

PAZ Y SEGURIDAD

THE PDET HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO QUENCH THE THIRST FOR RURAL WELFARE

Verdad Abierta

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When the FARC guerrillas left the territories they occupied, the abandonment of the communities and lands that live in that “other Colombia” was made evident. For years, they have lived in the margins of estatal access to fundamental rights.



To overcome these conditions, the Peace Agreement included Programs for Territorial Development through which the State aimed to make presence in 170 municipalities affected by the war.



This initiative built up the expectations of those communities, that saw in it the solution to many of their ordeals. But now that years have passed, they only feel disappointment as they see only delays and unfulfillments.

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In collaboration with

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“Help us as much as you can so that this information, that’s coming from the communities, can have the greatest possible reach”, says a community leader from the Middle Pacific sub-region to *VerdadAbierta.com*, who prefers to keep his name confidential for security reasons. He is distressed because the welfare promised to his black communities has not arrived, after the promise of the implementation of the Programs for Territorial Development (PDET, for their acronym in Spanish) that were agreed in the Peace Accord.

The institutions in charge of the PDET are deceiving Colombian society as well as the international community because, when they present their management reports in the Middle Pacific, they show that millions of dollars are being invested here. But nothing is happening here.

When the former FARC left the territories they had occupied for several decades, the abandonment of the communities and lands that live in the “other Colombia” was made evident. For years, they lived on the margins of statal access to fundamental rights, under the threat of their unfulfilled day-to-day needs, and without a comprehensive and effective presence of the State. It was found, for example, that in the south of the department of Meta, in the villages of Caño Amarillo and Albania of the municipality of Vista Hermosa, there are five streams that have no bridge, and, on rainy days, they flood so no one can move between villages, much less transport the harvest. Another example is the lack of electricity in several Pacific communities who are left in the dark when the light of day goes away.

To close the gap between the countryside and the city and provide welfare to rural communities as part of the

point on Comprehensive Rural Reform, the PDET was formed and thus came to life in March 2017 with the Decree 893. It established a strategy expected to reach 170 municipalities in the country, considered to be the most historically hit by the armed conflict, with social investment. However, inhabitants of several of these areas express their unhappiness and annoyance because they still do not see concrete results.

An example of this can be seen in the distant village of Gaviotas, in the municipality of Uribe, also in Meta. To get to Gaviotas one needs to take a road made of dirt and stones, a trek that lasts for more than two hours. Thus, the communities say that agriculture is not profitable because of the difficulties they face in getting their crops to larger markets, and the economic impulse promised by the PDET has not arrived.

“Our produce is here, we plant it, but what do we do with it?” asks a farmer. “We have had to deforest a little bit because the only way to make a living is with cattle. When we had coca, people would cut down a hectare of forest and plant it, process it and deliver it on foot. But delivering plantain, for example, to the market can’t be done on foot. We must find means of transportation and pay for them. With the PDET we were expecting roads.”

Like this one, other similar testimonies can be heard throughout the country while the phrase “we are complying”, repeatedly pronounced by Emilio Archila, presidential advisor for Stabilization and Consolidation, echoes in the microphones when he speaks about the implementation of the Peace Accord.

1

CLOSING THE GAP

Attached to the Presidency of the Republic, the Agency for Territorial Renewal (ART) began operating as of January the 1st, 2017. This entity is responsible for coordinating the intervention of national and territorial entities in rural areas affected by the conflict. As part of that objective, it leads the coordination of the PDET.

The process of consultation with the inhabitants to determine their needs and project implementation tasks was carried out through a large participatory exercise that, at the time, the then President Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018) described as “the largest social dialogue in the world.” The needs of these communities were included in the Action Plans for Territorial Transformation (PATR), which were concluded in the first quarter of 2019 and involved the participation of more than 200 thousand people. Of these, 65 thousand were women, and it also involved 715 indigenous councils and 517 community councils of black communities. This consultation process gathered the needs of more than 11 thousand villages that are part of the 170 prioritized municipalities. They were grouped in 16 sub-regions and categorized as the most affected by the armed conflict, poverty, illicit economies and institutional weakness¹.

As a result of this diverse dialogue, 32.808 initiatives were identified –4.606 initiatives with gender and rural women, 8.381 ethnic initiatives and 619 ethnic and gender initiatives– to be implemented over a 15-year period, guided by the PATR.

These initiatives respond to the needs of these communities within eight pillars: Social Management of Rural Property and Land Use; Infrastructure and Land Adapta-

tion; Rural Health; Rural Education and Early Childhood; Housing, Drinking Water, and Basic Rural Sanitation; Economic Reactivation and Agricultural Production; System for the Progressive Guarantee of the Right to Food; and Reconciliation, Coexistence and Peace Building.

Measuring the progress of the PDET, which is projected for 15 years, is no easy task. Just one of the more than three thousand initiatives may cover different and broad needs of a municipality or sub-region. This implies, according to the ART, that “the execution of a single project will not necessarily mean the complete achievement of one initiative. Some of these initiatives require permanent action for their execution, like for instance those related to periodical maintenance or endowments.”

According to ART’s balance report, as of September the 10th, 2021, 8.594 initiatives had an active implementation path, that is, they were associated with projects and actions that promote their implementation².

“Of the 8.594 initiatives, 9.82% are associated with the Land Management pillar, 12.83% with infrastructure, 8.46% with Rural Health, 25.04% with Rural Education, 7.30% with rural housing, drinking water and basic rural sanitation, 21.53% with Economic Reactivation, 5,32% with the Right to Food pillar, and 9.70% with Reconciliation and Peace,” states the entity.

Although it is difficult to qualify the fulfillment of the progress as the ART itself explains, when looking at the projects and works for the fulfillment of the initiatives, the general opinion, when the communities are asked, is that they expected more by this date. The Agency has

1 See: <https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/RQVZe/1/>

2 See: <https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/7909338/>

generally observed situations that generate risks associated with the execution stage of the projects, such as delays in the schedules for various reasons, shortage of raw materials due to the Covid-19 pandemic, climatic situations, hold-ups due to road blockades during the National Strike in mid-2021, invasion of land where the works are being executed, and some other cases due to price readjustments.

For a human rights defender from Alto Patía and Northern Cauca sub-region, who prefers to keep their name

confidential for security reasons, the biggest problem in the implementation of the PDETs is the role of the ART, as they justify that “in view of the expectations raised with the communities, the ART says: ‘We are a coordinating entity, we are a facilitating and accompanying entity; we look for sources of financing, but we are not responsible for the execution of the PATR.’”

2

FOLLOWING THE MONEY

The PEDT is executed through three sources of financing: the Collegiate Body of Administration and Decision (OCAD Paz) –which manages royalty resources–, Works by Tax, with which the private sector can effectively participate, and resources from international cooperation. On November the 23rd, one day before the fifth anniversary of the signing of the Peace Agreement, the Rural Development Agency reported that the national government has invested 11.44 billion COP in the 170 PDET municipalities.

According to reported information, the sources of those resources are discriminated as follows: OCAD PAZ, 6.23 trillion pesos; Works for Taxes for 607,456 million pesos; Colombia in Peace Fund, one trillion pesos; general budget of the Nation, 3.10 trillion pesos; and international cooperation, 428,105 million pesos.

On the other hand, when the ART is asked about the resources that have been used for the initiatives, it maintains that up to August the 31st, 2021, with respect to the number of works executed with resources from the OCAD PAZ and Works for Taxes funds, 432 and 76 respectively were carried out.

The regions with the highest number of projects in the OCAD Peace fund are Sierra Nevada, Perijá and Plantain Zone (72), Caguán Basin and Piedemonte caqueteño (49), Macarena - Guaviare (38) and Chocó (35). Of the

total 432 projects in this fund, more than half (295) are set for pillar two Infrastructure and Land Adequacy, followed by Rural Housing, Drinking Water and Basic Rural Sanitation (89). In the case of Works for Taxes, the sub-regions that occupy the first four positions are Alto Patía and Northern Cauca (11), Southern Tolima (11), Putumayo (9) and Arauca (9); most of them related to various supports for education and rural early childhood and rehabilitation, improvement and construction of roads.

In the information provided by the ART on executed works, a road improvement project for the stretch that goes from the municipality of El Paujil to Cartagena del Chairá in the region of Caquetá appears as “finished”, in which 35 billion pesos have been invested; however, a journalistic team of this portal verified, at the beginning of November of this year, that there are still some stretches to be concluded, which affects mobility in the area due to works on the road.

One of the aspects that draws attention in the response given by the ART to VerdadAbierta.com is the clarification about data they do not manage, as it comes from information exercises captured from other systems or external sources and “do not constitute the primary or official information about them.” What is worrying about this clarification is that the entity does not have certainty about the works that are not under its control.

3

PENDING ITEMS

The PDET programs contemplated the execution of “low scale and fast execution works”, through which projects such as school classrooms or playgrounds were intended to be built while the PATR was being constructed through local and regional community dialogues. In Pacífico Medio, made up of the municipalities of Guapi, López de Micay and Timbiquí, in the region of Cauca, and the municipality of Buenaventura, in Valle del Cauca, the execution of at least ten of these small works for each of these four municipalities was agreed upon. But although the PATR was signed, on February the 23rd, 2019, to date not even one of them has been delivered³.

EGA Consortium, formed by Galán School Corporation for the Development of Democracy and Asfaltart S.A., is the operator of these works. To date, in Buenaventura, the most advanced work of this type is a children’s park in the community council of Zacarías del Río Dagua. However, the contract signed by EGA Consortium, and this Afro community has been in force for more than three months and the advance payment has not been made.

In the case of the municipality of Guapi, on the coast of Cauca, according to information from the ART, a park in the village of San Antonio de Guajui has been completed, but the complaint of the community council of the Guajui River is that they have not been paid the 221 million pesos that had been agreed for this work. In Timbiquí and López de Micay, as of the date of this publication, they have not started with the first work.

VerdadAbierta.com sought the directors of EGA Consortium. The spokesperson was Sergio Párraga, its legal representative, who specified to that some of these

small works that he has under his responsibility in several communities of the Pacific are in a state of structuring, for those that have a higher degree of complexity. But the simpler works, such as the playgrounds on which the communities expect payment to be made, did not require this type of process and that the chain of non-compliance begins with the State.

As of today, I have been deposited 14 million COP after we signed the Middle Pacific contract in December 2019,” says Párraga. “We do not have the contractual obligation to finance the works, it is up to the Colombia en Paz Fund to wire us to be able to pay. As of today, the Fund has not transferred the resources to us, and we have had to assume many administrative costs”.

Párraga adds that they have had to seek loans to start making the small payments they have given to the communities. In the case of the community council of the Guajui River, Párraga said that 60 million have been paid and a second payment of 120 million was scheduled for the end of November, leaving a balance of a little more than 41 million to be paid.

In Buenaventura they are scheduling a meeting this week to start the work and he maintains that it has not been possible to start with the execution of the playground project because the EGA Consortium still does not have the advance payment.

We have an issue. A document of the Consortium that we have put on the table in Technical Operating Committees before the national and regional ARTs, states that the structure of the contract does not point to the works being done as quickly as possible, it is a rather complex structure. Things should be much more agile, there should be resources.

3 Read more at: <https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/7909338/>

He also specifies that this problem is not an isolated case of the Pacific, but that non-compliance is widespread with other operators in other sub-regions of the country.

“But to be as fair as possible, from two months ago the processes with the Fund began to advance”, says Párraga and warns that the sanitary crisis due to the Covid-19 affected the execution of the works, in time and costs: “The materials went up a lot, the steel shot up, the concrete is impossible, the transports are tenacious, and now we are in a strong winter season”.

Regarding the resources coming from the OCAD Paz, the communities of the Middle Pacific highlight that there is not a single work supported by this fund.

“No community council in the Middle Pacific is strong enough to formulate projects of this type,” says the leader of the sub-region, who prefers to remain anonymous. “The formulation itself is done through the may-

or’s offices, but if it is difficult for the mayor’s offices because they do not have a defined budget and the personnel required for the formulation and follow-up of these projects, how will it be for the community councils? That is why there are no projects!”.

In the case of the other PDET subregions of the Pacific, the spokesperson for the Middle Pacific considers that, although there are some works in these other municipalities, in general they are very few in comparison to other regions of the national geography. A worrying situation because the time for execution of the works, with each passing day, is less, given the 15-year compliance goal.

“It is aberrant. This also demonstrates to us that this country, from those who lead it, is still deeply racist and discriminatory, because here they are, the black and indigenous communities, so ‘we should not send anything to them’”, feels the leader of the Pacific.

4

A PHASE OF “LOW PARTICIPATION”

As part of a process of relationship of the leaderships of Alto Patía and Northern Cauca, human rights defenders constituted the Regional Articulation for Peace, from which they autonomously carry out a regional, as well as municipal oversight in relation to the implementation of the PDET in 24 municipalities in the regions of Valle del Cauca, Cauca and Nariño.

They are taking this initiative as they consider that the members of the oversight PDET that were established in the PATR, approved and signed in December 2018, were not trained to follow the implementation of the Program and “they are used to validate decisions in which the leaderships have not participated,” says a human rights defender from the Cauca Regional Peace Space, who prefers to keep his name confidential due to the high rates of violence experienced in that region.

In this tension, the organizations of this sub-region stated that they have complained to the ART that information does not reach them, they do not socialize the initiatives that are being implemented and they do not communicate with them.

There is very little participation, limited participation of the leadership of the driving group and social organizations that were present in the Regional Transformation Action Plan; in the prioritization, structuring and securing of resources for the 4,466 initiatives of Alto Patía and Norte del Cauca,

for this reason the communities state that “they do not feel that peace has reached the territories”.

In addition, the leaderships feel worn out, because, as this spokesperson explains, “some communities blame the people who were left as delegates of the driving groups or social organizations that participated in this process for the fact that nothing has been implemented”.

The most recent activities carried out by the members of the driving group in each subregion was the validation of the road maps, a tool that allows the implementation of the PDETs, articulating national and territorial plans that are being developed in each territory. This document specifies execution times, responsibilities and financing, in addition to establishing monitoring mechanisms.

Eleven roadmaps are published on the ART’s web page, with the Middle Pacific, Macarena-Guaviare, Arauca and Alto Patía and Northern Cauca still pending. In the case of the latter, the human rights defender of the Cauca Regional Peace Space explains that they were still adjusting the document so that it would respond more accurately to the reality of the region and include human rights and environmental aspects.

Although, as a result of the construction and validation of the roadmap, some initiatives will be prioritized, which in this case are at the municipal and sub-regional levels, the process by which the source of financing is found and its execution is nowhere near ready,

states the Cauca leader, who specifies that the initiatives will be prioritized, but will not have a due structuring and financing process.

5

THE TABLE IS DONE

The PATR of the Pacific region bears the signatures of ethnic communities (community councils and indigenous organizations), municipal mayors and governors; it is, in the words of the leaders an “ethnic PDET”.

In the case of the Middle Pacific subregion, in order to continue with community participation in the initiatives of the Reconciliation, Coexistence and Peacebuilding pillar, it was agreed to build a subregional roundtable to follow up and monitor the implementation of the PDET, in addition to the creation of a roundtable to address issues that were not within the competence of this Program, such as the organizational needs of black communities, the possible role of indigenous communities as environmental authorities or modifications in the maritime division of the region. However, none of these initiatives were developed as planned.

“We, the communities, on our own, had to form the PDET Subregional Roundtable for the Middle Pacific,” says the human rights defender consulted, as a strategy to follow the implementation of the PDETs. And since August 29, they decided to cease meetings on PDET issues with state institutions until three requests were met.

The first is the creation of a coordination for the Middle Pacific, because since its conformation it has never had one of its own, instead it’s been managed from the coordination of Alto Patía and Northern Cauca. “The fact that this coordination has not been created to a large extent also means that there have been no results here in the Middle Pacific”, says the leader of this region.

In the second, they demand the recognition of the monitoring table that they created as a community and, in the third, they demand a plan to solve the deficit

that the sub-region has in terms of formulation, feasibility and financing of projects so that the 629 initiatives agreed upon can be fulfilled in the time foreseen by the PDETs.

The Pacific leaders also asked the ART to have a space for conversation in which officials from the Renewal Agency, the Presidential Council for Stabilization and Consolidation and national and international guarantors would address these points. On October 13, they met with each other, but it did not turn out as the communities had hoped.

We arrived there and there were the same people with whom we have always been talking to and with whom no results have been achieved for the Middle Pacific. The ethnic authorities of the Pacific took the decision that there was nothing to talk about and until today, November 22, we have not received an answer. We hear unofficially that [the ART] is preparing a response.

Although at the failed meeting of October 13, ART representatives tried to persuade some of the leaders to continue the dialogue by stating that work would begin on November 1, as of the date of this publication there had been no progress.

In addition to the possible bureaucratic obstacles, there is the atmosphere of hostility that surrounds those who, from the communities, ensure compliance with the programs agreed upon in Havana, Cuba. Several human rights defenders throughout the country agree that they fear for their lives.

One of these regions is Cauca, which has rebounded, year after year since the signing of the Peace Agreement, as the region with the highest rates of lethal violence

against leaders and ethnic authorities and where at least six dissident groups of the former FARC are present⁴.

The leaders of the driving groups –says a leader from Cauca–, who participated in the construction of the PDET, who have been demanding compliance with the PDET, increase their risks because in some places being a defender of the implementation of the Peace Agreement, of the PDET, becomes a risk due to the presence of armed groups, but also because the communities blame the non-compliance on the driving groups, on the social and community movements.

Therefore, he calls on the ART and other state institutions to avoid stigmatization, to support the role of monitoring the PDET works and to insist on the defense of the integrity of social leaders who still believe in the Peace Agreement and defend its implementation to the hilt to repair the communities from so many decades of violence and marginalization.

4 See Figure: <https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/7808157/>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

VerdadAbierta.com is digital native medium dedicated to journalistic research of events related to human rights in an ample thematic framework. It was created in 2008 and is integrated by a team of journalists specialized in covering the Colombian armed conflict and peace processes. Since the 31st of January 2019, they're under the tutelage of the Verdad Abierta foundation.

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THE PDET HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO QUENCH THE THIRST FOR RURAL WELFARE



To close the gap between rural and urban areas, and provide with welfare to rural communities, the Peace Agreement included Programs for Territorial Development (PDET) as a strategy with which to reach, with social investment, 170 municipalities that were considered the most affected by the armed conflict.

The agreed initiatives through the PDET, which included community participation, contemplate eight pillars: Social Management of Rural Property and Land Use; Infrastructure and Land Adaptation; Rural Health; Rural Education and Early Childhood; Housing, Drinking Wa-



ter, and Basic Rural Sanitation; Economic Reactivation and Agricultural Production; System for the Progressive Guarantee of the Right to Food; and Reconciliation, Co-existence and Peace Building.

Their execution has two sides. The national government's side, that claims an investment close to 11,44 billion COP in the 170 municipalities. Then, the communities that question the ways in which this initiative is being implemented when there are clear delays in the execution of the works promised.