Beauvoir (2005) pointed out, “one is not born a woman, but becomes one,” and with this, the discussion about it becomes a sociocultural rather than a biological issue.

However, from a post-structuralist perspective, it is possible to deconstruct gender relations, which, according to Butler (2017), are problematized based on biological, cultural, and linguistic differences between men and women in a context of social asymmetry. Women, from the perspective of gender relations, are a discursive construction in which their bodies acquire meaning based on the masculine, are sexually differentiated, and, of course, sexuality is framed within a heteronormative moral and reproductive control.

Thus, rural women in Colombia refer to a contextual perspective of cultural relations of domination, especially economic relations of subordination (Meneses, 2023; Arias et al, 2023). The latter relationship reflects a closed, objectifying, deterministic, and exclusionary economic mindset that operates according to the logic of progress, with linguistic and cultural manifestations that signify women living in rural areas as a body territory (Haesbaert, 2022) that matters little, but from a productive performativity, is an informal labor force subordinate to a patriarchal figure of father, husband, brothers, but who only appears to care for and contribute to generating the precarious livelihood of their households.

Therefore, rural women fit into anthropological and historical positions that consider gender as a “relationship between socially constituted subjects in specific contexts” (Butler, 2017, p.55). It is understandable that rural women find themselves in an interstice between the culturally determined and the plurality that emerges as a line of flight (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994), as a matter of creating their position and corporeality as feeling-thinking subjects who, as a vital force, move these women to construct possible worlds and meanings, but at the same time, she is susceptible to being objectified by a dominant economic and cultural force.

In fact, the historical construction of rural areas in Medellín has disregarded the importance of women’s role as caregivers, ignoring their abilities in organizing political and participatory rural settings, their dialogues, and their traditions. Rural women are not only defined by gender relations (Merchán, 2023), but also represent a process of recognition, insofar as they have the potential to create and redefine the territory as their own space through everyday practices and knowledge about agriculture, plants, and caring for the land. and also has as an attribute the re-signification of feelings that begin and end in women themselves.

In this regard, Dalila, a transgender woman from the district of San Sebastián de Palmitas in the municipality of Medellín, highlights the diversity of women, not as a biological issue, but based on interests and everyday productive and social practices. She points out that the Arcoíris collective recognizes rural women and rural peasant women. The former are women who live in rural areas, either within a family structure or alone, and the latter are women whose economic, family, and social activities are linked to productive activities.

In particular, rural women not only inhabit the countryside, but the territory is their condition of possibility, both materialistically and symbolically and idealistically, as indicated in Haesbaert (2022), when referring to it as a historical and material social construction of life, insofar as it is a substrate of fixed elements (Santos, 2000), and at the same time, it is a concrete, localized, border space of political domination and power. The second refers to a relational, symbolic territory, the result of flows (Santos, 2000), horizontal power relations, meanings, imaginaries, languages, and a set of customs that give it a unique meaning, since it is the subjects that make it possible.

The territory appears not only as materiality, but also as the result of power relations and is linked to sociocultural issues of a symbolic nature, which have a legal-political exercise that is made possible by a relationship of valuation and appropriation of subjects, through social, economic, and political practices, via flows in which a productive and collective order is incorporated. In this sense, territory for rural women is situated in autonomous corporealities and in historical re-significations that are transformed into knowledge, tastes, ways of perceiving and conceiving otherness, and political and economic expression, which, as CINEP (2022) points out, escapes forms of patriarchal domination and is a body-territory insofar as it

allows us to view bodies as living, historical territories that allude to a cosmogonic and political interpretation, where our wounds, memories, knowledge, desires, and individual and shared dreams reside; and in turn invites us to view territories as social bodies that are integrated into the web of life (Cruz, 2016, p. 44).

Thus, the practices of rural women in the city of Medellín are based on relationships of symbolic appropriation of the territory, since agricultural practices such as seed care, plant care, small-scale production to ensure family sustenance, the dynamics of local farmers' markets, domestic activities, and emotional neighborhood relationships, especially with other women, enable processes and reinterpretations of what it means to be a rural woman, as a possibility for life that is built on the ability to choose.

The participation of rural women becomes a driving force for collective processes that call on them to be participants as agents of change, visible witnesses to the transformation of territories, through collective strategies that seek inclusion and common goods (Urrego, et al, 2022). Citizen participation is a process that is carried out with a purpose and through both institutional spaces and those created by citizens themselves. Therefore, citizen participation was "developed in the early 1990s as part of a strategy aimed at governments to establish and consolidate democracy in their respective societies" (Gómez, 2015, p. 11).

This is how citizen participation begins to take root within territories, becoming territorialized as a form of autonomy and critical questioning of the processes that take place within them. Therefore, participation is a complex contextual and territorial exercise, which, as indicated by Múnera and Sánchez (2008), has been inscribed in a "planning process," so that it must be separated from this first institutional-legal scenario, which is also linked to representative democracy, and positioned as a mechanism that energizes and articulates collective mobilizations and discussions, toward a deliberative democracy that has common goals.

It is worth remembering that participation does not necessarily occur when there is institutional and regulatory support, and even less so when it is enforced by regulations (Múnera and Sánchez, 2008, p.10). Participation is therefore a dynamic and multivariate action and process that, for rural women in Medellín, represents an enabling scenario for the construction of common goods² that involves and is made possible by productive-cultural practices as means and modes of rural life. Participation is therefore a mechanism that has the power to transform the political life of individuals and their territory.

“ Thus, rural women in Colombia refer to a contextual perspective of cultural relations of domination, especially economic relations of subordination (Meneses, 2023; Arias et al, 2023). ”

2. For example, territory as a common good. See Urrego Estrada, G. A., Colorado Rendón, S. E., & Betancur Hernández, L. F. (2022). Social pedagogy in common goods. *Research Journal · UCM*, 22(39). <https://doi.org/10.22383/ri.v22i39.191>

Methodology

The objective of this research is to identify the processes of rural women's participation in Medellín. To this end, the research was guided by a qualitative approach based on observation and analysis of practices, ways of life, and livelihoods that women weave together in rural areas, in order to interpret the problem that is the subject of this study.

The research had three significant stages: in the first stage, key descriptors were identified for the systematic review of literature and traceability of national and international debates on rural women in public settings. Second, a territorial contextualization of modes and means of livelihood was carried out using research techniques such as interviews, focus groups, and participant observation, which enabled an *in situ* approach to the object of study and the recognition of women's daily practices and forms of social organization. In the third stage, the categories of territory, rural women, and participation were triangulated with the findings from the interviews, from which emerging categories emerged: care, land, and the seeds of life as articulating axes of social cohesion.

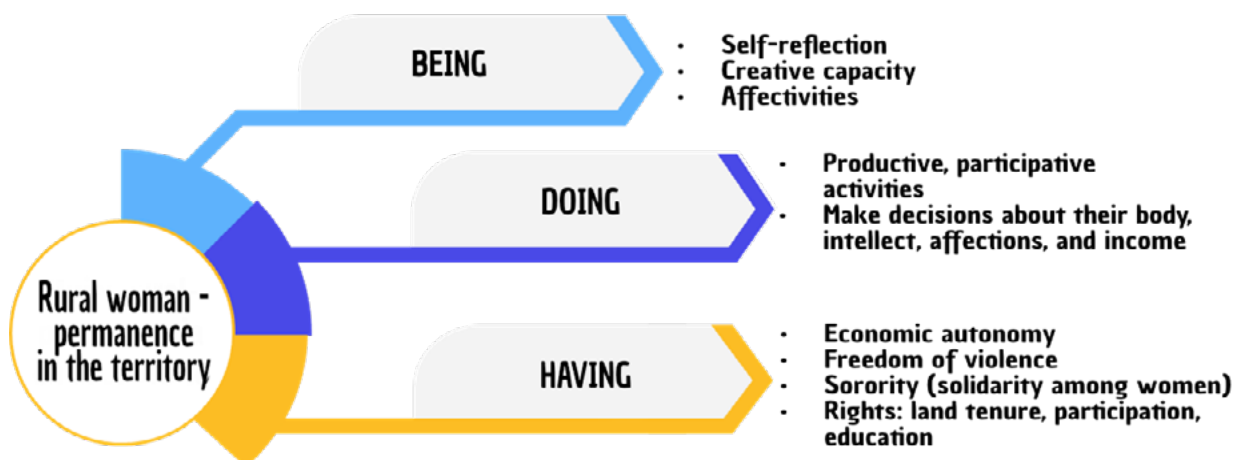
Results

Rural women and territory: between the body and productivity

Rural women in Medellín are involved in two areas: firstly, agricultural production practices that not only guarantee food for the household and supply small-scale markets, but also provide women with economic autonomy (Medina and Fernández, 2021); and second, their relationship with the land through knowledge (Vanegas, 2021) and neighborly and emotional relationships (Cruz, 2020) with other women, who through agreements and gatherings (Solano and Farfán, 2020) link politics as a matter of exchanges, agreements, and demonstrations that allow for the establishment of common interests such as food sovereignty, symbolic, monetary, and social recognition of care-related activities, without violence or discrimination in domestic, public, and institutional spaces.

Thus, rural women are political and symbolic subjects (see Figure 2), while rural areas as territories transcend the physical, spatial, and normative conception of land with specific uses for agricultural production, becoming instead threshold spaces. In other words, rural areas are sociocultural spaces of convergence, "a necessary meeting point and crossroads between spaces" (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 22, cited by Stavrides, 2016), that is, between the urban and the productive.

Gráfica 1. Rural women in Medellín, permanence in the territory..



Note: Prepared by the author based on interviews conducted with the Colectiva Arcoiris San Sebastián de Palmitas.

“ The territory appears not only as materiality, but also as the result of power relations and is linked to sociocultural issues of a symbolic nature, which have a legal-political exercise that is made possible by a relationship of valuation and appropriation of subjects through social, economic, and political practices. ”

The rural area in Medellín represents 70% of the municipality's total area and, according to its political and administrative division, has five districts: San Sebastián de Palmitas, San Cristóbal, Santa Elena, Altavista, and San Antonio de Prado. More women than men live in these districts, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Rural population projection by sex 2018-2030

Type	Administrative district	2022					
		Men	Women	Total	% Men	%Women	%Pob Medellín
Rural	50 San Sebastián De Palmitas	3.220	3.061	6.281	0,12%	0,12%	0,24%
	60 San Cristóbal	17.128	14.595	31.723	0,66%	0,56%	1,21%
	70 Altavista	9.741	10.099	19.840	0,37%	0,39%	0,76%
	80 San Antonio de Prado	5.180	4.919	10.099	0,20%	0,19%	0,39%
	90 Santa Elena	12.819	12.773	25.592	0,49%	0,49%	0,98%
Totals		1.232.847	1.380.111	2.612.958	47%	53%	100%

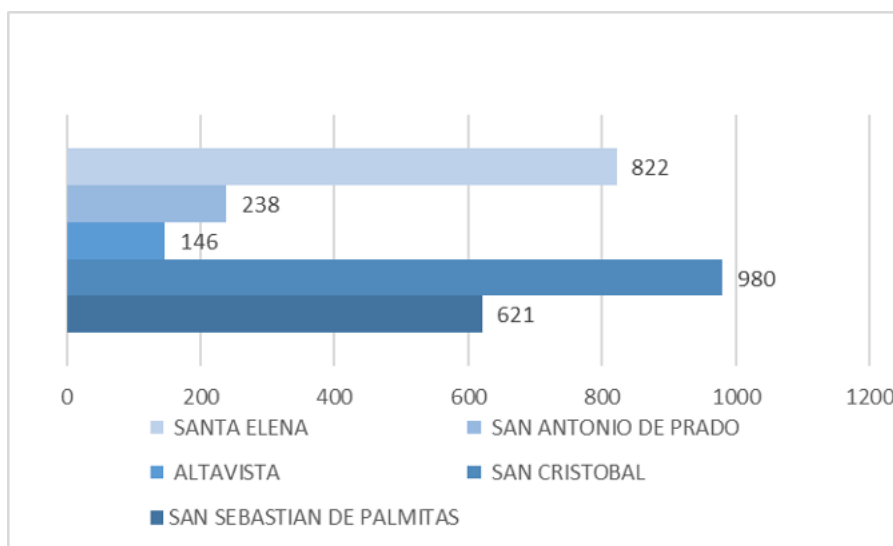
Note: Administrative Department of Planning. Sub-directorate of Prospective, Information, and Strategic Evaluation 2022..

“ As for the participation of rural women, it becomes a driving force for collective processes that call on them to be participants as agents of change, visible witnesses of the transformation of territories, through collective strategies that seek inclusion and common goods (Urrego, et al, 2022). ”

Rural women in the District of Medellín will account for 53% of the total population of the townships in 2022, making it necessary for both institutional spaces and productive practices to allow for gender parity, not only in citizen and political participation processes, but also in land tenure, the modernization of agricultural practices, the strengthening of productive units, and access to technical and advanced training.

It should be noted that, of this female population, 844 are women farmers out of a total of 2,807 (see Figure 2), according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, through the Rural Development Agency, in the registry of users of the public agricultural extension service. Approximately 30.06% are women, which means that existing socio-productive processes in rural areas still need to give greater recognition and visibility to women as peasant farmers, beyond their role in caring for and managing the home.

Figure 2. Peasant producers by district in the municipality of Medellín 2021.



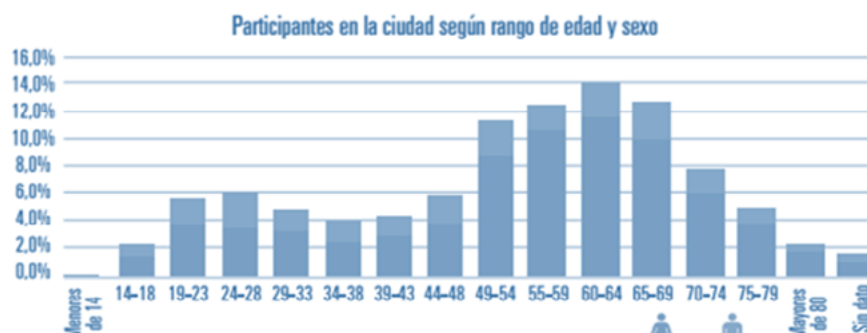
Note: Prepared by the author based on data from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Rural Development Agency, in the registry of users of the public agricultural extension service.

However, agricultural production is often classified as irregular or informal employment, which creates even greater inequality gaps between men and women. In addition, rural women top the global unemployment list. According to DANE (2022) in its report Gender Gaps in Colombia, for every 100 unemployed men, there are 120 women in the same situation. This issue, linked to the lack of opportunities to access advanced training, wage inequality, and care-related activities, continues to be a factor in the exclusion of rural women from participating in public life.

Women and Participation from and for Rural Areas

Based on Figure 3, participation is understood as a binding political exercise, an initiative, a volition, insofar as rural women appear as relevant political subjects not only numerically, but also as political decision-making bodies that are part of the construction of collective interests for decision-making and, with this, the achievement of agreements and the configuration of common goods. In this sense, the sociocultural processes of rural women in Medellín, such as food sovereignty, symbolic, monetary, and social recognition of care-related activities, without violence or discrimination in domestic, public, and institutional spaces, have gained strength in urban settings. For its part, Figure 1 shows the Citizen Participation Index in Medellín in 2019 and reveals that there is a greater convergence of women in local and city spaces, that is, women are the population group with the highest percentage of participation in the city.

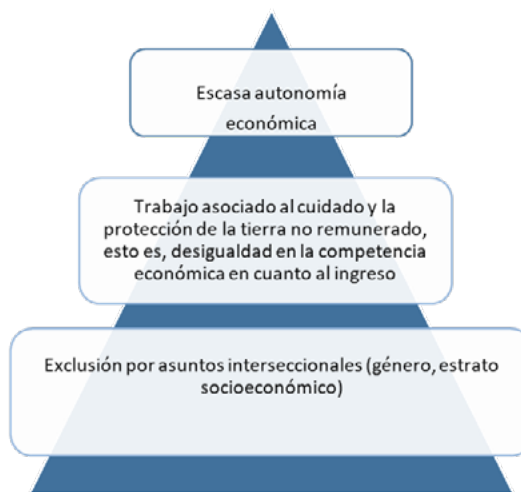
Figure 3. Índice de Participación Ciudadana 2019.



Source: Medellín Citizen Participation Index, 20199.

However, this participation should not be understood as ideal, but rather as a breakdown of the degree of influence, deliberation, and decision-making that women can have in these spaces. The report on perceptions of citizen participation in Medellín (2019) highlights perceptions of women's participation, for example: "men have a longer history of participation, while women's involvement in various local decision-making spaces is recent, and they are also more timid and fearful"; "Women participate in consultative and non-decision-making bodies" and "Women themselves legitimize men more than women, because in these spaces we give men the floor, we give men the right to speak." These perceptions reflect the socio-territorial problems of rural women (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Socio-territorial issues affecting rural women



Note: Prepared by the author based on this research.

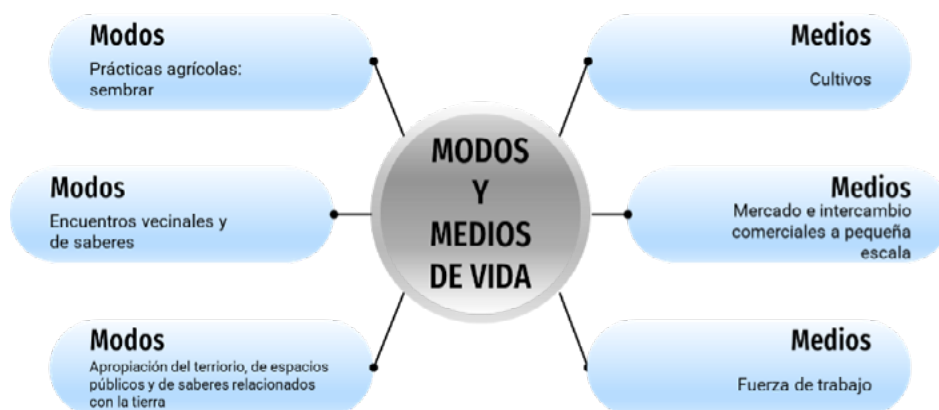
Discussion

The participation of rural women has been linking local spaces that do not necessarily need to be institutionalized. on the contrary, peasant practices of cultivating, selling products at a fair price, and being considered in government and public policies to protect these productive activities and, therefore, peasant ways of life, constitute principles that guarantee food sovereignty and spaces free of violence. In turn, they are matters of cohesion to link forces and interests among women from different villages and townships in Medellín.

In this sense, the peasant lifestyles that emerge as demands from peasants are assertions of their cultural practices, such as seed care, what, how, and when to grow, fair prices, animal care, domestic care, land care, how to eat, how to dress, but now These demands must be based on the consideration that rural areas are spaces free from gender violence and guarantors of food sustainability (Ladio, 2021).

Another area of demand is that public policies recognize rural women as subjects of law who, through their participation in rural areas, can contribute to the implementation of strategies that guarantee a dignified life, which translates into the right to remain in their territories and engage in peasant farming practices. Therefore, the political participation of rural women from and for rural areas is considered to be linked to politics, to the creation and reinterpretation of meanings in relation to the means and modes of peasant life (see Figure 5).

Figure. Modes and means of livelihood.



Note: Prepared by the author based on this research.

In this sense, these ways of life broaden the discussion of rurality in Medellín, since rural women are political actors who promote the transformation and reinterpretation of the territory through practices that are, in turn, challenges for metropolitan rurality in terms of both urbanism and social rurality. Such practices as the local consumption of peasant agricultural products, bartering to guarantee healthy food sovereignty, encouraging social and neighborhood organizations in the agricultural economy, that is, local producers, agricultural production for autonomy and the re-signification of sociocultural ties, are key issues to be addressed in both public policies and government agendas and programs in Medellín.

Finally, the participation of rural women is conceived from development approaches that are linked to their sociocultural and productive capacities, which even in modern times have been approached from a gender perspective in terms of overcoming gaps in inequality, physical and sexual violence, access to advanced training, and reducing wage disparities, among others. Undoubtedly, the participation of rural women as agents of knowledge and forms of family and community support faces inequalities that are inscribed in patriarchal logic in rural areas, but which are at the forefront of caring for the land. For Nussbaum (2017), development models must redefine human capacities through social justice, meaning that rural women in Medellín have an ethical imperative to participate in public life on equal terms and with equity.

Conclusions

The territory in Medellín, especially the rural areas, has been shaped as a social reality marked by cultural, political, and symbolic structures that, from a gender perspective, have contributed to its economic and productive revitalization. Its conception is marked both by access to land for its use and by ways of inhabiting it based on a cultural and economic differentiation of gender roles around specific productive activities, as well as by participatory processes that vindicate productive and symbolic ways of life. This has generated different discussions at the local level about the place of women in caregiving and men in productive agricultural activities.

Contemporary discourse on gender has been largely based on that of peasant and feminist movements, which base their political and participatory actions on the transmission of territorial knowledge about cultivation and seeds. In this sense, the distribution of roles and their recognition in age-related processes are viewed differently by rural men and women, which has led to the need to redefine community involvement in terms of caring for the land as a collective issue.

In the context of gender differentiation, actions ranging from culture to traditional practices have been identified with regard to agricultural development, which is directly associated with men as providers. Meanwhile, the work of rural women is related to caring for the home and family, which has ignored their relationship in political and productive contexts, their relationship with the land, and their relevance in its preservation, as a matter of care, which is understood through the exchange and transmission of knowledge.

As for the participation of rural women, their activist and transformative role is found in processes of food sovereignty, symbolic, monetary, and social recognition of care-related activities, without violence or discrimination in spaces such as the domestic, public, and institutional spheres. This is at the crossroads of institutionalizing participation, which brings together local movements and demands in extensive government agendas that, while making it possible to strengthen and build public and government policies, do not fully consider local singularities and dynamics, since these are specificities of the micro-territorial scale.

These specificities respond to everyday organizational, productive, and symbolic processes related to cultivation, care, and participation in nearby neighborhood networks. These networks promote the economic autonomy of women and their productive units, which must be reflected in public policies through strategies for the defense, protection, and conservation of productive rural territories, while also reducing gender-based and sexual violence and strengthening training processes and the redefinition of their rights.

In this way, social cohesion and women's organizational processes, derived from caregiving and agricultural production, reflect new forms of civic and political participation. For example, the grassroots organization Colectiva Arcoiris has enabled rural women belonging to various nodes to find meaning in the public sphere for their private lives, that is, the transformation of their own realities, the re-signification and dignification of ways and means of life as political subjects who contribute to the local development of their territory.

“ The participation of rural women is conceived from development approaches that are linked to their capabilities sociocultural and productive capacities, which even in modern times have been approached from a gender perspective in terms of overcoming gaps in inequality, physical and sexual violence, and access to advanced training. ”

“ Social cohesion and women’s organizational processes, derived from caregiving and agricultural production, reflect new forms of civic and political participation. For example, the grassroots organization Colectiva Arcoíris has enabled rural women belonging to various nodes to find meaning in the public sphere for their private lives ”

Participation faces the challenge of overcoming representative democracy and positioning itself in local debate to make political decisions at a micro-territorial level. This also allows us to understand how the civic and political participation of rural women is also part of affirmative action and that not only institutions, but society itself owes them, especially rural women in Colombia. The District of Medellín must update the District Planning System and other instruments that are mainstreamed by citizen participation, so that rural women can become more effectively involved in decision-making.

It should be noted that new initiatives for rural and peasant development are being implemented in Medellín; however, the participation of women is unclear. In this regard, it is essential to develop a model that links women’s productive and sociocultural capacities and reduces gender gaps so that everyone’s participation is binding.

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