

RESEARCH REPORT: Cases of Good Practice to Overcome the Conflict in the Department of Valle del Cauca¹

Luis Fernando Baron² (Project's Coordinator)
Enrique Jaramillo³,
Rosa Bermudez⁴,
Ana Lucia Paz⁵,
Vladimir Rouvinski⁶
Icesi University

1. Introduction.

This research report consists of a brief review of the results of the evaluation of five cases of good practice in the Department of Valle del Cauca, implemented by the Interdisciplinary Research Center (CIES) of the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences at Icesi University. The study was part of a bigger project sponsored by the Good Practice Bank (a database) of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Colombia in 2008.

The selection of the cases came after a thorough search for appropriate cases undertaken jointly by UNDP and local actors. As a result of this process, some three hundred initiatives from five Colombian regions, namely, the departments of Cauca, Valle del Cauca, Antioquia, Santander and the geographic area called Los Montes de Maria (see Map 1) have been selected for the further consideration by researchers at Colombian universities. The suitability, efficiency, sustainability, legitimacy and replicability were among the key selection criteria.

In the case of the Department of Valle del Cauca, the group of researchers from Icesi University has chosen the following five cases: the process of the residents' returning and the strengthening of the community at Bajo Calima (chief investigator Enrique Jaramillo), the fomenting of peace culture and the strengthening of community

¹ This research report is written by Luis Fernando Baron. The translation from the original in Spanish to this English version is made by Vladimir Rouvinski.

² Director, The Interdisciplinary Research Center (CIES), Icesi University

³ Director, Anthropology Program, Icesi University

⁴ Doctoral Program in Urban Studies, Colegio de Mexico

⁵ Director, Sociology Program, Icesi University

⁶ Director, Political Science Program, Icesi University

of the Cajambre River (chief investigator Rosa Bermudez), the TV program *Doce del día D-3* of the regional TV channel Telepacífico (chief investigator Ana Lucia Paz), the Program of Political Studies and Conflict Resolution of the University of Valle (chief investigator Vladimir Rouvinski), and the Program of Young Farmers of the Department of Valle del Cauca, promoted by the Departmental Coffee Producers Committee in association with the Central Agrarian Cooperative of Valle, CENCOA (chief investigator Luis Fernando Baron, who also coordinated the examination of all five cases in the department). The Icesi researchers had been assisted in their work by Lady Otalora and Maritza Valencia.

The above five cases are indicative of the regional context, especially, as concern the strategy and activities chosen by the cases' protagonists, as well as of the causes and particular characteristics with regard to the possibility to act and the determination of local actors. It is from this perspective that this study intended to explain the entire chain of events, the context and the form of a particular practice, in order to confirm that the case in question is, indeed, a good practice to overcome the conflict. In other words, it was necessary to answer the following question: "What are the basic, or minimum, ingredients that turn a collective action into a good practice?" Or, the question can be reformulated in this way: "What are the conditions that make visible a good practice to overcome the conflict?" That is why the actual research report offers the analysis of five cases from three different angles: firstly, the common context of all five cases has been discussed, taking into account the common characteristics of the region as regards the socio-political and historical development since the end of the last century. Next, a brief description of each of the cases follows. And, finally, the key elements, lessons and recommendations that emerge as a result of a comparative analysis of the cases have been discussed.

2. Context

The examination of the recent historical and socio-political contexts of each of the cases facilitates the identification of a series of episodes, the phenomena, and the processes. This kind of identification is a required element in the construction of preliminary hypothesis with regard to the key elements of good practices and must be considered a necessary step before a more detailed analysis can be performed.

As concern the historical and socio-political processes in Valle del Cauca, it is important to underline the persistence and the continuity of agrarian conflicts in the area, a product of the colonization and the struggle for land and territories, which are the pillars of the armed conflict in the department. Another important characteristic of this region is a high degree of social mobilization and organization, with a focus on political, cultural and ethnical inclusion, which had been evident even before the adoption of the new 1991 Colombian Constitution ^[1]. The third key characteristic is the spread of violence, the armed conflict and the forced displacement in the region during the period from 1998 until 2004, which was due, mostly, to the expansion of the activities related to the drug trafficking, the fight for the access to the transportation corridors ^[2], and the appearance of paramilitary groups. And, finally, it is the way of the response to the above developments –considered as a severe crisis at a regional level– of the social movements, local institutions, mass media, the academy and some sectors of the entrepreneurship. The five case studies described in this research report make part of this response.

3. Description of the Cases.

3.1. The Process of the Residents' Returning and the Strengthening of the Community of Bajo Calima: Assistance to the Victims of Conflict.

During the first months of 2003, a significant part of the population of the African descent from the basin of the Calima River, in a rural area in the proximity of the city of Buenaventura, was forced to displace to other territories in various parts of the region, as a result of hostile actions and assaults by illegal armed groups ^[3]. Yet, from the very beginning of the displacement, finding a temporarily home at rented houses and at friends and relatives' residents, the Calima River Communitarian Council starts to design a plan of action aimed at the return process, which is culminated in September 2004 with a return of the majority of the inhabitants to the places of their former permanent residence.

It is important to underline that the Council turns to the use of various strategies in order to strengthening the Bajo Calima community. That is because this case of the returning can be considered a gradual process, which, at different time spans, was supported by the Departmental and the city of Buenaventura's civil authorities, in

particular, by the Office for Peace Promotion, and by national and international organizations. At the same time, a process of the returning represents to a community one of the ways of building a different type of relations with the State. In fact, the social capital acquired in this traumatic exercise has provided the community with a certain degree of autonomy with respect to the armed actors, the skills to negotiate agreements and the learning of the new rules of the game in an environment that is never constant.



Illustration 1. Women of Bajo Calima.
Photograph taken by Enrique Jaramillo and Maritza Valencia.

Nowadays, in Colombia it is hardly acceptable to claim that a particular case of the returning of the internally displaced persons to the place of their origin is a successful one simply because people have re-established their social and human conditions or because the institutions have managed to heal the impact of social and armed conflict. The returning can be considered a success story only then, when people

do remain in the places of their former residence continuously. From this perspective, an extensive field research and an extended co-residence could allow the researchers to understand -beyond the level of institutions- the forms of action that the communities develop in response to the changing conflict environment.

3.2. Peace culture of the Cajambre River: the strengthening of the local self-governance.

The Cajambre River is a geographical area located to the south of the Port of Buenaventura. The case study of the population in this area identifies some important forms of collective actions by civil society in response to an armed conflict.

The ethnic composition of the Cajambre River's area is one of the particular features of this case: the population in the area is composed by an Afro-Colombian ethnic community who are direct descendents of those slaves who worked at gold mines and arrived in the area as far back in history as in 1786. Today, this community of approximately four thousand people makes part of a regional social movement that demands ethno-territorial rights and is determined to maintain neutrality and autonomy with regard to armed actors. Hence, this case study is taking into account four key pillars that have marked the development of the process: the rediscovering of the ethnic "self" as a political claim; the imagining and the perceiving of local self-governance; the demand for a free determination as a response of civil society to the armed conflict; and the emphasis on peace education as a social aspect of the governing the territory in question.

Currently, the area is witnessing an intense dispute for the territory, in which the issues of governance and the territorial control are overlapping. A number of cases of displacement is a result of countless violent clashes, in which the leftist rebels, the ultra-right paramilitary groups and the Colombian army have been involved. The inhabitants of the Cajambre River consider the armed actions -the cause of the displacement- a strategy to expropriate their land. They believe that the primary objectives of this strategy are the exodus of the population, which is unable to resist the environment of daily fear and the threat of terror, and the retraction of the processes of ethno-territorial organization that provides the benefits of social protection to the entire community.

Thus, the people of Cajambre had to advance various actions, which included the production of alternative crops, sustainable development of the territory, protection

of biodiversity and natural resources ^[4]. Since the year of 1999, these actions have been formalized in the Plan of the Management of the Territory (PMT) that emphasized the following key issues: the strengthening of a formal organization of the community, making certain the territorial rights, food security, good governance, and research. For the Communitarian Council, this plan is a guideline on a daily basis, and it is implemented by the means of education and the construction of social consensus and agreements. All these are significant contributions in the improvement of the situation with a real community's control over the territory in question. It is certain that the case of the Cajambre River community is a clear example of the actions developed in defense of autonomy and self-governance.

3.3. The Young Farmers of Valle del Cauca: the Prevention of the Recruitment.

The program Young Farmers (JAV) is born in the circumstances of a severe coffee crisis in 1997, which was getting worse with the slowing of the Colombian economic growth in 1999. The program emerged as a response to two key problems identified by the coffee producers: a low quality of the management in the sector and the migration of young peasants to the urban areas. JAV is designed by the Departmental Committee of Coffee Producers of Valle del Cauca in association with the Central Agrarian Cooperative of Valle del Cauca (CENCOA), as an experimental model of the agrarian reform in rural areas of the department.

The central idea of the project is to allocate the productive lands to young peasants so as they could produce coffee and, in some cases, the sugar cane. The land is distributed by an average size of five hectares per family. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that the program is not limited to the allocation of land only, but also brings about technical, social and administrative assistance via some follow-up activities. These activities are taking place during a prudent time span, until the new coffee producers are able to take care of their businesses by themselves.

From the perspective of the UNDP-Icesi research of good practices to overcome the conflict, this case is an example of a well-thought-out and experimentally tested model that provides valuable mechanisms of the searching for alternatives to the agrarian reform, using a renovated form of the later. Equally important are the lessons learned during the implementation of the program with regard to the prevention of the

recruitment and the discouragement of the young people from the joining of illegal armed groups and making part of illegal and criminal activities.



**Illustration 2 A coffee farmer in Valle del Cauca.
Photograph taken by Luis Fernando Baron and Lady Otalora.**

The key factors that determined the success of this practice are interrelated, namely: the strengthening of self-esteem and young farmers' rural and coffee producers' identity; the re-establishment of confidence in neighbors and the

reorganization of work space and communitarian action; the promotion of agrarian projects that, in addition to the provision of food security, are viable and sustainable; the re-activation of communitarian and local economic networks; and, last but not least, a social recognition.

3.4. TV Program D3 (Telepacífico): Mass Media for Peace and Co-Existence.

The program D3 ^[5] broadcasted by the Telepacífico regional TV Channel is known by this name since 2004. However, D3 has been preceded by various similar programs that had emerged in parallel with the channel's foundation in the end of the 1980s. The list of these programs includes "The meeting point", "Disappeared", and "Disappeared and Displaced". The recent program, D3, was financed jointly by the Telepacífico Channel and the National Television Commission (CNTV) until the end of the broadcasting of the program in January 2008, due to the changes in the policies of the TV Channel.

One can identify the importance of D3 by the program's contribution in the visualization of the conflict theme from two basic but different angles: on the one hand, it is the design and broadcasting of programs about the conflict in the region, which had been prepared by the director and invited experts in the topic to be discussed in a particular program. On the other hand, the program served as a space for common people to present their own cases and to learn about the mechanisms to search for disappeared relatives and friends. Whereas the topic of the disappeared had not been D3's central theme, the program turned out to be a significant resource in the construction of a public space, which had a major symbolic importance in the region. This is because the program responded to the interests and touched upon the urgent and sensitive issues for Colombians, placing the former in the center of public agenda.

It is worth of mentioning here that the program served as a source of timely and trusted information for the public regarding the successful cases and institutions that could resolve the problems. Although there is no strong empirical evidences, which could confirm the construction of a kind of inter-institutional network to attend the victims of the conflict, it is possible to acknowledge the role of the program in providing, on a regular basis, the information that improve the accessibility of common people to various institutional mechanisms that deal with the cases of displacement. In other words, D3 can be characterized as a bridge in the communication between the

society and institutions, and a public forum for common people. This way, the latter could share their living experiences and find a better response to the situations they are facing.

3.5. Program of Political Studies and Conflict Resolution: Education for Peace and Co-Existence.

Following the adoption of a new political constitution in 1991, the demobilization and the handling in of the arms by a number of rebels groups like M-19, Quintin Lame, Popular Liberation Army (EPL), some part of Army for National Liberation (ELN), the former rebels were expected to take an active part in the country's political life, as a part of the deal with the government. Indeed, many of the former rebels came to occupy important positions in power structures, private and public institutions at national and regional levels. Yet, many of them did not possess sufficient educational and professional skills. That is why there was a clear need for some kind of educational project that would facilitate the participation of the former rebels in the processes of integration in civil life, taking into account their intention to become active protagonists in the process of the construction of a new Colombia.

The above considerations serve as a guideline for the joint efforts by the National Company for Peace (COMPAZ, an NGO created by the former rebels of M-19) and the University of Valle to open a program called "Political Studies and Conflict Resolution". The program begins in the year 1997 at the Institute for Higher Juridical and Political Studies of the University of Valle. Despite of the fact that the program was designed with an active participation of COMPAZ, it was not limited to the former members of M-19 only. This educational opportunity was opened to all ex-rebels who have made a deal with the government as a part of the peace processes in the end of the 1980s – beginning of the 1990s. The program is the only case in Colombia of professional training in the area of social studies provided to the former rebels.

One of the important lessons that could be learned from this case study is that the program at the University of Valle did allow various groups of the former rebels to continue their search for better options for country's political and economic future, but, this time, within the Colombian legal political framework, and not by the way of an armed struggle like in the past. The graduates of the program, now having better professional skills and being more competitive in the labor market, have come to

occupy the positions of peace facilitators ^[6], officials of local and regional governances, etc. Some had been elected to the national and regional parliaments or became members of municipal councils. Yet, the program has benefited its participants not only from professional but from personal perspective as well, since the proper existence of the program can be considered a kind of symbolic recognition of the rebels' previous experience that was not gone for nothing. This characteristic of the program is of particular importance in the public environment of modern-day Colombia, in which a significant part of the society rejects the rebels' past, including, sometimes, the rejection by immediate family and relatives. Hence, the recognition is one of the factors that did facilitate the process of reintegration.

4. Regional Key Elements to Overcome the Conflict in Colombia.

Before turning to the description of key elements of good practices to overcome the conflict, which can be identified based on the examination of the above cases, it is necessary to emphasize the impossibility of generalization, if one is expected to learn a universal recipe for whatever the circumstances are. On the contrary, the first aspect that must be underline with regard to the analyzed cases, it is the importance of a symbiosis of all the diverse factors that are noticeable in each of the cases and that play a role of a certain kind of social construct, which appears in a particular socio-historical context. Besides, for the studied cases, it is more appropriate to talk about the key elements to face the conflict rather than to overcome it.

The five cases examined in the Department of Valle del Cauca show diverse strategies, which have their origins in cultural, institutional, social and political contexts that are marked by the armed conflict in the region. The examination of the cases allows the researchers to identify diverse dynamics as well as the logics of action by the state, communitarian, entrepreneurial and social actors. The latter have been constructing various alternatives in order to deal with the negative consequences of an armed conflict. From this perspective, the prevention of the recruitment of young people in the coffee-producing areas, the support of the population displaced as a result of the clashes between the armed actors, the assistance to the families of disappeared in finding a meeting point and the showing to the general public of the sufferings caused by the armed clashes, the cultural taboo of ethnic minorities to participate in the armed conflict

and the demand for the respect of the right to neutrality and self-governance constitute some of the efforts to find an alternative way to construct a more humane and more fair society, on the basis of acquired social knowledge.

It is also important to underline the fact that in the cases examined in Valle del Cauca, it is possible to identify some emerging tendencies that show their potentials in indicating the ways to eventually overcome the conflict in Colombia. That is why the task of understanding better the key elements of the cases is pertinent to the task of finding the answers to the questions formulated in the introduction to this research report.

Firstly, it is necessary to examine the issue of collective action by social groups. Here, one could notice the central idea of the cases, in which the issue of identity – shared, social, cultural or political- is on stake: the issues of identity and collective action, social movement, and group action are closely linked. In the case with ethnic minorities, the issue of identity is central to the development of collective action in defense of the territory and that of the resistance. In the case of young coffee farmers, the issue of identity is evident in the notion of “being a peasant”, “to work on land”, “being a coffee grower”. In the case with the former rebels or demobilized population, there are constructed identities that allow the group to continue to share the identity based on the political ideas even after their armed struggle is over: the program of political studies offered an option of the continuation of their social life as political actors.

The issue of identity is directly linked to the issue of social and political recognition, social inclusion and acknowledgement by various actors of the political confrontation. To a large extent, the success of the analyzed cases depended on the ability of their protagonists to construct an environment, in which the others are recognized in their present condition and in which the doors to political and social inclusion of marginalized and offended communities have been opened. Hence, it is possible to confirm that social, political, symbolic and cultural inclusion constitutes one of the most important keys to overcome the armed confrontation in the country.

In the context of the continuous conflict and the need to search for alternatives to resist, the ideas hold by the actors in each of the cases with regard to the way to construct the relations between the State and society seems to be equally important to

understand the key elements of the good practices in the region. Therefore, it is worth of mentioning here the normative and juridical developments in order to provide the population with more guarantees of the respect of their rights, and, first of all, the right to life and collective rights, like the ones demanded by ethnic minorities. In fact, as soon as the population starts to make use of the legal mechanisms and feels familiar with them, there are better results as concern the actions to resist the conflict.

Another significant element of the cases examined, it is the importance of the strengthening of the institutional aspect, as the way to create some space, in which a certain degree of social legitimacy has been achieved and in which the grassroots of political change have been fomented. Hence, social organizations, governmental institutions and entrepreneurial associations are the privileged scenarios of public debate and mediated action. The strategies to resist the conflict require the institutions to perform a central function in keeping public debate animated, in the promotion of citizens' cautiousness and the facilitation of the dialogue between various actors. It is in this way that the normative definitions are turning into the references of authority, thus leading to the establishment of a sustainable social order.

The international cooperation, as an institutional framework that supports the citizens' action, is yet another important key element of the cases of Valle del Cauca. Indicatively, the international assistance, via international cooperation agencies, to ones of the most marginalized and less protected populations – that of Bajo Calima and Cajambre- turned out to be essential for the public to know the situation of the conflict and the exclusion of the population, as well as for the configuration of the alternative ways to provide the assistance in the middle of the conflict. The role played by the institutions of international cooperation underlines the weakness of the civil society in Colombia to resist the armed actors and to demand the respect of civil rights. But this is also indicative of the weakness of the Colombian state as concern the issues of governance and the protection of civil population in the midst of an armed conflict in the country. On the other hand, the presence of international cooperation agencies constitutes one of the forms to gain the legitimacy to the processes for both the Colombian State, which is exposed to the international eyes, and for the social organizations that represent the Colombian civil society. These organizations are

looking for a better protection and guarantees and wish for the construction of a better security environment, in which they could work with a higher level of efficiency.

In addition, a formal appearance in the institutional spaces of the central issues concerned with the conflict in the country, like the situations of internal displacement and disappearance shown by D3 program at a regional TV channel, manifests a strong desire to tackle the issue from a strategic public space, i.e. the mass media. This is certainly an example of citizens' participation in the task of making public the various aspects of the conflict. The program of political studies and conflict resolution at the University of Valle can be evaluated from a similar perspective, as an example of the openness and institutional flexibility to offer educational alternatives.

Drawing a line here, it is possible to conclude that five cases of good practice to overcome the conflict in Valle del Cauca can be regarded as an excellent illustration of the contemporary Colombian society that is highlighted by the context of history of war and confrontation and is busy searching for a more “civilized” and less costly -in terms of human lives and social sufferings- ways to put an end to the long-standing conflict in the country.

Notes by the Translator

- [1] The Political Constitution of Colombia, adopted in 1991, has replaced the previous constitution of 1886. The new constitution has declared the equity of all citizens, acknowledged the rights of indigenous communities and proclaimed the aim of the construction of a “social state”.
- [2] These are the natural geographical paths suitable for the trafficking of illegal drugs, arms, etc.
- [3] For a related discussion of the process of internal displacement, see Rouvinski, V. and J. Vasquez (2005), *The New Poor of Contemporary Colombia: Armed Conflict and Impoverishment of Internally Displaced Persons*, in *Journal Of International Development And Cooperation*, v.11 (1-2), 69 – 84.
- [4] The land at Cajambre is an attractive asset for drug dealers for it is apt for the growing of coca.
- [5] The name D3 comes from the initial letters of its full name in Spanish, *Doce del Dia*, time of the beginning of the broadcast.
- [6] The position of peace facilitators has been created at national, regional and local levels throughout the entire Colombia, according to the 1991 Political Constitution.