

Almanac of the Future

A STORY OF SUCCESS

Motivational experience No. 25



**DEVELOPMENT is written
with P of Peace, Participation and
Participative Budget**

The experience of local processes of citizenship in two regions of Antioquia indicate diverse routes, responding to different contexts, characterized by humanitarian affection due to armed conflict, manipulation and/or social and political exclusion. Victims re-encounter the capacity to play their citizenship and inhabitants of territories manage to get involved in a leading way in local development, designed among all and for the benefit of all.

I wanted to hide

With these words Beatriz Tilano describes what she felt and thought when she lost her husband, murdered by the paramilitaries in Santa Fe, West Antioquia. She had to leave her house, look for a job; her eldest 10-year-old son stayed with his brothers of seven and four. María Eugenia Ruíz was born in the municipality division of El Tapón, which belongs to Yolombo. Together with her parents and her five brothers they were displaced twice. In 1994 the guerrilla made the family leave their small farm as their teenage brothers were at risk of being recruited. Maria Eugenia spent some time at her uncle's house. After two years the family returned. In 1998, paramilitary groups killed one of her brothers and forced the family to leave immediately.

Maria Eugenia recalls: "We were forced to go up on a dump truck and my dad told us to open the corrals of the hens and pigs for them to search for life." Eight teenagers, all guilty of sympathi-

zing with the guerrillas lost their lives. Years passed where the family lived in Medellin, María Eugenia married and lives nowadays, together with her husband and her two children as steward in a farm near San Jerónimo. Her parents, together with a brother, returned to their farm five years ago, but María Eugenia did not want to visit them for years. But at the insistence of her children,

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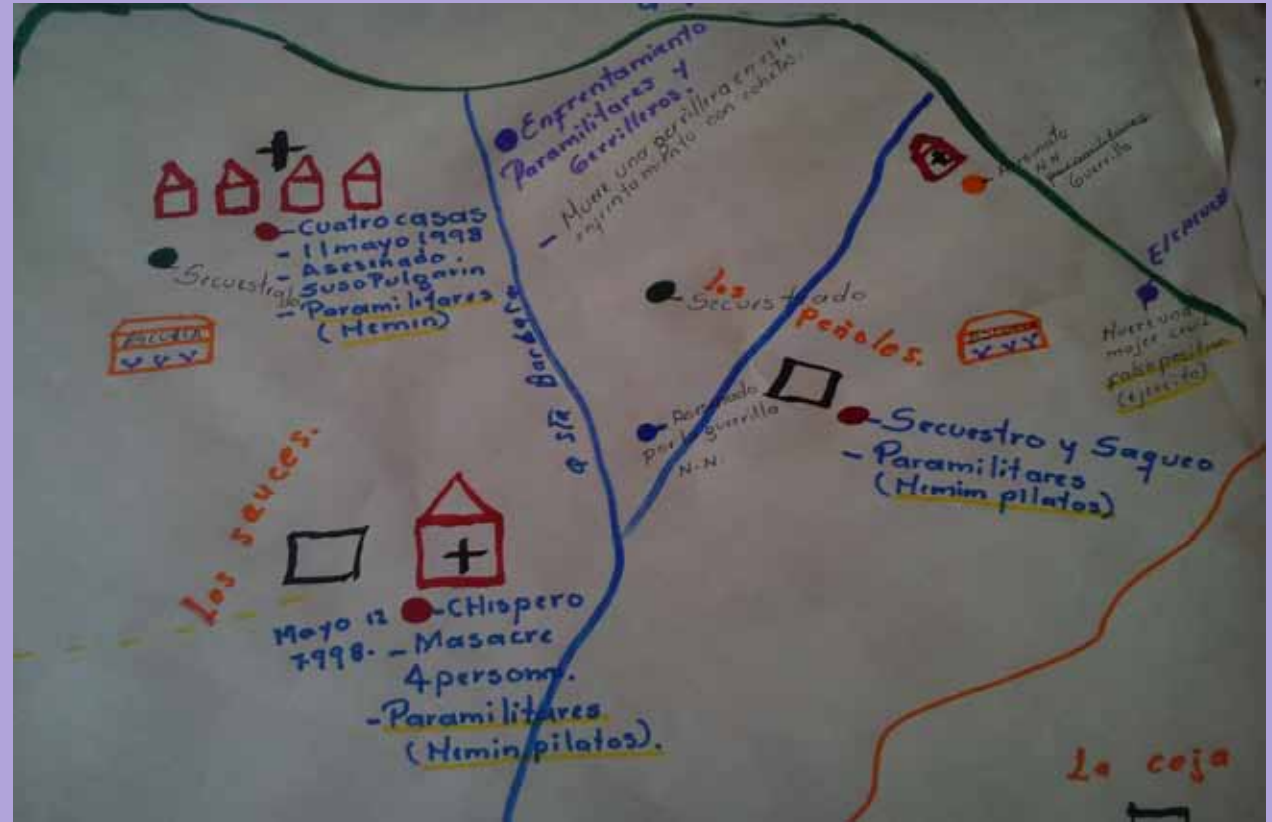
they visited her parents' house three years ago. Maria Eugenia recalls: "It has been very hard since I came back to live the moment of the tragedy".

Of the 25 families that lived in El Tapón before, only 8 have returned. "The hardest thing is that some neighbors have been part of the paramilitarism and I recognized the voice of two." María Eugenia never told her children what happened but her grandfather told them "the story" during their first visit. The billiard room of the village, where the teenagers were murdered, has become a sanctuary.

I got scared but I accepted

Beatriz and María Eugenia, both victims received psychosocial support in their process of understanding and overcoming emotional pain and mourning, transforming feelings of fear, revenge and anger, opening the way to forgiveness, reconciliation and the sense of dignity of the person.

"I thought I was in the wrong place when I first attended a meeting with Conciudadania (Citizen's Fellowship)." Maria Eugenia, through the kindergarten of her youngest son, learned of the spaces called Steps and Hugs. Beatriz knew through



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a friend of the support provided by the institution. "I used a lot of excuses but I finally convinced myself and participated." They participated, each in their locality, in the monthly meetings (steps), starting with their emotional healing process and preparing themselves as animators of peer support groups. Both Maria Eugenia and Beatriz also attended the practice sessions of solidarity (hugs), feeling, thinking and reconstructing what happened, forming themselves in the capacity of active listening and forgiveness. María

Eugenia's testimony is blunt: "I was able to heal myself and overcome my fear of relating, for example, to the Community Action Board. I have become a promoter of life and mental health and my personal and family life has changed since then. Before I shouted to my children, I was a punishing mother; today when there are discrepancies I count to ten, there is more dialogue and Jon Alejandro my husband now takes care of our children when I dedicate time to the Network of Peace and Reconciliation. Beatriz has

participated in a meeting between victims and demobilized. "I ended up sitting next to the brother of who had murdered my husband. He told me that his brother had died and I told him that I would have needed him alive because I wanted to ask him many things. "Beatriz's daughter is happy because she sees her mother very changed. Beatriz prefers dialogue instead of fists, advising in her family environment.



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Why me?

Step-and-hug sessions create affective links at the group level. "We feel like a family talking about our things, we heal as victims and we transform ourselves as people, we speak in public and we get a different way to see. Also we realize that we are not the only person in the situation of victim. Of course, at the beginning nobody wants to speak in the sessions, but the playful practices help to feel quickly in family". The state recognizes as a victim only the people of the immediate family: spouse, children and parents. Peer support groups have formed Networks of Peace and Reconciliation in many municipalities such as Sta. Fe and San Jerónimo. Thanks to these networks, over time, greater acceptance has been gained in the public space in the area of victim recognition. Both Maria Eugenia and Beatriz have formed and accompany groups of victims as promoters of life and mental health. "It's hard to get to the villages. The people, after all, are very reluctant to be part of society again", shares María Eugenia. "We teach that it is about remembering - not forgetting - with less pain. It's important for people to feel good to talk about what they have inside them." Hugs, symbolic moments make you feel the solidarity, helping to overcome the why me.

Beatriz accompanies several groups in the ur-

"We no longer recognize ourselves as victims but as leaders, eager to continue working," summarizes Beatriz her story. In San Jerónimo, the Network of Peace and Reconciliation has managed to involve not only victims but also professionals, youth and delegates of the city.



Psycho-social support to victims by victims, supported by Conciudadanía, who managed to overcome their victim's trauma opens the door to direct their attention to the common good of the collective.

ban context of Sta. Fe. "We have also convinced men that it is not a waste of time to think on how to live in peace in family and with the environment; men find it harder to talk about their feelings."

They said: There are no victims here!

April 9 is, by Colombian law, the day of recognition of the victims and memory. But it does not date from a long time ago that it was heard authorities pronounce: "There are no victims here". Today, the municipal government of Sta. Fe supports with transport to the events of Steps and Hugs in the municipality divisions. The Peace and Reconciliation Network in this locality achieved a Memory Park. Between the victims, authorities and demobilized, a wall with adobes was built next to the cemetery, making visible the more than three hundred people killed by the armed conflict. The monthly activities of the network end with a march to the park. "We no longer recognize ourselves as victims but as leaders, eager to continue working," summarizes Beatriz her story. In San Jerónimo, the Network of Peace and Reconciliation has managed to involve not only victims but also professionals, youth and delegates of the city. "It is important

to get out of the trauma, to get back together, to look at others, to provide tools so that people know their rights and feel as a valuable person for society," says María Eugenia. "The healing is extended, now we incorporate to our work the environment and the waste theme". The network in San Jerónimo has assumed its own identity and is working in the search of resources for the continuity of the process.

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Leaders are missing


We are sitting in the plenary hall of the Municipal Council of Caramanta, coffee-growing municipality 130 kilometers to the southwest of Medellín. Ever Abello, a councilor for the fourth time and now president of the City Council begins to remember the beginnings of the Constituent Assembly of Caramanta. "When in 2001 the mayor Herman Ocampo took possession of his position, governance was giving it's back to the people. With the support of Conciudadanía, the mayor of that time organized a school of leaders. For a year and a half, forty delegates from the municipi-

pal divisions and social organizations were trained in democratic law and citizen participation. Lirian Aguirre Gómez, president of the Caramanta Association of Communal Action Boards, is a member, as is Ever, of the Citizen Council, a technical organ of the Constituent Assembly. "The strong idea remains in that the municipal budget comes from the communities and not only from the mayor's office." The Constituent Assembly is an autonomous participatory space between citizenship and mayor. "The people did not know the functioning of the city hall and the municipality," explains Ever. He and Lirian live in the corregimiento of Alegrías, one of the three rural sections of the municipality.

The population of the municipality amounts to approximately 5,300 people, half living in the rural area. "Since the Assembly began to operate, 80 percent of its participants are representatives of the rural area and this relationship is maintained," the two explain.

It is built with and from people and not from the desktop

There is no lack of mayors who wanted to ignore or close the space of the Assembly; but its mem-

A street view in a town with a large church in the background. The street is paved and lined with colorful buildings. The church has a tall, pointed spire and is the focal point of the image. The sky is blue with some clouds. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

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During the 14 years since the Constituent Assembly has existed in Caramanta, the two most palpable and constant achievements of the protagonist participation in matters of public management of local development are reflected on the one hand in the annual participatory budget, drawn up from the demands and proposals of the citizenship and on the other in the accountability of the mayor before the municipal civil society. "We are interested in regulating these procedures," says Ever, who in the last election won as the most voted councilman.

bers affirmed their right to participate as citizens. "It has been a constant of the assembly to opt for conciliation and dialogue, without resorting to extreme measures. In 2009 they wanted to end the assembly but they could not. Persistence won," Ever recalls.

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tagonist participation in matters of public management of local development are reflected on one hand in the annual participatory budget, drawn up from the demands and proposals of the citizenship and on the other in the accountability of the mayor before the municipal civil society. "We are interested in regulating these procedures," says Ever, who in the last election won as the most voted councilman. "There are always people and, particularly those who managed the municipality

for many years at will, who put stones on the road. For this reason it is necessary to regulate by law the participatory budget and the accountability. The assembly is the bridge between the citizens and the administration that has allowed building the development with and from the people and not from the desk".



La minería socava el futuro de nuestra tierra.

There is no territorial spot without concession

Of the surface of the municipality (56 km²) almost one hundred percent is concessioned to mining, extracting gold, silver and platinum. The Constituent Assembly of Caramanta, in alliance with others and working in network, achieved a national battle against extractivism: the municipalities regained the right to define the subject of concessions since the elaboration of their EOT (territorial planning scheme).

Lirian explains: "With the EOT we opened the door to request before the competent state entity - in the case of Caramanta it is the Autonomous Corporation of Antioquia briefly CORANTIOQUIA - the cancellation of mining concessions. There is indiscriminate felling of trees, pollution and irresponsible use of water". Ever complements: "Public policies, defined by citizenship, serve as a shield against mega-projects. It has been possible to multiply the interest of defending the territory in the population and young people are being incorporated into the Assembly process."

The citizen's agenda in election times

The pre-election campaigns generate the danger that people believe in the promises of politics and Caramanta is no exception. The body of the Citizen Council, technical arm of the Assembly, organizes communal workshops with the help of Conciudadanía, helping the electorate to have criteria to choose.

For the elections, the Assembly defines a Citizen's Agenda and the candidates are consulted publicly around this agenda. "There are moments of frustration," Lirian recalls, "because there is no shortage of anti-participatory attitudes of politicians and at times we had to carry out protest actions, but usually the mayors accept and apply the Citizens' Agenda." The threats and even defamation have not been lacking but thanks to the support of the community, the assembly has been maintained. The experience of the Constituent Assembly of Caramanta is a pioneer and example for other similar processes.

Despite this, there is no lack of new challenges that Ever summarizes as follows: "Defend the territory and its biodiversity, seek the autonomy and sustainability of the communities in their territories and ensure that the State recognizes its shortcomings. But with the indispensable ingredients: organization, persistence and awareness, these can be achieved. "



Messages to the future

- The conversion of victims into active social actors through the path of assisted psycho-social self-healing recovers subjects of law that are quickly linked to the spaces of citizen participation.
- The autonomy and socio-organizational sustainability of communities, strengthening their territorial roots allows involvement with leadership in local public management and, in alliance with similar others, influence national legislation.
- Building from below, from the people, from the territory, allows public actions that encounter the demands and proposals instead of governing not considering the people. The organization, persistence and awareness of the cause help in this citizen's conquest.

The text was elaborated, based on conversations in situ by Jorge Krekeler, thematic advisor from Misereor, and consensual with actors representing Santa Fe de Antioquia, San Jerónimo and Caramanta. Thanks to María Eugenia Ruiz and Beatriz Tilano from the West region, Lirian Aguirre Gómez and Ever Abello from Caramanta, and Gloria Alzate and Gloria Ríos from Conciudadanía. Conciudadanía counts for its work with the auspices of different agencies for cooperation, including Bread for the World.

Almanac to the Future

STORIES OF SUCCES

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