

La economía solidaria: una estrategia en la construcción de paz de las personas en proceso de reincorporación del Catatumbo

Solidarity economy: a strategy in the construction of peace for people in the process of reincorporation in Catatumbo

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Resumen

El artículo se centra en una descripción sobre los procesos de fundación de cooperativas desde los principios de economía solidaria, realizadas por las personas en proceso de reincorporación del Catatumbo, antiguos combatientes de las FARC-EP Frente 33, como una apuesta a la construcción de paz en la región. Las cooperativas tienen como objetivo desarrollar proyectos productivos colectivos en diferentes actividades y ser un referente en el Catatumbo que conlleven al desarrollo regional. EL artículo tiene una metodología cualitativa descriptiva con recolección de información primaria y entrevistas a personas en proceso de reincorporación. Como resultados se puede evidenciar la creación de 6 cooperativas en la región el Catatumbo, que en este momento empiezan a desarrollar proyectos productivos con apoyo de la Universidad Francisco de Paula Santander y organismos nacionales e internacionales.

Palabras claves: Economía Solidaria, Cooperativismo, Catatumbo, Reincorporación.

Abstract

The article focuses on a description of the processes of founding cooperatives from the principles of solidarity economy, carried out by people in the process of reincorporation from Catatumbo, former combatants of the FARC-EP Front 33, as a bet on the construction of peace. in the region. The cooperatives aim to develop collective productive projects in different activities and be a benchmark in Catatumbo that leads to regional development. The article has a descriptive qualitative methodology with primary information collection and interviews with people in the process of reincorporation. As a result, the creation of 6 cooperatives in the Catatumbo region can be evidenced, which at this moment begin to develop productive projects with the support of the Universidad Francisco de Paula Santander and national and international organizations.

Key words: Solidarity Economy, Cooperativism, Catatumbo, Reincorporation, Reintegration.



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1. Introduction

The article is part of a research extension process being developed by the Socio-environmental and Agricultural Consultancy of Northeastern Colombia in the Catatumbo region together with people in the process of reincorporation of the former 33rd Front of the FARC-EP. Its objective is to describe the processes of economic solidarity developed by the people in the process of reincorporation in Catatumbo through the foundation of cooperatives as a form of peace construction and the development of productive projects. The article presents a theoretical structure that addresses the context of the Catatumbo region, the dynamics of the peace process in the region, and finally the role of solidarity economy and cooperativism in peace construction.

Regarding methodological aspects, the work focused on a descriptive qualitative methodology, with techniques for collecting primary sources, direct observation, and unstructured interviews.

About the results, six cooperatives created in the Catatumbo region were identified, which are beginning to build social fabric from the reincorporated persons, as an alternative for reincorporation into civilian life and where collective productive projects are being formulated in different economic activities, such as poultry farming, marketing, livestock, agriculture, among others. To this must be added the desire of the people in the reincorporation process to initiate a training process in different topics. All this with the desire to build a region based on legality and regional development.

The main conclusion is that despite the multiple security problems for reincorporated

persons in a region that continues to be immersed in armed conflict, there is a consolidated commitment to carry out reincorporation, peace construction, and development within the region.

2. Theoretical framework

The violent events that have permeated the communities of Catatumbo for more than 40 years show that despite the signing of a peace agreement with the former FARC guerrillas, peace construction in the territory remains weak, due to the presence of illegal groups such as the EPL, ELN and FARC dissidents, who operate in the area, a situation that blurs the peasant identity of the people who work the land every day.

Catatumbo became nationally visible due to the actions of the Catatumbo Bloc of the AUC (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia) between 1999 and 2004. Tibú and La Gabarra are reference points for massacres and forced disappearances, murders, sexual violence, among others. This is shown in the report by the Centro de Memoria Histórica: Catatumbo Memoria y Dignidad (2018), which recounts the violence experienced in this region of the country and the stories that emerge from the depths of Catatumbo. Stories that are full of pain, deep-rootedness, hopelessness, and resilience. (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, [CNMH], 2018).

Although violence is still present in Catatumbo, we must not ignore the desire of the peasants to move forward despite the situation of violence and the government's abandonment; the State does not guarantee basic needs such as health, education, roads, and agricultural conditions. The communities perceive the presence of the State when the Army or the National Police increase their forces or when illicit crops are eradicated.

(Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica [CNMH], 2018).

Regardless of their conditions, the community continues to believe that peace can be found, as defined by the Political Constitution of Colombia (1991) in Article 22, which mentions that peace is a right and a duty of obligatory fulfillment (p.4).

Based on the above, Colombia has lived the last 50 years amid armed conflict, which blurs the right to peace, in the framework of this postulate, the signing of the peace agreement between the FARC-EP and the National Government on September 26, 2016, is proposed. This agreement seeks to prevent more victims and focus all efforts on building a stable and lasting peace. According to the final document:

The end of the conflict will mean the opening of a new chapter in our history. It is about initiating a transition phase that will contribute to greater integration of our territories, greater social inclusion - especially of those who have lived on the margins of development and have suffered from the conflict. (Acuerdo Final para la Terminación del Conflicto y la Construcción de una Paz Estable y Duradera, 2016)

According to the UN Verification Mission in Colombia, El Catatumbo is one of the regions most affected by the conflict and is the region that generates one of the greatest challenges for the implementation of the peace agreement to be reflected in results that can be perceived by the inhabitants of the area. (Misión de Verificación de la ONU en Colombia, 2018)

Within the framework of this agreement, one of the points is the reincorporation into civilian life of the ex-guerrillas and their

families, as mentioned in the peace agreement document.

A comprehensive and sustainable, exceptional, and transitory process that will consider the interests of the FARC-EP community in the process of reincorporation, its members, and their families, aimed at strengthening the social fabric in the territories, coexistence, and reconciliation among their inhabitants, as well as the deployment and development of productive activity and local democracy (Gobierno Nacional de Colombia y las Farc-Ep, 2016).

According to the peace agreement, reincorporation should take place in three areas: social, political, and economic, evaluating the conditions for the return of reincorporated persons to the formal economy, in the report (Retos y riesgos de la reincorporación económica de los excombatientes de las FARC, 2019) gives some recommendations for economic reincorporation, especially for individual and collective productive projects: "The consolidation of productive initiatives requires long-term processes that include accompaniment programs for the socio-emotional stabilization of ex-combatants, as well as academic and technical training processes".

On the other hand, the reincorporation process shows how the solidarity economy is a fundamental part of the productive projects, in Razeto's words (2010):

This approach to economics focuses on solidarity and is a theoretical and practical search for alternative ways of doing economy, based on solidarity and work. The principle or foundation of solidarity economics is that the introduction of increasing and qualitatively higher levels of solidarity in economic

activities, organizations, and institutions, both at the level of enterprises and in markets and public policies, increases micro and macroeconomic efficiency, as well as generating a set of social and cultural benefits that favor the whole society. (p. 47)

The Peace Agreement identified the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) models as high-impact strategies, which in practice allowed the creation of approximately 135 cooperatives distributed throughout the country. These organizations integrate more than 6,000 ex-combatants and are now working on the implementation of a wide range of productive projects and business initiatives that will enable them to generate long-term employment and income (Madrilejos, 2010).

On the other hand, this article also invites us to think about Cooperativism, which according to its socio-economic movement is based on values and principles of equality and equity. People organize and associate voluntarily in jointly owned and democratically controlled cooperative enterprises to address their economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations. To achieve this, cooperative members must be constantly learning the associative and economic processes of the cooperative model. In addition, they must be familiar with the legal bases and organizational processes of cooperatives.

3. Methodology

The methodology used was qualitative, which according to Abalde and Muñoz (1992) is an investigation carried out from the inside, which assumes a preponderance of the individual and subjective. Their conception of social reality falls within the humanistic perspective.

The present investigation had a descriptive scope that allowed us to describe phenomena, situations, and contexts; according to Hernández, et al., (2014) "with descriptive studies we seek to specify the properties, characteristics and profiles of people, groups, communities, processes, objects or any other phenomenon that is submitted to an analysis" (p. 92).

Therefore, it is intended to measure or collect information independently of the concepts or variables to which it refers, "descriptive studies are useful to accurately show the angles or dimensions of a phenomenon, event, community, context or situation" (Hernández, et al., 2014, p.92).

The investigation was conducted on the basis of a case study, according to the definition of Yin (1994), quoted by Silva (2016):

An empirical investigation studies a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not evident. (...) A case study investigation successfully deals with a technically distinctive situation in which there are many more variables of interest than observational data; and, as a result, it draws on multiple sources of evidence, with data that must converge in a triangulation style; and, also as a result, it benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions that guide data collection and analysis (p.27).

The research integrated the following techniques, semi-structured interview, direct observation, and reports, all of which provided diverse results and results from different points of view that enriched the study and allowed it to go deeper.

The interview defined as the "oral exchange between two or more people to reach a greater understanding of the object of study, from the perspective of the person/s interviewed" (Meneses and Rodríguez, 2011., p.34), was the first collection technique applied, integrating into the words of Hernández, et al., (2014), a guide of issues or questions, open or closed, with the interviewer having the freedom to introduce additional questions to clarify concepts or obtain more information, thus clarifying doubts and verifying answers.

Direct observation was used for the research, which according to (Díaz, 2010) "is that in which the researcher can observe and collect data through his observation."

4. Results

In terms of results, we can chronologically place them in three phases that have been identified. The first has to do with the training and the beginning of the accompaniment provided to the reincorporated individuals by UFPSO, a second phase corresponds to the formation of solidarity economy and the initiatives for the formation of cooperatives and a third phase refers to the constitution of the cooperatives and the formulation of productive projects, as well as the cooperation of external agents to the processes such as the Non-Governmental Organization Paso Colombia.

4.1 First phase

For 2019, the approach to the reincorporated people of San Calixto begins in an articulated work between the Consultancy, the United Nations Verification Mission, and the Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization. In these first meetings, the need arises to provide training in animal

husbandry and agronomy, as well as support for the formulation of productive projects.

A central theme that the reincorporated persons began to express in the meetings was the need for organization and formalization of the collective processes that they were beginning to have in the different municipalities of Catatumbo. This led to the need for training in solidarity economy.

The age of the owners of the established businesses as can be seen in Graph No. 2, 26% are 43 to 49 years old, 14% are 50 years old or older, 18% are 36 to 42 years old and 42% are 28 to 35 years old. The merchants and entrepreneurs have an average age of 28 to 35 years old in the majority of the established businesses with the largest clientele in the third age group as reflected in this study, It is important to mention that there are also young owners who, day by day, are moving forward, and are the ones who in the future will gradually generate more jobs.

4.2 Second phase

In alliance with the Observatory of the Solidarity Sector, a deployment was carried out in several municipalities of Catatumbo, reaching in 2020, before the beginning of the pandemic, remote places such as the village of La Trinidad, where together with the UN Verification Mission, training processes in solidarity culture were developed.

Considering the above, in 2021 three (3) training processes were carried out in the basic course of solidarity economy, in the municipalities of Hacarí, Cúcuta, and El Tarra, where 50 people in the process of reincorporation and 20 women were the beneficiaries of this academic offer.

Although our University Franco de Paula Santander Ocaña is a higher education institution, it has become an important ally in the consolidation of strategies that contribute to the construction of territorial peace, supporting the creation and legalization of new cooperative organizations in Catatumbo.

Solidarity economy courses in the region have enabled the formation of several cooperatives of reincorporated persons, who have seen in associativity the way to contribute to peace through their productive projects.

4.3 Third Phase

In Norte de Santander six cooperatives have been working towards community reincorporation based on their experiences. Managing productive projects based on the initiatives of the reincorporated people (see Table 1.)

Table 1. List of cooperatives in the process of reincorporation Catatumbo.

Cooperative	Production line	Members	Municipalities
Cooperativa Multiactiva por el Desarrollo y la Paz del Catatumbo – (COODEPAZC)	Agriculture Livestock project filed CNR, sheep project idea. Livestock - Milk - multipurpose farm Avocado Fish farming	26 families	San Calixto

Asociación para la Reconciliación y la Paz en el Catatumbo (REPAZCAT)	It has a project that is in the process of being approved by the Mayor's Office for \$30,000,000 worth of chickens. There are members of the Association that have individual productive projects.	30 families	Tibú (Caño Indio)
Cooperativa Multiactiva de Reincorporación y Paz (REINCOPAZ)	Raising and marketing of poultry Recovery of the fish farm Possibility of developing a project in the town of San Pablo.	20 Familia	Teorama
Cooperativa Multiactiva Paz Común - COMPAC	Laying hen poultry farming project	45 families	Cúcuta
Cooperativa Multiactiva de Tarra por la paz, (COOMTARPAZ)	To be defined	27 families	El Tarra

A total of 6 cooperatives have been formed in the municipalities of San Calixto, Tibú (Caño Indio), Teorama, Cúcuta, and El Tarra, benefiting around 148 families with different productive projects.

In this same phase, an international NGO, Paso Colombia, arrived in the territory and began to accompany the reincorporated

people by financing initiatives and with the idea of generating the Catatumbo Marketing Network.

5. Discussions

The solidarity economy according to Law 454 of 1998, regulated by National Decree 1714 of 2012, is defined as:

Socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental systems are formed by the set of social forces organized in associative forms identified by solidary, democratic, and humanistic self-management practices, without profit motives for the integral development of the human being as subject, actor, and end of the economy.

From this definition, people in the process of reincorporation have bet on collectivization through cooperatives to enter civil society from a social, democratic, and humanist perspective, generating social welfare for the people who are part of them and generating regional development.

“We, as reincorporated people, have bet on peace and we want to generate proposals to change Catatumbo, we left our weapons behind and now we want to be a reference point for our proposals”¹

Another factor that has influenced the formation of cooperatives has been the issue of security, since to the extent that people feel vulnerable in the territory, because the conflict has continued to develop, the collectivization and the humanistic purposes

of the cooperatives make them feel supported by a social fabric.

“The idea of cooperatives is because they are part of us. As guerrillas we always thought of the common good of all above the individual. We had nothing of our own, everything belonged to the collective”.²

Productive projects, as well as the support of academia and international organizations, are fundamental for the success of this process and for it to become a benchmark for other areas of the country.

“We want the productive projects to be a reference for the region. We used to fight for the people with weapons. Now we want to honor the word we gave for peace and continue fighting for the people by example”.³

As the training in solidarity economy and the project formulation process progress, an example is being set by the people in the reincorporation process concerning the construction of peace and regional development.

6. Conclusions

Three phases can be mentioned until the beginning of the year 2022 about the solidarity economy processes developed by the population in the Catatumbo reincorporation process through the foundation of cooperatives as a form of peace construction and the development of productive projects.

¹Anónimo. Persona en proceso de Reincorporación. Entrevista José Manuel Alba. San Calixto, marzo 12 de 2022.

²Anónimo. Persona en proceso de Reincorporación. Entrevista José Manuel Alba. Cúcuta, Febrero 23 de 2022.

³Anónimo. Persona en proceso de Reincorporación. Entrevista José Manuel Alba. Tibú, Octubre 20 de 2021.

The first had to do with the beginning of the accompaniment by the University at the head of the Socio-environmental and Agricultural Consultancy of Northeastern Colombia and training in the areas of agriculture and livestock; the second related to training in solidarity economy and the beginning of the idea of founding cooperatives; the third refers to the consolidation of cooperatives and the beginning of productive projects.

The start-up of the cooperatives is a way for people in the process of reincorporation to continue the road to peace and their participation in society, and in the future, they are intended to be an example of organization and successful productive experiences that will mark the regional development of Catatumbo.

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