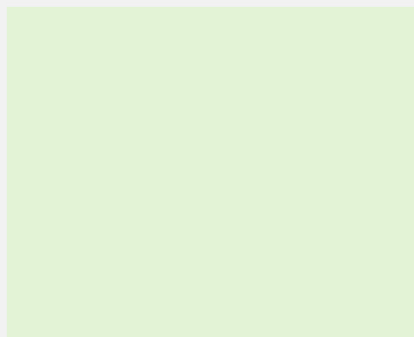
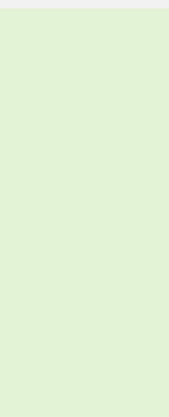
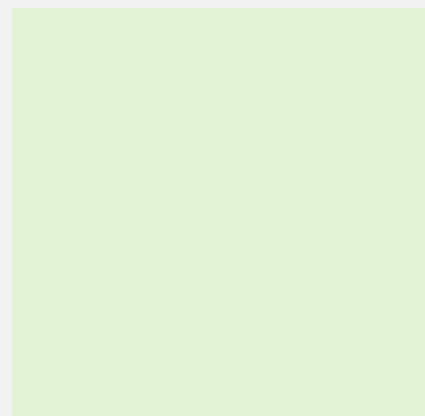
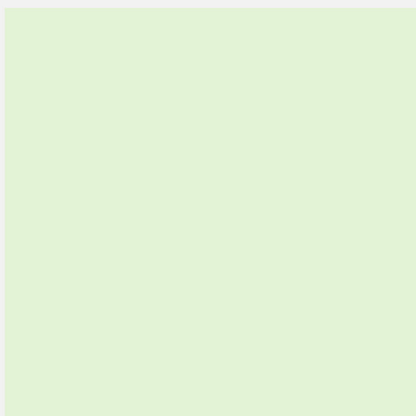


4 Empowering Peasant Economies of Cauca's Youth

Actoría de Social Juvenil



Introduction

The adoption of the neoliberal model in Colombia has led to widened inequalities and large-scale exploitation of natural and human resources, with disproportionate impacts on the rural youth. In this context, the solidarity economy is an alternative that contributes to alleviating poverty among young people and their families, as well as promoting the development of life skills and community work, active participation, rootedness to the land, agricultural work and the strengthening of rural identity. As an alternative to the dominant neoliberal and market-based economy in Colombia, the peasant economies in Cauca promote the participation of the youth in the production and sale of their crops. In promoting forms of solidarity economy in the country, business activities of small landowners and farmers are able to contribute to the development of their families, communities and country.

Country Context

In Colombia, land ownership is concentrated among 14 per cent of the landowners, which are multinational corporations, political elites, and paramilitary groups.¹ This led to the dispossession of peasants of their land, leading to large-scale displacement and impoverishment of millions of peasants, especially women. Act 160 was passed to supposedly avoid the concentration of land ownership among the privileged few and redistribute the land to smallholder farmers, providing them with an Unidad Agrícola Familiar (UAF) or a family agricultural unit. The UAF is claimed to be the size of land that would enable a family to earn a decent livelihood.

However, this law was instrumentalised by corporations and the local elite to acquire large tracts of land by dividing it among different entities. Large businesses have used these lands to build large plantations and implement mining projects, leading to the exploitation of natural resources and adversely impacting the environment for profit. With these, smallholder farmers face landlessness and threats to their livelihood, leading to the decline in the production of staple food crops, also impacting the food security of the country.² The unequal distribution of land has also fostered conflict in rural areas, which has worsened poverty and inequality.

¹Ibáñez, A. & Muñoz, C.. (2011). La persistencia de la concentración de la tierra en Colombia: ¿Qué pasó entre 2000 y 2010?. Notas de Política 9, Centro de Estudios sobre Desarrollo Económico (CEDE) of the Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá.

²Oxfam International. (2023, June 22). Divide and Purchase: How land ownership is being concentrated in Colombia - Oxfam Policy & Practice. <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/divide-and-purchase-how-land-ownership-is-being-concentrated-in-colombia-302323/>

Peasant economy in Popayán, Timbío and Piendamó in central Cauca

Overview

As a response to the unequal distribution of land, the Actoría de Social Juvenil (ASJ) or the Association of Producers for Youth Social Action implements programs to forward a solidarity economy with the participation of the rural youth. A solidarity economy is defined as an “economic alternative within society that allows for the efficient distribution of scarce resources so that the needs of the people of that society can be satisfied.”³ The social and solidarity economy, constituting 7 million people, contributes four per cent of Colombia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).⁴

ASJ is a grassroots organisation composed of young farmers from the department of Cauca, southwest of Colombia. ASJ supports the cultivation, production and sale of coffee and various staple foods of peasant youth and their families in Cauca. Coffee represents close to 13% of the department of Cauca's GDP. Around 100,000 families in 40 municipalities depend on coffee production for their income.

The aim is for organised youth to strengthen productive solidarity efforts that allow for the survival of communities in the face of the onslaught of the neoliberal model in the Colombian countryside. Participation in local farmers' markets is a path of resistance. In addition to providing support to the emerging solidarity economy, ASJ aspires for the youth to become protagonists of their own history and contribute to social transformations. Inspired by the values of justice, respect, solidarity, and honesty, ASJ's work aims to contribute to the construction of total peace in Colombia.

For this research, Actoría de Social Juvenil studied the cultivated area of 30 peasant youth and their families, as well as the landscape of the peasant economy in the municipalities of Popayán, Timbío and Piendamó of Cauca, Colombia.

About the project

In Cauca, small landholder peasants collectively produce coffee and 20 other fruit and vegetable crops, which they sell in farmer's markets. ASJ provides assistance in developing the “VOZ Y SABOR” or “Voice and Flavor” brand, which sells a brand of coffee produced by youth peasants in farmer's markets and networks of ally organisations.

³Andrade Restrepo, L. M. (2021). Analysis of solidarity economy organizations in Colombia and their impact on the country. *Cooperativismo y Desarrollo* 9(2), 555-571.

⁴Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2022). From informal to formal jobs: The contribution of cooperatives in Colombia. <https://www.oecd.org/publications/from-informal-to-formal-jobs-the-contribution-of-cooperatives-in-colombia-28214bf5-en.htm>.

Modality	Research, knowledge, and information sharing; Capacity development
Instrument	Not applicable
Program Type	Capacity development
Duration	No specified start date, ongoing
Budget	Not applicable
Sector	Agriculture
Development Partner(s)	Actoría de Social Juvenil (ASJ)
Type of private sectors engaged	Social and solidarity economy
Private sector partners	Peasant economies in Cauca
Other dev't partners	None
Role of partners	ASJ assists the growth of the solidarity economy along its “three axes,” namely organisation, mobilisation and advocacy. By organising the youth peasants, ASJ aims to strengthen the productive solidarity efforts to confront the impacts of the prevailing neoliberal economic framework in rural areas. It provides support for the development, management and execution of productive projects for the rural youth, and assists young farmers to receive direct technical advice and support to ensure the possibility of better sales and marketing of food in the region. Once organised, the youth work together to develop a brand for their coffee products and to sell their produce in farmer markets. In addition to income-generating activities, ASJ mobilises young peasants through youth camps and forums in order to discuss the persisting challenges of the rural youth and to formulate a youth agenda. This youth agenda also promotes solidarity economies as a path to solving current development challenges. The youth agenda is then promulgated in local, regional and national policy-making spaces, through advocacy efforts. The organisation campaigns for the government to adopt concrete recommendations from the youth agenda, including those relating to the solidarity economy, in government policies.
Monitoring	ASJ conducts regular monitoring and surveys of its programs and activities in Cauca.
Results framework	No information available

Results

In the survey sample, 712,992 coffee trees were found to be planted, occupying approximately 142 hectares. Young farmers were also able to sell 20 other vegetable and fruit crops, in addition to coffee. There was also a high participation of young women farmers in the solidarity economy in Cauca. However, there remain challenges in the training of rural youth, as well as the processing and marketing of their goods, which serve as hindrances to the growth of the solidarity economy in the department.

Evaluation

From the survey and interviews conducted for this research, it can be seen that the rural youth face several challenges in their initiatives in the solidarity economy. Underlying all the challenges is the unequal distribution of land and the lack of arable land to cultivate agricultural products. Those who have a sizeable land have little training on the cultivation, processing and marketing of products. There is also little familiarity with agroecology, which can support the production of fertilisers and pest management for crops. Peasants also face the disproportionate impacts of climate change.

Adherence to the Kampala Principles

Kampala Principle 1: Inclusive Country Ownership

The solidarity economy has been recognised and regulated by the government of Colombia since 1986 when it passed the 2636 Decree that founded the National Council for the Solidarity Economy (CONES), through which policies and programs relating to the solidarity economy are formulated. The government recognises the importance and potential of the solidarity economy in facilitating economic growth and development. After the 1997 financial crisis, Law 454 was passed that clearly defined solidarity economy as “a socio-economic, cultural, and environmental system formed by a set of organised social forces, identified by associative solidarity, democratic, and humanistic self-managed practices, and considered it crucial for the national economy.”

The National Administrative Department of the Solidarity Economy (DANSOCIAL) was founded in 1998 to guide the operations and activities of solidarity organisations. DANSOCIAL was responsible for overseeing the functions of other subsidiary bodies such as the Superintendence of the Solidarity Economy and National Fund for the Solidarity Economy, which aimed to provide legal and financial support for these organisations. In recent years, the solidarity economy has also been increasingly seen as a pathway towards poverty eradication. The establishment of the Social Innovation Centre under the National Agency for Overcoming Extreme Poverty aimed to help 1,500,000 families out of extreme poverty by 2020 through solidarity economy initiatives.

Despite these government initiatives in support of the solidarity economy, its assistance has not been felt by all organisations. There are also issues that some organisations supported by the government have not incorporated the principles of cooperation and reciprocity, and have solely undertaken for-profit activities. With this, ASJ also mobilises Cauca's rural youth to campaign and advocate for policy recommendations and programs that would genuinely address the concerns of peasants, especially young farmers. These recommendations are enshrined in the youth agenda that is drafted through conferences and forums organised by ASJ. The youth agenda is then brought to national, regional and local policy-making spaces by the peasant youth.

Kampala Principle 2: Results and Targeted Impact

The peasantry has led to the establishment of subsistence economies on small plots of land. The territory of Cauca is one of the departments of the country with a high percentage of peasants living in smallholdings, which are organised in property sizes that on average do not exceed 2 hectares or 20,000 square meters.

⁹Villar, R. (2001). El tercer sector en Colombia. Evolución, dimensión y tendencias. Confederation colombiana de organizaciones no gubernamentales.

¹⁰Martínez, S.C., Pachón, A.M. & Moreno, V.M. (2019). Solidarity Economy, Social Enterprise, and Innovation Discourses: Understanding Hybrid Forms in Postcolonial Colombia. Soc. Sci. 8(7).

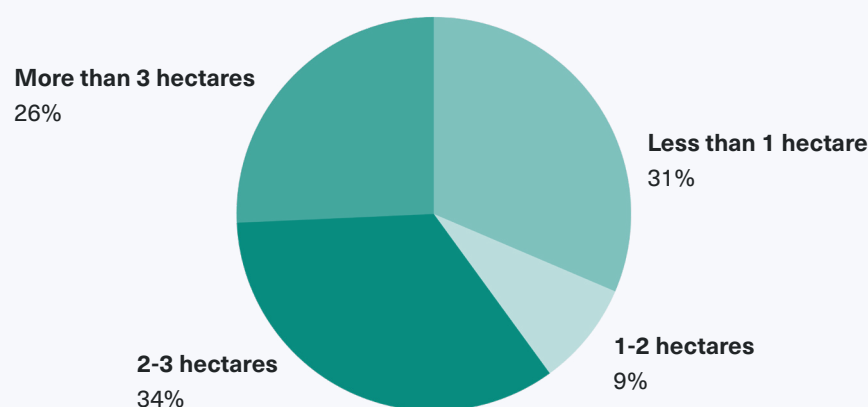


Figure 1. Size of land owned by the surveyed Cauca youth.

The rural youth in Cauca collectively work towards economic sustenance through the cultivation, production and sale of agricultural products. The ASJ made its own coffee brand, “Vos y sabor, el café de las juventudes campesinas del Cauca”, which is the fruit of the bounties of the land, the feelings, thoughts, dedication and talent of the young farmers rooted in their territory, culture and customs. This brand was made possible through collective or associative entrepreneurship that emphasises the value of collective work to foster economic growth, creative capacities, solidarity with others, and respect for nature.

Aside from coffee, the young farmers are able to harvest different fruit and vegetable crops on their plots, as they are able to sell a variety of 20 products in farmer’s markets. By planting other food and medicinal items, they are able to preserve their heritage and culture and protect biodiversity. Avocado is the most commonly grown fruit, followed by guava and citrus, which together with guamos, chachafruit and banana serve as shade for coffee, generating optimal systems for a diversity of birds that feed on these fruits. Beans, maize, and cassava are the most commonly grown food crops on the youth farms. Some farms also have medicinal plants like aloe, lemongrass, basil and mint, that are used by peasant families as remedies and for spiritual protection.

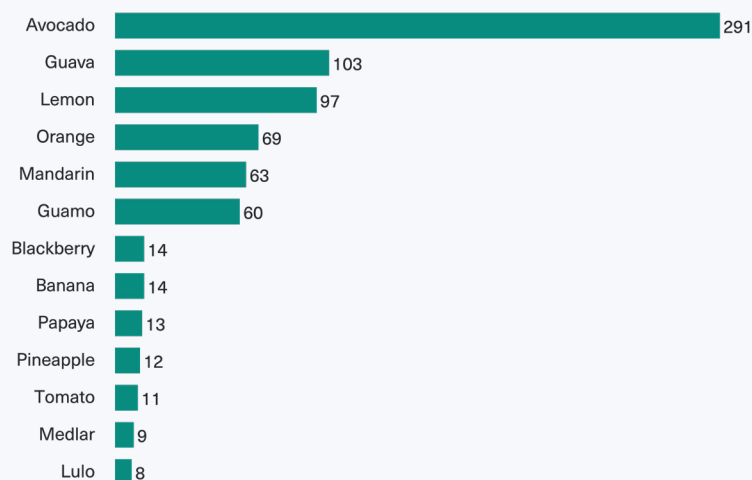


Figure 2. Number of fruit trees cultivated by the surveyed Cauca youth.

Cabbage	Broccoli	Cilantro	Onion
Tomato	Carrot	Cucumber	Beetroot
Arracacha	Lettuce	Orange	Archucha
Chontaduro	Pumpkin	Spinach	Acelga

Figure 3. Crops cultivated and consumed by the Cauca youth.

Kampala Principle 3: Inclusive Partnership

The peasant economy is based on the principles of collectivity, comradeship, solidarity, and social transformation. With this, it can be seen that the youth are actively involved in peasant economies, with a high participation rate of young women. The consolidation of territory and community is conducted through a cultural dialogue, which aims to generate social cohesion and belonging, in order to forward self-determination of the youth and their families. The youth members of the community are divided into working groups or nodes, in order to create and develop different youth agendas in their territories. The different nodes include the following: identity, community youth leadership, community communication, collective entrepreneurship, and systematisation of experiences.

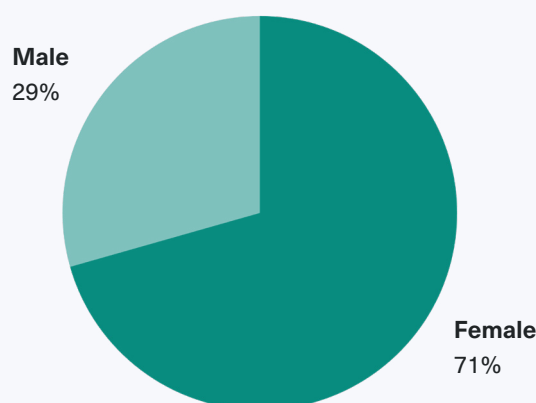


Figure 4. Data of surveyed Cauca youth.

These nodes empower the youth to take on leadership roles and undertake activities that will contribute to the common good of their communities and to the social transformation of their country. With this, they are able to make a critical analysis of their lived realities and forward solutions and initiatives that will be able to address their needs. For the rural youth in Cauca, the solidarity economy is a real alternative to fight for their rights and support a dignified life for young peasants.



Kampala Principle 4: Transparency and Accountability

Under the node that focuses on the systematisation of experiences, the youth organise workshops and training sessions to share their knowledge and experiences on crop management, harvesting and post-harvesting. Their experiences and stories are then transformed into narratives, published through primers, documents, articles, theses and infographics. As a result, the following booklets were produced: *Siembra Identidad y valores campesinos*, *Semi lero Liderazgo juvenil comunitario*, *Voz y sabor comunicación comunitaria*, among others.

Kampala Principle 5: Recognising, sharing and mitigating risks for all partners

Despite all the economic and social adversities experienced by the rural youth, they are clear in their conviction that “life is in the land.” With this, they continue to work in the countryside, planting, caring for the crops, harvesting and ensuring that these products reach the tables of many people. As peasant economies foster community youth leadership that emphasises collective decision-making for the common good, risks are adequately addressed. Under the community communication node, the youth are able to propose issues and topics to be discussed and decided on. In this manner, they are able to highlight issues and challenges they face, and their ideas, analysis and perspectives are given importance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As a response to the unequal redistribution of land and increasing landlessness by peasants in Colombia, Actoría de Social Juvenil has implemented capacity development efforts to foster a solidarity economy among the peasant youth in Cauca. While this has enabled the rural youth to participate in production and economic life, there remain systemic barriers and gaps in development initiatives that hinder farmers from exercising their rights over their own land and livelihood. With this, development actors must adopt the following recommendations:

- **For the government to pursue a fair distribution of land, ensuring peasant families have ownership over their UAF, and to stop land grabs by large multinational corporations that have historically exploited natural and human resources of the country for profit.**
- **For the government to extend support to solidarity economy initiatives, especially those that enable the marginalised sectors to participate in economic life. The government and other development actors should provide the necessary assistance to peasant economies, as a path towards food sovereignty and development. This should include the provision of necessary technical assistance and capacity development efforts to further promote the cultivation, production, and sale of crops by farmers and their families.**
- **For the government to foster an enabling environment for civil society, including the youth, to highlight their demands. The government must consider adopting the youth agenda forwarded by the peasant youth in development policies and plans, promoting the democratic ownership of their development priorities.**