



# MAIN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION PROJECTS IMPLEMENTED BY EX-COMBATANTS FROM “HÉCTOR RAMÍREZ” RURAL SETTLEMENT LOCATED IN LA MONTAÑITA, COLOMBIA



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## ABSTRACT

This paper analyzed the importance of productive projects in the reintegration process of ex-combatants of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), in the rural settlement “Héctor Ramírez” located in Caquetá, after the signing of the Colombian peace process in 2017. In this regard, the research was characterized by being a descriptive study as a qualitative approach, using the semi-structured interview as a data collection instrument applied to ex-combatants to recognize their expectations about the productive projects that they have been developing in the camp. It was found that ex-combatants reinvest the earnings received in productive projects to achieve, under their criteria, possibilities of growth and financial return for the long term. In addition, they hope that the Colombian government will support the improvement of the commercialization processes of the products generated in the different projects. In this way, the standards of well-being at the personal and community level will be improved.

**Keywords:** Armed Conflict, Ex-combatant, Productive Project, Reintegration

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## INTRODUCTION

In Colombia, the scene of the armed conflict is bleak. The painful history of the country's suffering because of the violence caused by Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) with forceful acts such as massacres, kidnappings, forced displacement, sexual crimes, dispossession of goods, the dismemberment of living men, exhibitions of beheading, and the dispersal of body parts along rural roads, are situations that still survives in the victim's memory (Niño, 2017). The organized struggle in the nation provoked physical, emotional, and sentimental changes in individuals, modifying their personal and collective psychological well-being, including the strong impact of suffering and some of the most unforgettable unpleasant impressions in their memory (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2013). Consequently, the identification of the people's mental damage involved in the conflict, the degrees of flexibility and adaptation techniques, as well as the related danger factors, has an essential objective, and it is the characterization of the victims to construct care and repair cycles according to individual, family, and local needs (Hewitt et al., 2016).

In the same context, Colombia is experiencing a transformation in ways of life in the post-conflict. The country must promote institutional strengthening that allows it to consolidate and solve the fundamental and structural problems of social inequity (Bernal and Moya, 2018). For that reason, the government created the territorial training and reincorporation spaces (ETCR by its acronym in Spanish). Today, they are known as rural settlements, in which ex-combatants of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) are trying to reintegrate into civilian life (Garduño, 2020).

This paper shows each of the agricultural production projects on which the inhabitants of the "Héctor Ramírez" rural settlement has been focused, in order to generate income and consolidate the peace agreements signed between the National Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

## METHODOLOGY

### Area of Study

#### **"Héctor Ramírez" rural settlement, located in La Montañita-Caquetá.**

This community is located in the municipality of La Montañita, department of Caquetá in the Colombian Amazon, 27 km from Florencia (Capital City). Its municipal seat is 1°23'42" north latitude and 75°26'13" west longitude of the Greenwich meridian. It is located 450 meters above sea level, its average temperature is 27 °C, and its extension is 1,483.92 square kilometers. The general limits of the municipality are: to the north with the department of Huila (eastern mountain range), to the south with the municipalities of Milan and Solano, to the east with the municipalities of El Paujil and Cartagena del Chairá, and to the west with the municipality of Florencia (Alcaldía La Montañita Caquetá, 2012).

## **Sample**

The sample of the present study are thirty participants, ex-combatants who are part of the "Héctor Ramírez" rural settlement in La Montañita, Caquetá.

## **Instruments**

A semi-structured interview as an instrument composed of six key questions, was applied to all the participants of the settlement. The questions were mainly related to the productive projects, production, and marketing.

## **Information Analysis**

A matrix was drawn up using Microsoft Excel 2010, to identify similarities and differences between the responses of the ex-combatants. The information obtained was contrasted with primary sources with the contributions of the most representative participants like members of the JAC, committee coordinators, and cooperative director.

## **RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

All the interviewers agreed on the projects that were a special part of this research, financed by FONDO PAZ (El Fondo de Programas Especiales para la Paz), and international communities, in charge of financing and promoting the development of programs, plans, and strategies aimed at peace process. A brief description of the actual state of these projects, and how is the management is given below. All these projects that will be mentioned below, began in 2017 with the arrival of the reincorporated to the rural settlement.

### **Agricultural productive projects**

All the activities must engage the production with the commercialization. Moreover, the crops are not all at their highest level of production, but they are availability of crops such as pineapple, sugarcane (the sugarcane is processed for its transformation into panela), bananas, and yucca.

Products such as panela, yucca, bananas, and pineapple and their derivatives are sold in the store, in the bakery, and in the ice cream parlor.

### **The pineapple crop**

The pineapple crop (Figure 1) is the top product that the rural settlement has. They have approximately 7 hectares planted throughout the place, and so far, it is the only crop that is in production. Annually, 60 tons of pineapple are obtained, which generates income exceeding 50 million pesos; these resources are used to improve the physical assets in the community. Currently, the product is sold in the different municipalities of the department of Caquetá, and neighboring departments.

**Figure 1.** Pineapple crop of the "Héctor Ramírez" rural settlement.



- **The bananas crop**

Bananas are one of the crops (Figure 2) that are grown to a lesser extent, there is about 1 hectare planted in the place, but most of the production used for local consumption, and it distributed among the inhabitants of the community. Also, the production of approximately 7 tons of bananas in 11 months estimated, with a value of 9,800,000 Colombian pesos. This production had problems with the conservation, thus, the person in charge said that almost half of the planted plants did not grow, thus affecting its commercialization. This product is of great importance since it is part of the daily diet of the inhabitants of the place.

**Figure 2.** Banana crop of the "Héctor Ramírez" rural settlement.



- **Fruit Pulper Machine**

For the processing of crops, there is the fruit pulper machine, which seeks to be one of the community's strategies for purchasing and marketing products derived from the production processes that they have been carrying out. The fruit pulp products found such as pineapple, guava, soursop, passion fruit and lulo, pineapple syrup sweets, traditional milk caramel, grape-flavored milk caramel, whiskey cream, among others (Table 1).

**Figure 3.** Fruit pulper Machine of the Hector Ramirez rural settlement.



For the delivery of the fruit pulper machine, “this was possible thanks to the contributions of support countries to the Trust Fund of the Departamento de Asuntos Políticos (DPA), to the UN Mission, with the implementation of Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD), and with the support of Agencia para la Reincorporación y la Normalización (ARN), la Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz (OACP), and Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje (SENA)” Federico Montes. The machine is one of the strong ones, for the commercialization in the store and bakery, there was the opportunity to buy and taste food produced there, the prices of some products are in the following table:

**Table 1.** List of products and prices of the fruit pulper machine of the “Héctor Ramírez” rural settlement.

PRODUCTS	PRICES (Colombian Pesos)
Fruit pulp (Kg)	2.000
Whisky cream (Lt)	15.000
Milk Caramel Big (300 g)	5.000
Milk Caramel Small (100g)	4.000
Fruit syrup (Lb)	3.000

Moreover, something that could be observed is that they do not carry out frequently production processes, only when the products sold out, the production processes start again., this is the case with bread, fruit pulps, and all the products mentioned. So, in the case of any visit that needs many products, they do not have enough of them available for transforming and offering the products. Financially, the strength of the community today is its pineapple crop, with has many purposes, according to the interviews, ranging from own consumption, and transformation for local, regional, and national marketing.

## Livestock productive projects

- **Aquaculture**

For this process, the community uses geo-membranes, and the production is in lakes around the settlement. The community farms *Colossoma macropomum*, *Prochilodus magdalenae*, and *Oreochromis* spp (fish species); the production is about 2,560 kg, and the production is done twice a year.

The main purpose of the product is local marketing and consumption. The national government gives them monthly aid for the purchase of fish, and they sell and market the product in the sector.

During the visit, this production was identified as an innovative strategy for the community. The place has excellent water resources, this type of super-intensive production represents a maximum use of natural resources, making them more efficient because it allows them to cultivate fish in a controlled environment with a water recirculation system, thus obtaining a smaller amount of liquid for production .

This geomembrane system allows filtering water that is under constant monitoring where the temperature, pH, and oxygenation have an important role. It allows the removal of the metabolic waste of the fish and uneaten food, allowing control of the levels of ammonium and nitrites in the water, where these substances can poison fish. This system has a commercial value of five million Colombian pesos, which is made up of a steel-based circle, with its respective water turbine, guarantees an estimated average 350 grams in 7 months.

In the geomembrane systems, it was possible to evident the aeration systems necessary to inject oxygen into the water where the fish are housed. This must be to control the oxygen saturation levels since the rural settlement does not have monitoring equipment for the parameters. They are based on the behavior of the fish, when they come to the surface, the aerators are turned on.

Further, the person in charge stated that it is carried out four times a day in the morning at 7-11 and in the afternoon at 2-4, supplied based on Itálcol® brand concentrate with its respective handling in stages, considering that it is a super-intensive production system, it was found that a stocking density of 40 to 60 fish per m<sup>3</sup> of water, depending on the quality that can be obtained at sowing time, and taking into account that the pond is left empty for a month to not affect the conditions for the production.

Considering the above-mentioned points, 3% of completely new water must be guaranteed daily, where only two of the four geo-membrane ponds are in operation with an average of 80 m<sup>3</sup>, result-

ing in an approximate stocking of 2700 fish per pond with a total of 5400 every 7 months due to the low availability of oxygen linked to other management factors in this super-intensive production. Thus, it is managed for tilapia roja with a mortality rate of 20%. In conclusion, this system provides control of climatic factors, greater use of food, less stress, and some absence of diseases. On the other hand, a difference in taste can be appreciated since there is no presence of algae typical of other systems, and it is a benefit for the consumer (Figure 4).

**Figure 4.** Aquaculture of “Héctor Ramírez” rural settlement.



- **Pig farming**

The rural settlement has about 50 pigs, all for local consumption through government aid for the purchase of meat. There, they also have 7 pigs with 39 piglets. Moreover, they use the food waste obtained from the houses in the area to feed them. Considering that the animals are not fed with concentrate, they have a delay in reaching the average weight, and it can be observed that the breeding sows are below the production of the number of piglets, since they raise an average of 5 per birth. It takes between 6 to 7 months for a pig to reach an average weight of 60 kg, it can be deduced that it is not a technician, and it does not reach the optimal productivity values (Figure 5).

**Figure 5.** Pig farming in “Héctor Ramírez” rural settlement.



## DISCUSSION

In the "Héctor Ramírez" rural settlement, new spaces are built that allow us to see a scene where there is no space for armed conflict, where ideas and innovation are the ones that predominate in these fields. This is how a group of ex-combatants were trained in cooperative issues to strengthen their values and bet on the creation of new solidarity projects for their everyday life.

As conditions agreed in the Colombian peace process, the population of ex-combatants carries out projects preserving the agreement, where the following words are mentioned; *"each member of the FARC-EP in the process of reintegration will have the right, for once, to financial support to undertake an individual or collective productive project, for the equivalent of eight million Colombian pesos"* (Acuerdo Final, 2016, p.74).

The ex-combatants presented economic proposals. Initially, they agreed to quotas of between 1,000,000 and 2,000,000 million Colombian pesos, money that comes from the state contribution for the individual mobilization of ex-combatants. Thus, they joined the capital, and they trained in cooperatives even though they still did not know which project to bet on. After a specialized study of the soil and considering the climatic characteristics of the region, they opted for the following crops: pineapple, fish farming, pig farming, bananas crop, cassava, and cane, for self-consumption. Furthermore, they started with a capital stock of 450,000,000 million pesos, for an organizational project of a social type.

Regarding productive projects, these have become an incentive for ex-combatants, so far as they feel useful to society, producing necessary goods for the community, and they have faced obstacles such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. They have never given up hope, and they perceive this as an opportunity to continue strengthening each of their projects and perfecting their workshops and spaces. As an example, the project such as the hectares of pineapple planted, the fish farming project with four pools with a capacity of 8,000 fish each, and the fruit pulper machine that they received with the support of the European Union (Universidad de los Andes, 2019).

However, due to the inconveniences that arise from the proper development of productive activities, the ex-combatants are positive, and they consider that if the international community continues to support them, reintegration will be possible. Support received, such as that of the European Fund for the Peace process, with the construction of the fruit pulper machine, generates benefits not only for the ex-guerrillas but also for the community that surrounds them. Moreover, they will have someone to sell their products, and the fruit will be transformed into jams, compotes, milk caramel, and even whiskey cream handcrafted (Tiempo, 2019).

## CONCLUSIONS

- After years of armed conflict, ex-combatants analyze productive projects as a contribution to society, offering and marketing products that they harvest and make with their own hands, and a lot of projects are being developed by analyzing the context. Despite this, the production is efficient, but the commercialization has been a point at which they hope that the national government will support them, especially on their access roads.
- The productive projects, despite the marketing problems and the obstacles imposed by the

pandemic, are for the ex-combatants a guarantee of returning to civilian life. They only hope that the governments in power change words for actions, and there is a real political will to achieve the long-awaited stable and the lasting peace process.

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