

CONPEACE

From conflict actors to architects of peace

Civil Society Toolkit • August 2023

Comprehensive peace and security practices: territorial experiences and national articulations

Introduction

Currently, some Colombian departments such as Cauca, Guajira and Arauca are undergoing sociological reconfigurations, as well as a regionalization of conflicts and an upsurge in violence in their territories. Despite this, civil society and community-based organizations have generated a series of territorial defence and collective protection strategies with differential and intersectional approaches. These facilitate the strengthening of territorial leadership and social fabric, as well as inter-institutional articulation for the resolution of regional needs and problems.

The community workshop organised by CONPEACE and ICESI University in July 2022 emphasised the importance of state organizations working hand in hand with communities in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of peace and security interventions. This manner of working has the potential to empower community care and protection strategies that are consistent with territories' locally-defined necessities.

Taking the above into account, three examples of good community peace and security practices will be described below.¹:

1. The Fuerza de Mujeres Wayuu Organisation in **La Guajira**;
2. Terminales de Justicia in **Arauca**;
3. The EmpoderArte por la Paz project in **Cauca**.



Figure 1: Map indicating location of the three examples. Copyright Google Maps.

The CONPEACE and ICESI University Community Workshop - Thursday, July 28, 2022

The workshop had 21 participants from grassroots' communities and civil society organizations (11 female and 10 male) from eight Colombian departments: Cauca, Valle de Cauca, Nariño, Putumayo, Arauca, La Guajira, Cesar, and Norte de Santander, including representatives of Afro-Colombian communities, indigenous communities, and peasant communities.

Terminales de Justicia in Tame, Arauca

Structure and operation

The **Terminales de Justicia** (or Justice Terminals in English) are a community restorative justice mechanism developed since 2017 with the support of the Colombia Transforma programme. In 2017, the Justice Terminal System was formed in 9 of the 11 districts of the Tame municipality (each district is made up of 13 villages). To create the Terminals, a call was launched in the different villages to elect a representative from each institution, for example, from educational centres, health centres, churches, and Community Action Boards, in addition to the equity conciliator.

Once the Terminals are created, they are connected to the local urban justice system through the conciliator who acts as a bridge between the two. This is a way to bring the judicial system closer to rural areas and to break down existing barriers. Thus, cases of neighbourhood and family disputes begin to arrive at the Terminals, and it is the community itself that manages them.

Each Terminal has a computer, a printer, some primers, booklets, and the vests that identify staff as authorities. Terminal staff register the type of conflict and details of the cases without naming the people implicated. These records are sent to the Secretary of Government where they contribute to identifying the most relevant conflicts, to working towards resolution, and to determining the allocation of resources.

The Terminals document the process and when the parties reach an agreement it is recorded — the implicated parties make the agreement with the conciliator acting as moderator. A conciliation record is drawn up that has executive merits so that it is endorsed by the judge and goes on to be judged.

If there is a breach of the agreement, the judge suspends the investigation and orders compliance with the terms of the agreement.



Figure 2: Closure event



Figure 3: Inauguration and start-up of the Conciliation office



Figure 4: Training for equity conciliators in Tame, Arauca.

Evolution of reconciliation to Terminal

“Paramilitarism entered Arauca in 2001, but in 2006 we saw that the municipalities were confronting each other, the Tameños couldn't go to Saravena, and people from Saravena couldn't go to Tame, to Arauquita because if you weren't a paramilitary you were a guerrilla.”

Tame's civil society reacted to this wave of violence, and when the National University entered the municipality, 100 people presented themselves for the conciliatory diploma in equity. In 2007, 45 graduated and were appointed equity conciliators². Then the local justice systems were created, which are the articulation between the formal justice operators: Police Station, Welfare, Court, Attorneyship, and the Community Action Boards. This is how the two types of justice are articulated.

However, facilitators were aware of barriers to access, e.g. geographical, economic or cultural. Sometimes peasants are afraid to approach the judicial system due to economic and other factors. Conciliators in the countryside and in urban areas considered "we have to help our people in the countryside" and thus arose the initiative to create the Justice Terminals. In Tame, a municipal agreement was created on the theme of local justice, with conciliation seen not fundamentally as a manner to unblock the judicial system, but rather as reaching out to different communities to assist them in resolving their conflicts.

Another important impact was the context of the Peace Agreement since the ELN and the FARC administered justice in some ways. Given the pending demobilization, the question remained about who was going to administer justice. The conciliators decided that they were going to:

"After the demobilization there was a council where I asked the question 'who is going to administer the justice that you did?' Two FARC commanders responded, 'the state', I said 'wrong, wrong. It's not the state, it's the community itself that has to do that'."

Examples

1. An illegal armed group murdered a man who had senile dementia. One of the terminals went to them to say, *"you committed this act, and furthermore, the relatives of the person had to leave; this is not the case, so let's see what can be done."* Result: the illegal armed group called the family to apologize, state that it had been a mistake, and assure them that they could return home since there was no problem with the family.
2. Students have been learning to solve their own conflicts and have created a Conciliation Office in many schools, where they settle their problems and conflicts, on occasion with the participation of their parents.

Challenges

With all the success of Terminals, there are some challenges:

- The fundamental limitation is financial: everything is unpaid community work by the conciliators, who often spend from their own pocket to supervise their Terminal, advise them, and to continue ongoing processes.
- Another challenge is public order: threats and violence from dissidents and other armed groups.



Figure 5 and 6: San Salvador and Puerto Jordán

Fuerza de Mujeres Wayuu, La Guajira

The organisation **Fuerza de Mujeres Wayuu** (**Sütsüin Jieyuu Wayuu** in Wayuu; **Wayuu Women's Force** in English) was founded in 2006 in La Guajira, a department bordering Venezuela and the Caribbean sea. Created through an alliance of distinct Wayuu organisations, *rancherías*, and communities, its aim is to draw attention to violations of human rights and ethnic rights, as well as to the situation of vulnerability of victims of the armed conflict, the presence of armed groups, and the militarisation of the territory³. Constituted as a clearly binational actor, they define their mission as defenders of “territory, water, and life”⁴.

The starting point of the **Fuerza de Mujeres Wayuu** was the work with women and communities that are victims of the armed conflict, in addition to denouncing mining and energy megaprojects, forced displacement, and the violations of indigenous women’s rights in the implementation of such megaprojects. The organisation’s strength comes from women’s motivation for political participation, and the leadership they exercise in their communities.

Due to its wealth of natural resources and its highly strategic position for businesses (both legal and illegal), La Guajira has been the site of armed disputes that seriously impact the indigenous community. Territorial defence work – which has included denouncing the violent activities of paramilitary groups – exposed the women leaders of La Guajira to accusations and reprisals in the form of threats, violence, and forced displacement.

Women in various parts of La Guajira have intensified their level and capacity for collective organization, for example, by launching awareness campaigns around the devastating impact of mining on communities or publishing criticism of multinational companies, their violent exploitation of the region’s resources, and abandonment by the state.



Figure 7: Indigenous Wayuu women raising voices for peace and protection.

Resisting social and ecological damage

A key focus is on energy projects and their impacts on the environment and climate change, emphasising the co-responsibility between powerful economic actors and individuals.

As stated by a representative of the Wayuu Women's Force, resource exploitation projects and energy projects “*are damaging our territory, but also bringing about internal conflicts*”; Therefore, the work of the collective is peacebuilding, including monitoring the development of peace agreements in the territory and peace education in schools.

Strategies

There is good use of social networks – both existing platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp, as well as their own pages such as [Notiwayuu](#) or the Wayúu Communications Network – to communicate their work and create awareness, particularly among young people, from a work perspective. In the territory. There is a spiritual perspective that, for example, places emphasis on the protection of nature as well as on education, communication, and art. Likewise, they campaign via legal and political channels to advance a fierce and decisive critique not only of criminal-paramilitary structures, but also of dominant economic and political actors.

Creating international alliances —participating in the National Forum of Indigenous Women and Peace with colleagues from Guatemala and Mexico to share the experiences of what they have lived in their territories— has been key in the strategy of the Wayuu Women's Force.

As stated by a representative of the collective:

"We have been in multiple campaigns because threats have also affected us - that has been one of the things that has allowed us to continue in the territory - the institutional support for us from international cooperation and international allies have been fundamental."

Among others, they have formed partnerships with UNICEF to work on issues of reducing xenophobia towards migrants - especially towards people from Venezuela because there is also a substantial Lebanese population - advancing an agenda of conviviality across borders and uniting different ethnic and population groups.

Finally, the Fuerza de Mujeres Wayuu worked to provide humanitarian assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This collective can be considered as a form of struggle from below with a gender approach against violence, as architects of peace and a model to follow in other parts of the country that face similar challenges. La Guajira is a study area for the CONPEACE Program, and the focus of a previous publication that can be found [here](#).



Figure 8: Logo of La Fuerza de Mujeres Wayuu

Community Protection Strategy in Suárez and Buenos Aires, Cauca

The project **EmpoderArte por la Paz** (or EmpowerArt for Peace in English) is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, implemented by the PLAN Foundation in association with Foro Suroccidente and Corporación Otra Escuela, and with the leadership of the Centre for Afrodiasporic Studies (CEAF) of the ICESI University. In 2021 it elaborated in a participatory manner the “Community Protection Strategy, with emphasis on the promotion of safe environments for the participation of girls, boys, adolescents and youth (CAY) and women in the municipalities of Suárez and Buenos Aires, Cauca”.

The objective of this strategy is to promote self-care and protection practices promoted by communities and institutions so that girls, boys, adolescents and young people can exercise their right to participate in a safe and secure way through the strengthening of community capacities, political advocacy, institutional articulation, psychosocial guidance, and legal advice.



Figure 9: Mapping the Community Protection Strategy

Participatory work

Initially, a participatory diagnosis was carried out to better understand both the situations of risk and the spaces for participation of CAY and women from the municipalities. The diagnosis was conducted through a document review, workshops, focus groups, and seminars with local communities, public servants, and social leaders in the North of Cauca. Subsequently, the risks that CAY and women in the region frequently face were condensed into four groups: psychosocial risks, risks associated with gender-based violence, risks associated with the State, and risks linked to the presence of armed actors.

The construction of the Community Protection Strategy with emphasis on the promotion of safe environments for the participation of CAY and women in the municipalities of Suárez and Buenos Aires, Cauca, was an intersectional and interethnic commitment, in addition to a dialogue between academic, technical, and community knowledges on security, care, and protection. The strategy is made up of four dimensions: territorial protection, security guarantees, recovery of civic space, and construction of peace and coexistence; which in turn contemplate four lines of action: strengthening community capacities, political incidence and/or institutional articulation, psychosocial orientation, and legal advice.



Figure 10: Collective work as part of the Strategy

To build the Community Protection Strategy, it was necessary to adopt an alternative vision of security that was coherent with the Afro-descendant and indigenous communities that inhabit the North of Cauca, with their struggles and their organizational processes. This vision calls for the inclusion of other perspectives different from militarism, whose strategies are based on the use of force, competition and the elimination of the other or of difference. On the contrary, another security paradigm rescues the values of collective care and of cooperation with human and non-human life, and with fundamental principles such as inclusion and sustainability.

This security perspective recognizes the knowledge of the communities, their care and self-care strategies in which not only men participate, but also women, girls, boys, and adolescents.



Figure 11: Respecting ethnic worldviews

Sharing the strategy

In July 2022, in Cali (Valle del Cauca), the first socialization of the Strategy was carried out in the community workshop "Comprehensive peace and security practices: territorial experiences and national articulations" co-organized by CONPEACE and ICESI, in which social leaders from different regions of the country participated, as well as public officials and representatives of the international community.

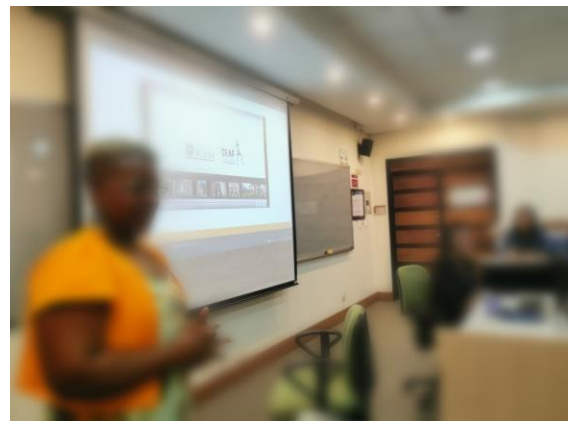


Figura 12: Presentation in Cali with CONPEACE/ICESI

Four months later, in November 2022 in Santander de Quilichao (Cauca), the EmpoderArte por la Paz project socialized the Community Protection Strategy with CAY and women from Northern Cauca. CEAF was invited to share the process carried out during the construction of the Strategy, its dimensions and lines of action. This second socialization of the Strategy saw the presentation of girls, boys, adolescents, youth, women and Afro-descendant, indigenous, peasant, and social leaders from the municipalities of Buenos Aires and Suárez, Cauca. Workshops were held to gather ideas for the implementation of actions contemplated in the Strategy. These spaces signified the beginning of the implementation of the Strategy with the Afro-descendant, indigenous and peasant communities of Suárez and Buenos Aires, as well as the opportunity to systematise their knowledge and combine efforts in favour of the care of their territories.

Conclusion

“Peace not as the absence of war, but as the guarantee of the full development of people”⁵

The current challenges associated with violence and insecurity in Colombia are due to structural causes such as the existence of illicit economies—mining and drug trafficking—, inequality, the selective presence of the State through its offer of social services like health, education and economic development, as well as the weakening of communities’ autonomy which has led to their impoverishment and marginalization. In this context, the actions implemented by the Colombian government, such as individual security schemes, are insufficient and inadequate since they do not take into account the needs of the population as a whole. For this reason, community perspectives and differential approaches must be included in the security practices of state entities to establish, together with communities, early warning and response systems articulated with opportune action plans (PAO) in the territories where violence is experienced.

Likewise, it is necessary to accompany and support social leadership through state institutions and international organizations, to strengthen the initiatives that generate positive impacts in the region and reduce the risks that social leaders face when they promote social and community processes.

These grassroots leaderships could be essential to advance in the processes of dialogue and demobilization of illegal armed groups and in the comprehensive implementation of the Havana Peace Accords.

The examples presented in this publication show good security practices implemented by communities in the departments of La Guajira, Arauca and Cauca, which consider prevention and collective protection as fundamental elements in the construction of territories of peace. In addition, these examples demonstrate the importance of applying measures not only in the short term, but also solutions in the medium and long term, based on proposals for social, productive and educational development that seek integration, empowerment and justice in the territories.

Footnotes

¹The information in this document is based on the interventions of representatives of each of the three initiatives during the civil society workshop, July 28, 2022, Cali.

²The figure of conciliators in equity is guaranteed by law 23 of 91 - [https://www.camara.gov.co/sites/public_html/leyes_hasta_1991/ley/1991/ley_0023_1991.html](https://www.camara.gov.co/sites/public_html/leyes/leyes_hasta_1991/ley/1991/ley_0023_1991.html)

³<http://www.notiwayuu.com/2021/12/mujeres-wayuu-una-larga-lucha-por-la.html> (18.12.2022).

⁴<https://twitter.com/mujereswayuu> (18.12.2022).

⁵Verbatim from one of the participants during the civil society workshop, July 28, 2022, Cali, Colombia.

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Based at the University of Oxford's Global Security Programme, the CONPEACE Initiative focuses on changing security landscapes in marginalised spaces, especially border regions during transitions from war to peace. Founded and directed by Professor Annette Idler, CONPEACE's interdisciplinary research bridges the gap between marginalised communities and centres of political power, using a bottom-up methodology based on intensive fieldwork, non-state order frameworks, and regular forums between interested parties.

(* in alphabetical order)

Canada

