



Form presented by the initiative to participate in the Transformative Cities People's Choice Award

GENERAL INFORMATION	
Location	Medellín, Colombia
Title of the Transformative Initiative:	Strategies to sustain the life, economy and culture of the farming communities on the edges of the city of Medellín
Name of the Organization:	Corporación Ecológica y Cultural Penca de Sábila
Type of Organization	We are a not-for-profit environmentalist and feminist organization that has been going for 32 years. We promote territorial environmental management through autonomous community actions.
Website:	www.corpenca.org
Category and Year:	FOOD. 3rd Transformative Cities Award (2020).
STORYTELLING	
Summary	
Political, organizational and advocacy strategies, fair trade and agroecological production for the full exercise of rights, food sovereignty and sustenance of the life, economy and culture of the farming communities on the edges of the city of Medellín.	
Background and Description of the Problem	
<p>The initiative came about due to the need to protect 12,000 farming families living in rural areas of Medellín. This is a group of people whose rights have historically been infringed and who currently have precarious living conditions and a standard of living below that of the urban areas. They typically own smallholdings where they practise farming on a small scale to guarantee their own subsistence.</p> <p>The problems faced by these communities are the systematic loss of the material and natural foundations of small-scale farms due to unsuitable farming practices; the lack of alternatives to improve production systems on small farms; the lack of direct sales and</p>	

marketing mechanisms; women's lack of access to land and means of production of their own; the loss of traditional knowledge about small-scale farming; the unlikelihood of passing on the farm to the next generation due to the lack of opportunities in the life of a farmer; and the lack of employment safeguards and social security.

Women are at higher risk of vulnerability because they do not own their home and/or the farm. Despite working in farming, this means that they are unable to access resources such as credit or incentives for production.

Design and Implementation

The initiative involved political education processes and training on alternative farming methods with farmers' organizations in rural areas known as *corregimientos*; conversion to agroecological farming practices; development of the fair trade circuit by selling produce directly in the Colyflor shop; mobilizing communities to defend farmers' rights (meetings, forums, debates, marches, demonstrations, bartering seeds, gathering signatures); bringing the farmers' organizations together by setting up the Aburrá Valley Farmers' Assembly; linking up with other social actors to forge alliances such as the "Alliance for the defence of rural community territory and life" in association with the universities; political advocacy work to achieve designation as a Rural Farming District and the inclusion of this in the city's land use plan, so that strategic areas can be designated and protected to be used specifically for small-scale farming.

Farming families, farmers' associations, and rural community organizations such as women's associations, young people's organizations, farmers' working groups, environmental groups and others have joined the initiative. They have participated in the agroecological farming practices, the advocacy work on local development plans and the municipal development plan, the promotion and setting up of the Aburrá Valley Farmers' Assembly and the campaigns to defend the rural communities' territory and farmers' rights.

The initiative has come up against the Colombian state's failure to recognize the rights of rural people and farming communities, which is reflected in the lack of support from government institutions. The rural communities on the edges of the city have to fight for their rights to be respected and for public funding, as the local government has other priorities and directs its attention exclusively to urban areas. Progress has been made on placing rural issues on the public agenda, raising the profile of the rural territory, rural communities and the small-scale farming economy on the edges of the city, and the adoption of fair trade and responsible consumer practices by the urban population.

Results Achieved and Evaluation

The initiative we are presenting for this award brings together the different strategies that the Corporación has taken forward with the aim of sustaining the life and economy of the farming communities in the *corregimientos* of the city of Medellín, which account for 70% of the municipality's territory.

Bearing in mind that we are talking about a process that has been going on for more than two decades, we can mention the following results: setting up of two associations of farmers who practise organic farming on their land, development of the Colyflor Solidarity Economy Circuit as a fair trade strategy for farming families, inclusion of the Rural Farming District in the Medellín Land Use Plan and in the development plans for 2016-2019 and 2020-2023, setting up of the Aburrá Valley Farmers' Assembly, an alliance between farming families and their organizations in the bioregion of the Aburrá Valley, which comprises 11 municipalities adjacent to Medellín, and the development of an alliance with academia, involving faculties from public and private universities.

The beneficiaries of this process can be identified as: the 104 individuals, farmers' organizations and associations that form part of the Colyflor Shop's network of suppliers and the 12,000 farming families who live in the designated Rural Farming District of Medellín.

In the community processes, the farmers' associations hold annual assemblies to present reports on the work done during the year and evaluate the results. As part of the advocacy work with the local government, there is a citizen watchdog body that oversees the allocation and spending of public funds for rural areas.

Political Strategies

Firstly, we have made use of social mobilization, organizing demonstrations and participating in citizen marches. We have also attended the local government's forums for citizen participation such as meetings, workshops and Municipal Council sessions. In addition, various media (television, radio and newspapers) have reported on our activities and proposals. All this has been accompanied by serious proposals on land use, such as the legal concept of the Rural Farming District (*Distrito Rural Campesino* - DRC). Alliances have also been key. Finally, with regard to self-managed initiatives, we have managed to develop the Colyflor Solidarity Economy Circuit and a proposal for technical training through the Agroecology School.

Milestones: 2003: Founding of the ACAB Farmers' Association and opening of the Colyflor Fair Trade Shop. 2011: Setting up of the Campo Vivo Agroecological Farmers' Association. 2013: Setting up of the Aburrá Valley Farmers' Assembly. 2014: Inclusion of the legally protected DRC in the Medellín Land Use Plan. 2017: Setting up of the Alliance for the defence of rural community territory and life in the Aburrá Valley between different universities and the Corporación. 2020: Inclusion of the DRC in the Development Plan for 2020-2023.

Organizations that have provided support: the alliances we have managed to develop around the defence of rural communities, including several faculties from public and private universities and social and community organizations from other municipalities in the Aburrá Valley. One organization that has been an obstacle is the local government itself, as they are unaware of the particular features of rural life and concentrate on the urban areas of the municipality, making it very difficult to get them to give way and support our proposals. Finally, it is important to note that it is thanks to the integrated nature of our strategies that we have been able to achieve results, with serious and coherent proposals owned by the community and social mobilization.

Communication and Cultural Strategies

Over the years, we have produced several videos to explain the Rural Farming District initiative, and others that include testimonies of farming families about how rural life is affected by tax increases or the megaprojects that displace them. We developed a logo to represent the proposal for the District: a chiva bus. Also known as a "ladder bus", this is a traditional form of public transport much used in Colombia. In many rural areas these buses are still used to transport people, crops and animals, connecting the countryside to towns and cities. We also designed banners and placards for the public events such as marches and demonstrations. Articles on the events held and denouncing abuses are published on the Corporación's website.

In recent years, we have attracted the attention of the local media around the subject of the rural population living in Medellín. During the discussion of Medellín's Development Plan 2020-2023, we managed to get local media to describe the demands of the rural population and to highlight its relevance in the context of the Covid-19 crisis. The voices of the Corporación and many different people from rural communities have been heard on radio programmes and quoted in articles in the local newspaper and reporting on the pandemic.

Resources, Funding and the Transformative Economy

Corporación Penca de Sábila receives funding from like-minded international cooperation agencies that share our views and policy proposals. This has enabled us to launch and run self-financing economic initiatives such as the Colyflor Solidarity Economy Circuit, a process in which small-scale farmers are able to sell their produce directly to consumers at a fair price in the Colyflor Shop. The Colyflor Shop is a partnership between the ACAB and Campo Vivo farmers' associations and the Corporación. The financial results are made public and shared every year in assemblies attended by all the farming families. Through the training provided by the Agroecology School, we have managed to transmit the technical skills and principles involved in organic farming to dozens of young people and small-scale farmers in this region.

In addition, through the alliances developed with other organizations we have managed to mobilize technical and human resources to improve our advocacy and training work. An example of this is the alliance with various university faculties in the city.

Furthermore, the designation of the Rural Farming District of Medellín by the Municipal Government has led to public funds being allocated, so far only for the assessment stage.

Related Legislation

Rural communities in Colombia have had to contend with the denial of their human rights, especially their rights as people who live in rural areas. This situation has become much worse due to the failure by the government of President Iván Duque to fully implement the Peace Agreements reached between the national government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The Colombian government also abstained from voting in

favour of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. Despite this, the legitimacy of our initiative continues to be based on this Declaration, the Colombian Constitution, and the historical demands for a comprehensive rural reform that is fair to people who live in rural areas.

In 2014 we managed to include the Rural Farming District in the Medellín Land Use Plan through Municipal Agreement 048, as a legally protected area in which physical-spatial, economic, cultural and social activities can be carried out. The designation of this District also means that programmes and projects aimed at the improvement, permanence, promotion, planning and management of the rural territory can be developed and implemented to benefit farming communities. We subsequently managed to achieve the inclusion of the District in the city's development plans for the last two local government terms, 2016-2019 and 2020-2023.

Ecological Transitions

Sustaining the life, economy and culture of the farming communities on the edges of the city of Medellín, and support for their farming systems and conversion to agroecology are a fundamental component of the idea of an eco-city and a harmonious relationship between society and nature. Our proposal, which is based on designated land use, allows socio-environmental conflicts in urban planning to be resolved by setting limits to rein in urban growth, guaranteeing conservation areas and understanding that rural communities and their crops are also protecting the territories that cool down the planet as a result of farming practices on small and medium-sized plots of land. Medellín's *corregimientos* are highly suitable for farming, and it is vital to recognise this and boost their potential. This is why it is essential to continue to promote agroecology as an alternative farming method, reducing and eliminating the use of agrotoxins in farming. This will undoubtedly be reflected in an improvement in the health of farming families, consumers and ecosystems, given the close links between human, animal and ecosystem health. We have also promoted and implemented the development of short circuits and fair trade in markets based on the solidarity economy.

Lessons Learned

We believe it is essential to combine protest and demands for the human rights of the rural population to be safeguarded with specific advocacy proposals and self-managed actions on the ground. This means that it is necessary to try to maintain dialogue with government institutions and attend all the forums for citizen participation to present our proposals, even

though this can often be wearing and fruitless. In addition, it is not possible to go it alone and alliances are essential, between farmers' organizations and with academia.

We have learned from this process that it is necessary always to have social oversight and for citizens to monitor what government institutions are doing, as the lack of political will in local governments is evident and constant pressure from society is required to ensure that the gains achieved are actually implemented.

Although most of our work has focused on the rural population of Medellín, since 2013 we have been supporting the Aburrá Valley Farmers' Assembly. The Aburrá Valley is the area where the 11 municipalities that form part of the Medellín Metropolitan Area are located. All these municipalities are home to farming families who suffer similarly from the lack of recognition and neglect by local governments. The work done to push for the designation of the Rural Farming District of Medellín, its development and the participation and advocacy process are an experience that organizations from other municipalities can learn from. We have shared this experience in public forums, assemblies, meetings and seminars, we have produced videos with testimonies, and published articles and reports on it. We also managed to get the most important local newspaper to publish reports on rural people's needs and proposals on several occasions.

Conclusion

First, we have managed to build a solid Solidarity Economy Circuit which we manage ourselves; second, we developed a mechanism for the legal protection of rural and farming territories and we managed to get it included in the city's Land Use Plan and later in the Development Plans. By protecting and supporting the farming communities living on the edges of the city we can envisage a sustainable city without excessive growth and a direct, close, solidarity-based relationship between farmers and consumers.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Supporting documents

Resolution No. 201950118486 of 2019, adopting the second-level complementary planning instrument, the Rural Farming District for the Municipality of Medellín and other provisions:

https://www.medellin.gov.co/normograma/docs/r_alcamed_118486_2019.htm

Media reports:

<https://www.elcolombiano.com/antioquia/distrito-campesino-de-medellin-aun-no-funciona-BJ12935466>

https://caracol.com.co/emisora/2020/02/26/medellin/1582741397_371972.html

Video on the Rural Farming District:

<http://corpenca.org/distritoruralcampesino/>

Article on the advocacy work done around the Medellín Development Plan:

<http://corpenca.org/2020/por-una-ruralidad-en-el-plan-de-desarrollo/>

Impact of the Covid-19 outbreak

In Medellín, the crisis has placed the importance of food sovereignty and the farming communities living on the edges of the city centre stage. The Corporación has denounced how this contingency has laid bare the lack of government support for the farming communities to ensure that their produce can be distributed. Many farming families have seen their crops go to waste, while at the same many families in the city's neighbourhoods were suffering from hunger. We have noticed that some people are now more aware of or concerned about responsible consumerism, and the issue of rural communities and the people who live there has gradually found a place on the agenda of the media and some of the city's political representatives.

We can share our report from April about this:

<http://corpenca.org/2020/por-fin-aparecieron-las-comunidades-campesinas/>