

# Development Programs with a Territorial-based Approach in Colombia: An Agonistic multi-level Political Reconciliation Analysis\*

---

Programas de desarrollo con enfoque territorial en Colombia: un análisis agonista  
multinivel de reconciliación política

---

*Juliana Emilia Galindo Villarreal\*\**

Consultant at the Guernica Centre for International Justice, Colombia

<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8149-0248>

Artículo de investigación

Fecha de recepción: 29 de febrero de 2020

Fecha de aceptación: 14 de abril de 2020

## Para citar este artículo:

Galindo Villarreal, J. E. (2020). Development Programs with a Territorial-based Approach in Colombia: An Agonistic multi-level Political Reconciliation Analysis. *Campos en Ciencias Sociales*, 8(2), 187-216. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15332/25006681/6017>

---

\* This article is based on the dissertation “Development Programs with a Territorial-based Approach in Colombia: An agonistic multi-level political reconciliation analysis” submitted in fulfillment of the requirement for the Development Studies Master’s Degree at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in 2018.

\*\* Master’s Degree in Development Studies at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies of Geneva, Switzerland. Consultant at the Guernica Centre for International Justice. She has worked as a university lecturer on the Inter-American System of Human Rights, transitional justice, and human rights. Co-author of several articles on the Inter-American System, the Colombian transitional justice process, and women and peace building. E-mail: [juliana.galindo@gmail.com](mailto:juliana.galindo@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

This article analyses the Development Programs with a Territorial-based Approach in Colombia, established in Item One of the 2016 Final Agreement to End Conflict and Build Peace, from the notion of political reconciliation. It argues that, in the current complex post-agreement setting, the program can be positioned as a space for political reconciliation as long as an agonistic multi-level approach is adopted. Only through the simultaneous and comprehensive implementation of institutional, constitutional, and relational peacebuilding efforts, the recognition of both the conflictual relations among all actors and the relevance of public contestation would be possible, so as to advance in the participatory territorial planning for peace and its successful completion. The dynamics in the Catatumbo region, one of the focalized zones for the program, demonstrate the need for applying an alternative and critical perspective of political reconciliation in order to move towards a sustainable and long-lasting peace in Colombia based on the interconnection between peace, reconciliation, and development.

**Keywords:** Territorial Peace, Development, Political Reconciliation, Conflict Transformation.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza los Programas de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial en Colombia, establecidos en el Punto Uno del Acuerdo Final para la Terminación del Conflicto y la Construcción de una Paz Estable y Duradera del 2016, a partir de la noción de reconciliación política. Se argumenta que, en el actual y complejo contexto de posacuerdo, el Programa puede posicionarse como un espacio para la reconciliación política siempre y cuando adopte un enfoque agonista multinivel. Solo mediante la implementación simultánea e integral de los esfuerzos institucionales, constitucionales y relacionales de consolidación de paz será posible reconocer las relaciones conflictivas entre los diferentes actores y la relevancia de la contestación pública, a fin de avanzar en la planificación territorial participativa para la paz y su conclusión satisfactoria. Las dinámicas en la región de Catatumbo, una de las zonas priorizadas por el Programa, demuestran la necesidad de aplicar una perspectiva alternativa y crítica de reconciliación política para avanzar hacia una paz estable y duradera en Colombia, basada en la interconexión entre paz, reconciliación y desarrollo.

**Palabras clave:** paz territorial, desarrollo, reconciliación política, transformación de conflictos.

## INTRODUCTION

Colombia has suffered the longest-running armed conflict in the western hemisphere with a multiplicity of actors and interests as a result of politics, socio-economic tensions, and struggle for resources control (International Center for Transitional Justice). The violence between armed groups —guerrillas, paramilitaries, and army— has generated more than eight million victims.

Recently, Colombia has explicitly adopted a transitional justice framework, mainly through the partial demobilization and reintegration of members of paramilitary groups (Law 975 of 2005) and with the issuance of Law 1448 of 2011, which establishes an administrative program of integral reparations and land restitution. Additionally, the Final Agreement to End Conflict and Build Peace between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrilla (Peace Agreement) was signed on November 2016 and approved by Congress on December of the same year; it is comprised of six elements: comprehensive rural development; political participation; end of the conflict; solution to the problem of illicit drugs; a comprehensive system for truth, justice, reparation, and non-repetition; and an implementation and verification mechanism.

The comprehensive rural development chapter “seeks to lay down the foundation for the transformations of rural Colombia, in order to reverse the adverse effects of the conflict and the conditions that permitted the persistence of violence in the country and ensure the health and wellbeing of the rural population” (Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz, 2016), and includes three strategies: Strategies for Land Access and Use, the National Plans, and the Development Programs with a Territorial-based Approach (known in Spanish as PDET).

The PDET were established in order to speed up the execution and funding of the national plans in the zones most affected by poverty, conflict, institutional weakness, and illegal economies, under the leadership of the Territorial Transformation Agency (known in Spanish as ART). According the Peace Agreement, the programs:

[...] aim at the structural transformation of the countryside and the creation of conditions of wellbeing for their inhabitants, at protecting the pluri-ethnic and multicultural heritage, promoting the peasant economy, integrating the regions most affected by the conflict, strengthening community organizations, and turning the countryside into a reconciliation scenario (Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz, 2016).

The PDET adopted a participatory planning with the following stages: the Community Pacts for Territorial Transformation, the Municipal Pacts of Territorial Renewing, and the Regional Action Plans for Territorial Transformation. Communities, ethnic authorities, territorial entities, social and community organizations, and the private sector are involved in these processes.

As indicated by De Roux (2018), it was assumed that the conflict was historically and structurally related to the exclusion of the peasantry, concentration of land ownership, and the lack of state presence. Accordingly, it was properly understood that the rural problematic in Colombia transcended the formalization of land rights (Coronado, 2013).

Thus, one of the novelties of the Peace Agreement is the search for territorial peace. According to Criado de Diego (2018), this notion can be understood as the creation of effective conditions for the maintenance of peace in the territories that more directly and intensely experienced the war and illegal economies, paying attention to the heterogenic circumstances that define the reality of such areas. Another particularity of the Peace Agreement is the explicit connection between territorial peace and reconciliation, which entails a participatory local approach. However, the Peace Agreement and the legal framework that develops it do not detail the elements that characterize this reconciliation approach.

In this connection, the article proposes an analysis of the PDET rooted in the notion of political reconciliation based on an agonistic multi-level approach that considers the inevitability of conflict in socio-political life. The research follows a critique paradigm approach to peacebuilding that attempts to go beyond the limits of

analysis established by hegemonic orthodoxies, disputing “the overarching neoliberal ideology that merges security and development, romanticizes the local as victims or illiberal, builds hollow institutions, designs economic life to reproduce assertive capitalism, equates peace with state-building, and assumes that interveners have privileged knowledge about peace issues” (Pugh, 2013, p. 11).

The document is divided in three parts: first, the theoretical part, which includes the conceptual framework, the analytical framework and the methodology of the research; second, the case study that presents the context, the findings of the data collection, and the analysis in terms of political reconciliation; and third, the conclusions and recommendations for the application of an agonistic multi-level approach to political reconciliation in Colombia.

## **AN AGONISTIC MULTI-LEVEL APPROACH TO POLITICAL RECONCILIATION**

reconciliation has become central in the political discourse of conflict transformation and peacebuilding. Standardly, reconciliation has been identified as an enabling factor of politics between citizens divided by past violence of the past where “unity is presupposed as its ultimate end” (Schaap, 2005, p. 8).

Yet, against the tendency of promoting social harmony, Schaap suggests that “a politically adequate conception of reconciliation would be conditioned by an awareness of the risk of politics; that community is not inevitable and that conflict may turn out to be irreconcilable” (2005, p. 21). Henceforth, political reconciliation must address how antagonism between enemies might be transformed into agonistic politics between adversaries.

Political reconciliation as agonistic politics between adversaries is based on the theoretical discussion between deliberative and agonistic democracy. The agonistic democracy theorists consider that disagreement is an ineradicable and constitutive dimension of social relations and politics, rooted in the pluralism of values of human

life. Thus, democracy should facilitate and encourage the expression of diverse and partial perspectives and beliefs, and promote the active political participation required to express opposition and diversity as a prerequisite for a fully inclusive democracy for all citizens across social, moral, and cultural differences (Bashir & Kymlicka, 2008, p. 11).

In this vein, Mouffe (2005) argues that the domestication or sublimation of antagonism through agonistic forms of democracy provides opportunities of legitimate expression of hostility through a public sphere that establishes a shared symbolic space where actors can see each other as engaged adversaries rather than enemies to be destroyed. For the author, to convert “struggles between enemies into struggles between adversaries” (2000, p. 103) is the “very condition of a vibrant democracy” (2013, p. 7)

Such agonistic perspective is crucial for understanding how reconciliation enters into the political agenda. Reconciliation finds its inspiration, not in consensus, but in public contestation of the past and the meaning ascribed to particular historical events and processes (Muldoon, 2010, p. 127). For that reason, Schaap (2005) concludes that the end of political reconciliation is not to define a common identity among former enemies, but instead to keep open up a political space for them to debate and contest the terms of their political association and the significance of past events for their life in common (p. 82).

Concretely, Maddison (2016) suggests an approach that highlights the necessity of conflict for democracy and political reconciliation, and which draws attention to the multi-level complexity of reconciliation and conflict transformation. Maddison makes use of the theory of agonistic democracy to conceive reconciliation as a process that is deeply political, and that prioritizes the capacity to retain and develop democratic political contestation, but also considers the demands of reconciliation through three overlapping and interconnected socio-political levels: the constitutional, the institutional, and the relational.

- The constitutional level is related to the work of constitutionalism and the legal provision of space for political conflict and contestation. In this multi-level approach, political reconciliation involves three elements: citizenship, settlements and agreements, and constitutional design and reform (p. 14). An agonistic view of these constitutional requirements, for Maddison, “should not seek to subdue social tensions at all, but instead to create political space in which such tensions can be engaged and contested” (p. 116–117).
- The institutional level includes the political institutions reshaped by constitutional transformation, such as those related to land reform and economic distribution, education, policing, and justice, as well as a number of institutional domain, like civil society or religious organizations, whose transformation is imperative (p. 15). Even though some civil society institutions can replicate historical structures of power, they are crucial for pushing forward through the power of collective action, for critiquing or replacing elite narratives, and for ensuring that attention is paid to relational transformation in underlying cases of fractured social relationships (pp. 184-186).
- The relational level is associated with the creation of spaces for physical interaction, sharing places that break down patterns of segregation, seeking the understanding of other perspectives, and increasing the social and political capacity for difference to coexist in a non-violent democracy. An agonistic dialogue is an opportunity for constructive inter-group relations with the aim of transforming current or potential violent conflict into non-violent forms of social struggle and social change while involving emotional or non-rational forms of expression (p. 13).

Within this framework, reconciliation is defined as “the need to reshape the whole of a society, taking a broader perspective on a range of structural, institutional, and interpersonal transformations that promote democratic values and contestations” (Maddison, 2016, p. 13). The approach recognizes the different requirements, norms, imperatives, and dynamics of reconciliation of different socio-political levels, the tensions between short-term and long-term aspirations, and the

enormity of the challenge faced by any society struggling to move towards a new defined horizon. Reconciliation is concerned with the political challenge of deeply divided societies to live together democratically and non-violently in spite of radical difference (p. 45).

### **The Analytical and Methodological Framework of the Research**

Following Maddison's work, this article formulates that the efforts for reconciliation must be addressed in three interrelated, overlapping, and simultaneous socio-political levels: constitutional, institutional, relational. Its goal is to enrich this emergent perspective with an in-depth case study which highlights the necessity and potentialities of conceiving a robust approach to political reconciliation for the construction of the PDET in Colombia. According to this analytical framework, the research question proposed was: Could the Development Programs with a Territorial-based approach be framed within the notion of political reconciliation?

The research evaluated the validity of the following hypotheses in the context of the case study:

- H1: The PDETs only take into account the relational approach of political reconciliation.
- H2: The constitutional, institutional, and relational levels of political reconciliation are present in the PDET, yet they are not addressed in an interrelated and comprehensive manner.

A qualitative method was employed through the application of an inductive approach and following an interpretative paradigm where psychological, social, historical, and cultural factors are all recognized as important element in shaping people's understanding of their world. This qualitative research practice attempts to provide a holistic understanding of research participants' views and actions in the context of their lives (Maruster & Gijzenberg, 2013, p. 9).



Accordingly, focusing on the Catatumbo region, the research uses a case-oriented approach and a critical case sampling “in which cases are chosen on the basis that they demonstrate a phenomenon or position dramatically or are pivotal in the delivery of a process or operation” (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2013, p. 82). As argued below, this region, with its particular historical and socio-political conditions of development, is one of most affected by the conflict; and, since the conflict is still active, this territory constitutes a particular scenario for exploring the construction of the PDET within a multi-level political reconciliation approach.

To get insights into the specific context of the region, nine<sup>1</sup> semi-structured individual interviews were conducted<sup>2</sup> with civil society organizations, institutional representatives, and researchers, in an effort to achieve a triangulation of observers under ethical standards and confidentiality terms<sup>3</sup>. Four guide interviews helped to gather basic information on three general aspects: context factors, Peace Agreement and PDET implementation process, and the notion and praxis of reconciliation in this framework. The selection of and contact with the participants was accomplished through a snowball sampling as a multistage technique that begins with one or few people and spreads out based on links to the initial contacts (Neuman, 2014, p. 275).

Initially, the main purpose of the interviews was to explore the experiences, expectations and views of the civil society and NGOs involved in the PDET or the peace agreement implementation process, including the grassroot organizations that traditionally have engaged in territorial development debates and contestation.

---

1 During the research process, around thirty people, organizations and institutions were contacted, but only nine individuals agreed to participate in the study. Overall, the continuation of the armed conflict in the zone, communication services difficulties in certain areas, and the precautions taken that many organizations and individuals when talking about conflict and peace in the region were some of the constrains for engaging participants.

2 All oral interviews, except one where the interviewee decided to respond in written form, were recorded digitally and were manually transcribed into a digital format.

3 The purpose of the research and details about the academic project were communicated to all the participants on the first contact and during the interview itself. Regarding the terms of confidentiality, respondents were asked whether they agreed to the recording of the interview and about how they should be acknowledged in the final research outcome.

The ART, as the state institution in charge of the program, was another key actor identified at the beginning of the research process. However, through their answers to the questions about the context of the region and the architecture of the Peace Agreement, the participants added relevant information about multiple historical and socio-political factors which should be kept in mind in the exploration of the concept and praxis of reconciliation. To that extent, it was also crucial to interview scholars and researchers, who in fact contributed to a better understanding of the context and the implications of the Peace Agreement at a general and a local scale. This flexible strategy for gathering the information was possible because the semi-structured interviews allowed to react to the dynamic of the discussion by bringing up new questions or changing the emphasis of the interview process.

The data collected through the interviews was categorized into the conceptual categories of the multi-level political reconciliation approach using axial coding, which permits “organizing ideas or themes and identifies axes of key concepts in the analysis” (Neuman, 2014, p. 483). By means of the techniques of ‘cutting and sorting’ —identifying relevant quotes or expressions and arranging them into groups— and ‘meta-coding’ —locating fixed sets of data units in a fixed set of themes in a unit-by-theme matrix— (Gery & Bernard, 2013, pp. 94, 99), nine individual analysis matrices were constructed —one for each interview— and one general analysis matrix was generated compiling the most relevant information for each participant in each conceptual category of analysis.

Thus, triangulation of primary and secondary information (Neuman, 2014, p. 167) helped compensate for the shortcomings of data collection, increasing the validity and reliability of the findings. Information provided by the media (national newspaper articles and independent media), institutional documents, and research reports of international organizations and local NGOs were important for validating the context and the most recent events related to the continuation of the armed conflict in the region. Besides, research articles and books about the Colombian conflict, the Peace Agreement implementation, and territorial peace approach were significant to interpret the national and local contexts and support the need for an agonistic multi-level analysis.

## CATATUMBO REGION AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PDET IN A COMPLEX POST-AGREEMENT CONTEXT

The Catatumbo region, with its eleven municipalities, comprises fifty percent of the department of Norte de Santander, located in the north east of Colombia. Bordering Venezuela, the zone is characterized by the natural wealth of the territory. With an approximate population of 285,000 inhabitants, the region counts with *resguardos* of the Motilón-Barí indigenous peoples and peasants' communities (Documento Conpes 3739, 2013), the majority of whom suffer from high levels of poverty, as reflected in the 64.3 percent departmental index of unsatisfied basic needs (NBI in its Spanish acronym) (Verdad Abierta, 2019).

The processes of settlement and state formation are crucial to understanding the current socio-political scene. As indicated by Aponte (2012), the settlement process of Norte de Santander region was marked by the significant reduction of the Barí indigenous people, the informal peasant colonization during the nineteenth century, the era of violence in the middle of the twentieth century, and the colonization which took place between the seventies and the nineties. These logics explain the marginal condition of the region, where the state was limited to military presence and remained outside of important aspects such as the development of infrastructure, land use, and property (pp. 369-370). Hence, the settlement was characterized by individual and informal action and the absence of state policies for regulating the life of the locals (Aponte, Arboleda, & Barrera, 2016, p. 19).

There are diverse and overlapping territorial planning models in the region: i) in 1959, the *Serranía de los Motilones* forest reserve was constituted with the objective of developing and regulating the forest economy and protecting the soils, hydric sources, and wildlife of the region; ii) in 1978, the Catatumbo Barí National Park was recognized as indigenous territory with the purpose of protecting these ethnical communities; and iii) in 1988, the area was registered as one of the 56 protected areas of the Colombian National Parks System. The coexistence—and overlapping—of these different models of regional planning is a cause for division even within the communities, making it a very complex task to articulate all these visions within the process of territorial planning.

There is a structural problem undermining the efficient management of the territory and of land use in the region. According to Carvajal, the coca business has turned into an income source and survival mechanism for the population “due to the historical state neglect in the provision of goods, public services, and infrastructure, and the inexistent access to commercialization chains for the peasants or productive guarantees through credits and technical assistance for legal activities” (2016, p. 17).

In this context, Catatumbo peasantry has configured itself as a political subject through strong social mobilization in demand of the fulfilment of their fundamental rights and the recognition of their agency (Carvajal, 2016). In the seventies and eighties, productive organizations and sectorial organizations conducted strikes and mobilizations claiming for the improvement of their rights and the region’s development (Salinas, 2014).

During this same period, the ELN guerrilla arrived to the region, capitalizing on the marginalization of the zone, its geographical advantages for military strategy, the possibility to create base support with the communities given the insufficient living conditions, the lack of regulation, and the lack of presence of the state. Then, the FARC-EP guerrilla entered the regional dynamic by infiltrating the municipal areas and focusing on the control and regulation of the coca economy in the area, giving them the opportunity to win legitimacy among the producing families (Aponte, 2012). This “propitiated the window of opportunity in which the guerrillas promoted or infiltrated different grassroots organization expressions in the periphery of the national affairs” (Aponte, 2012, p. 384).

In the nineties, businessmen and local elites organized illegal self-defense groups. The expansion of the paramilitary project started in 1995 but peaked in 1999 with systematic violence aimed at isolating the guerrillas and controlling legal and illegal economies in the region, as well as land grabbing and the imposition of a new development model based in extensive agroindustry crops (Aponte, 2012). Massacres, indiscriminate and selective killings, threats, coercion, displacement, dispossession—a terror regime was imposed by all the armed actors in the region

during this period, generating severe and systematic violations of human rights and IHL between 1999 and 2006 (Salinas, 2014).

For Vargas (1992) this entangled scenery caused social struggles to manifest in a contradictory extremist dimension, reducing the social and political confrontation to the terms friend/enemy. As a matter of fact, the current conflicts are a product of successive historical developments with two clear positions in dispute that have led to consolidate mutually exclusive images of the 'self' and the 'other': the state, represented by the military institutions, along with the paramilitary and illegal self-defense groups organized by the agricultural and energy-mining sector owners; and, the guerrilla organizations, with the implicit or explicit solidarity of the social bases (pp. 253, 291).

During 2005-2006, a partial and questionable demobilization process of the paramilitary groups was executed, the Catatumbo bloc among them. However, the lack of transparency of the process allowed these illegal armed structures to continue operating in the region under a different denomination (criminal groups or *Bacrim*). The supposed demobilization of the paramilitaries entailed the re-accommodation of the guerrillas: the ELN, severely repressed, retreated to the mountains, while the FARC-EP strengthened its position in the territory (Aponte, 2012, pp. 416, 417). At this point, the EPL occupied the 'empty spaces' after the paramilitary incursion and positioned itself as a strong armed actor (Carvajal, 2016, p. 8).

Despite the 2016 Peace Agreement and the FARC demobilization, in Catatumbo the conflict remains. Currently, three dynamics come together in the region: the instability generated by the territorial dispute between the illegal armed groups, drug cartels, and criminal bands; the Venezuelan migratory crisis; and the decline in security and its consequent humanitarian impact (Garzón, Cuesta, & Zárate, 2020). The ELN and EPL groups expended their influence in the region, increasing their ranks, recovering roads, reactivating the trafficking chain, and fighting against each other for the control of the zone and the production and commercialization of coca (Verdad Abierta, 2018). Drug-cartels and criminal bands have landed in the region seeking to control its millionaire coca economy (El Espectador, 2018). In this new

security landscape, the Government increased the number of soldiers in the region, although they have been unable to control the situation (La Silla Vacía, 2017).

The State has responded in a fragmented manner. It is not clear how the security efforts create the conditions for implementing the Development Programs with a Territorial-based approach (PDET) and the territorial transformation. There is consensus that the military response is necessary but insufficient, especially when it is reactive and intermittent and does not guarantee communities' protection. (Garzón, Cuesta, & Zárate, 2020, p. 2)

On top of this, there are no guarantees for grassroots leaders, as evinced by the murder of 343 leaders in Colombia during 2016 and 2018 (Defensoría del Pueblo, 2018) and the 109 cases reported for 2019 by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2020). Catatumbo is one of the most afflicted regions.

In the national context, an important change in the peace political agenda—now called stabilization and consolidation agenda—occurred since President Iván Duque took office in 2018. His political party, which holds a majority of seats in Congress, openly opposed to the Peace Agreement. Regarding the PDET programs, the governmental shift affected the deadlines, already delayed, and increased the uncertainty around its implementation (Mesa Nacional de Seguimiento a los PDET, 2018).

In this fragile and complex context, the PDET programs are being developed in eight municipalities of the Catatumbo region: Convención, El Carmen, El Tarra, Hacarí, San Calixto, Sardinata, Teorama, and Tibú. From mid-2017 to mid-2018, 8,126 individual actors participated in the local, municipal, and sub-regional discussion and design of the PDET, a process that ended with the signature of the Regional Transformation Action Plan in September 2018 (Verdad Abierta, 2019). With no advances in 2019 (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2020), the Road Map for the implementation phase of Catatumbo's PDET for the oncoming fifteen years was officially launched in January 2020 (Consejería Presidencial para la Estabilización y la Consolidación, 2020).

## Research Findings: Contrasting Views of Peace, Development and Reconciliation in the Catatumbo Region

The main results obtained in the interviews are summarized as follows:

- *Different non-exclusive concepts of reconciliation.* Diverse approaches to the reconciliation notion: reconciliation as forgiveness and mercy; reconciliation as healing; reconciliation as social justice and the fulfillment of fundamental rights; reconciliation as the fulfillment of victims' rights; and reconciliation as coexistence and transformation of relationships. In most of the narratives, the combination of the different perspectives was identified. Respondents recognized that reconciliation includes all segments of the population but is fundamentally an exercise between the state and the communities in the territories.
- *Dissatisfaction and uncertainty toward the Peace Agreement's implementation.* In the accounts of the civil society organizations, the level of dissatisfaction in the local level following the signature of the Peace Agreement was clearly expressed, given: 1) the lack of adoption of the legal framework that supports the PDET efforts, such as the Special Transitory Electoral Districts for Peace or the Fund Land; 2) the political atmosphere that has arisen since the beginning of the negotiations with the FARC and the failure of the Peace Plebiscite in October 2016, which created deep polarization in the country; 3) a general perception of failure or significant gaps in the implementation of the Peace Agreement in the region, especially in an aspect as critical as the substitution of illicit crops.
- *(Dis)trust relationships between the communities and the state.* In general, the civil society organizations mentioned the widespread mistrust of the communities towards the state capacity and political willingness for the implementation of peacebuilding efforts. The narratives show different causes for this situation: the absence of the state and the rule of law in the region; the fact that the state makes presence only through military response;

the fragility and corruption of the local and regional institutions; the state failure to fulfill the various commitments it has undertaken; and the lack of political will to take concrete actions in this regard. This contrasts with the institutional narrative which deems the positive development of the PDET as a confidence-building exercise.

- *The contested roles of the multiple actors involved.* According to the narratives collected, there is a multiplicity of institutional, social, and armed actors' interrelations that must be considered in the analysis. The role of civil society organizations assisting and strengthening the community's participation in the implementation of the Peace Agreements stands out. The role of the Catholic Church and local institutions was highlighted too. Most interviewees emphasized the preexistent tensions among the organizations and between them and the institutions, especially questioning the legitimacy of the ART. The conflicts between grassroots organizations for controlling or having direct incidence on the PDET's methodology and decision-making was another topic often stressed in the interviews. The presence of armed actors in the zone and their influence in the communities was another aspect mentioned recurrently.
- *The PDET positive expectations contrast with its operational issues.* Participants perceived as adequate and necessary the inclusion of a participatory territorial planning exercise in the most affected regions as a useful tool for engaging the communities in the discussions on peace and development. Institutional accounts emphasized the facilitation of dialogue and the participatory exercises of PDET's methodology as a reconciliatory approach. Nevertheless, the civil society organizations expressed their frustration regarding practical issues like the community's summons, deployment time, the selection of the *veredas* for the pre-assembly process, and the methodology used by the ART. Regarding the reconciliation component of the PDET, the participants indicated that communities were not prepared for talking about this topic, resulting in their exclusion from the PDET agenda in the Catatumbo region.



## Research Results: The Need for an Agonistic Multi-Level Political Reconciliation Approach

The data collected evinced the complexity of the Catatumbo region, which is framed in a turbulent socio-political context. The information showed that several contextual variables must be considered for the PDET's political reconciliation analysis:

- *Multiplicity of actors.* On the macro level, those involved in the armed conflict—such as the ELN, the EPL, the Bacrim, the drug trafficking groups, the armed forces, and the landowners— affect and influence the communities, the civil society organizations, and local institutions. On a micro level, the actors directly involved in the PDET process are the ethnic and peasant communities, the grassroots organizations, the local NGOs, the Catholic Church, national-level institutions such as the ART, and local institutions such as the municipal major's office and the governor's office.
- *Multiple views of the territory.* Each actor has its view of the territory and land planning, depending on its connotation as ancestral territory, private property, agricultural land, natural reserve, land for the development of extensive agro-industrial projects, among others. On many occasions these views coincide in a single plot of land.
- *Multiplicity of development models.* In the zone, there is a convergence of peasantry agricultural models, agro-industrial models, extractive models, illegal economies, and the indigenous cosmovision of ancestral territory.

All these dimensions overlap and repel in a variety of scenarios, generating tensions that intermingle with the context of violence in the region. In this setting, it is suggested that PDET programs have a unique potential for promoting political reconciliation for the transformation of territorial development conflicts in non-violent ways of relationship. Still, the complexity and interrelation of actors, views of territory, and development models raise the case for an agonistic multi-level

approach for understanding the potentialities and the challenges of the PDET in the constitutional, institutional, and relational elements.

## **Uncertainty at the Constitutional Level**

As the Institute Kroc (2019) revealed, the implementation of the comprehensive rural development chapter has been slow, being a matter of concern the pending normative framework for access and formalization of land. Similarly, the Special Transitory Electoral Districts for Peace —conceived in Item 2 of the Peace Agreement— were not approved, thus affecting the PDET process, since the Districts were initially conceived as a mechanism of control and verification of the implementation of the Peace Agreement in congress by civil society representatives of the 16 prioritized PDET regions. This created a tremendous democratic affectation for the communities that expected to be part of the decision-making process (Misión de Observación Electoral, 2018). Consequently,

The incomplete policy development affects the accomplishment of some of the Peace Agreement measures and the comprehensiveness of the rural reform. The creation and implementation of instruments to facilitate the reform impacts the territorial transformation through the PDET when they do not rely on new legal mechanisms for the land-use conflict resolution and legal certainty related to rural land tenure. (CINEP/PPP & CERAC, 2019)

According to a multi-level approach, the creation of institutions and legal frameworks is fundamental for the emergence of agonistic spaces of contestation and debate. Thus, not only the lack of institutions, but the absence of rules about who, how, and when can they participate in those spaces are critical for the reconciliation dynamics. In the case of the PDET, while it is true that the space for discussion of rural territorial planning was legally determined, the lack of regulation generated legal uncertainty for the communities and the civil society organizations involved in the process, as the interviews revealed. This creates a contradiction between the participatory spirit of the Peace Agreement and the rejection of political space for the rural population at the national level.

The lack of implementation coupled with the historical illegitimacy of the State on the region creates a factor of distrust in the institutions. It generates questions regarding the effective implementation of the Peace Agreement. Thus, the constitutional element of political reconciliation is uncertain and has a negative impact on the reconciliation potential of PDET's program.

### **Fragility of the Institutional Level**

One of the most important approaches of the Peace Agreement was the creation of spaces where all members of society, even those who historically have been marginalized and excluded, may participate in the democratic process of decision-making in the post-conflict setting. The PDET is one of the biggest expressions of that approach, making possible the institutional element and enabling reconciliation dynamics.

However, the creation of a space is not enough and must be accompanied by a strong operational component. Following the information collected, it can be said that the historical and relational dimension of this case study demarcated the expectations and perceptions of the PDET operative tasks: the role of the ART as leader of the program and its methodology has been questioned in connection to the lack of confidence in the state, the existing tensions among the organizations, and the presence of illegal armed groups in the territories. It is also linked to the fact that the ART did not consider pre-existing processes and methodologies of communities and civil society organizations. In this sense, the institutional dynamics of reconciliation is formally present, but it is contested by local realities.

Problems related to the absence of a mechanism for accessing and circulating the information of the process and its results have been put on the table by the civil society organizations involved (Mesa Regional de Seguimiento del PDET Catatumbo, 2019). The little progress made in 2019 in the PDET's outline and the lack of institutional coordination between PDET and other related programs as the Victim's and Land Restitution Law measures and the National Comprehensive Program for the Substitution of Crops Used of Illicit Purposes are other concerning operational issues (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2020).

Another institutional aspect that is fundamental in this case is the role of civil society. As the historical review showed, the region counts with a strong tradition of grassroots mobilizations and the influence and re-configuration of these organizations by the armed conflict actors. As the interviewees illustrated, in the Catatumbo region civil society organizations have internal tensions and conflictual relations amongst them that the ART did not consider, and this affected the PDET's discussions in the region. As Restrepo (2018) noted, despite the Peace Agreement mention of the civil society as a relevant actor in the territorial planning process, it is still in an 'amorphous and dispersed' manner. Henceforth, the assumption of a broad, homogenous, and unified civil society has created more tensions in the region, limiting in practice the PDET program, and constraining its reconciliatory potential.

### **Insufficiency of the Relational Level**

The relational component is part of the conception of the PDET through the establishment of sharing spaces of dialogue and discussion among all the actors involved in the territorial planning process. Institutionally, the program is conceived as spaces of encounter where people can express themselves regarding their territorial planning expectations and needs, seeking the construction of a shared and unified development model for the region.

However, this participatory approach has been contested by the civil society organizations that see the process like a figurative or rhetorical methodology without the real possibility of debating with different actors about the views of the territory and its development. In this regard, from an agonistic approach, it is important to consider that dialogue not only involves the possibility to attend to the spaces, but fundamentally involves the possibility of communicating a viewpoint, listening to other perspectives, and engaging in a contested dialogue. In an agonistic model, the result of this process is not consensus, but discussions within a democratic setting for transforming the conflict into a legitimate debate. In this sense, the relational level of reconciliation present in the PDET is insufficient for responding to the local realities with multiple actors, views of territory, and levels of rural development.

It is worth mentioning that communities and social organizations that participated in the initial PDET discussions in Catatumbo reported not being included in the implementation of the Program after the signature of the Regional Transformation Action Plan, although the private sector and local institutions have been called by the ART (El Espectador, 2019). In response, they constituted a parallel space for “ensuring the autonomous and independent monitoring of the Catatumbo’s PDET implementation, and the construction of effective participatory avenues for the communities” (Mesa Regional de Seguimiento del PDET Catatumbo, 2019).

Thus, in contexts such as the Catatumbo, the PDET’s primary goal of reaching a consensus for constructing a unique and homogenous plan is misdirected and unachievable. In an agonistic political reconciliation approach, the PDET’s purpose cannot be built as a shared vision of the territory and development, which ignores the complexity of the socio-political and historical context and the impacts of the conflict. Special attention must be given to the fact that “assumptions about the right model for economic transformation have the effect of closing down political space in which future options for economic reform and redistribution may be discussed” (Maddison, 2016, p. 142).

Now, it is possible that within an agonistic debate, some actors remain dissatisfied about the final decision-making, which is normal if we accept the conflictual nature of the socio-political setting. What is important is that all actors have the same conditions for participating in the debate —through constitutional and institutional measures— expressing their opinions, making proposals, and having the opportunity to decide, especially historically marginalized and excluded groups. In practical terms, the PDET cannot include all the visions of territory or models of development, yet all the actors should have the opportunity to participate, debate, and contest, and always take part in all the public spaces for decision-making even if their view of development and territory is not applied. Thus, the PDET as a political reconciliation tool cannot eradicate conflict from territorial planning, yet it can give an agonistic space for those involved in the rural territory planning to always be present and have the possibility to contribute and contest.

In this sense, echoing Professor Arevalo's words (Semana, 2019), infrastructure projects do not have an impact if the territorial transformation and local development are not socially articulated. To achieve this goal, you need a notion of political reconciliation that is implemented through agonistic spaces and includes all actors, especially the communities and the local civil society organizations.

Therefore, the constraining factors identified at the constitutional, institutional, and relational levels harmfully impact the reconciliation approach of the PDET in the Catatumbo region. Thus, the second hypothesis of this research has been validated. Formally, a reconciliation approach was adopted but in practice the implementation has been focused on a relational component without considering the legal and institutional architecture, validating the first hypothesis of the research. As Maddison (2014) said:

[...] while achieving a peaceful political settlement marks a turning point in the recovery from violent conflict, it is evident that the transformative work required in the wake of a settlement remains long and arduous, often over decades or even generations. In most situations, an agreement to end the violence is not enough to transform a deeply divided society's underlying conflicts, which are rooted in history and identity. (p. 1014)

## **CONCLUSION: AN INVITATION TO RE-THINK THE PDET'S RECONCILIATION NOTION**

It can be concluded that the PDET programs can be framed in the notion of political reconciliation. This article claimed that an agonistic multi-level political reconciliation approach is the best alternative for responding to the complex Colombian transitional context; nonetheless, the Catatumbo case study displayed that the elements of this approach are just partially and incompletely introduced on the PDET's program scheme.

The mere opening for a space of participation, as the Catatumbo case has demonstrated, cannot be translated automatically into a successful reconciliation

effort. It is fundamental to adopt the constitutional measures that guarantee the effective participation of all the actors involved, specially the communities and civil society organizations at all levels of the decision-making process. At the institutional level, historical reading of the regional context is basic before the arrival of the newly created institutions and the implementation of methodologies and operational aspects. This previous historical reading is also basic for avoiding the romanticized view of the civil society of the region, understanding the tensions among them and other actors, and contemplating the procedures and other spaces of discussion that emerged within the communities and grassroots organizations. At the relational level, the adoption of an agonistic dialogue is fundamental for understanding that it is not possible to eradicate conflict and yet to avoid violence through the participation of all actors in equal conditions in a permanent debate around the territorial planning tasks. Under these conditions, it would be possible for the PDET program to turn into a political reconciliation tool for reaching a long-lasting and sustainable peace.

These conclusions are a call for re-thinking the current approach to reconciliation in the PDET, not only in the Catatumbo region, but in all the PDET regions in response to their own characteristics. Now that the fifteen-years execution phase has started, this seems to be an ideal moment for the consideration of radical and pragmatic changes from an agonistic multi-level political reconciliation notion.

One of the most basic elements for a successful political reconciliation approach is the end of the armed conflict. This is the biggest challenge for the state in the Catatumbo region and all the PDET regions.

Endorsing an agonistic multi-level reconciliation approach that truly responds to the complexities of the PDET regions requires the willingness and effort of the government, the communities, civil society organizations, cooperation agencies, and international organizations. Some steps in that direction include, but are not limited to, the following aspects:

- At the constitutional level, it is crucial to adapt the legal framework that supports the PDET program and to promote agonistic dialogue within the

Special Transitory Electoral Districts for Peace, the Reform of the Electoral Regime and Organization, and the comprehensive Substitution and Alternative Development Plans, among others. Civil society organizations must promote the implementation of the legal infrastructure for the implementation of the Peace Agreement, especially considering the political shift after the 2018 presidential elections. The international community will be crucial to support these constitutional and legal guarantees.

- At the institutional level, it is necessary to review the PDET methodology and to reestablish a dialogue with the communities and civil society organization. This could allow communities and civil society organizations in the ART to regain trust in the ART efforts for implementing the PDET in the region.
- At the institutional level, especially considering the political shift, civil society organizations must demand their participation and all the guarantees for debate in the PDET and all public spaces related to the implementation of the Peace Agreement. In this task it is fundamental that, despite the tensions around territory and development topics, grassroots organizations come together in sharing spaces and establishing a legitimate dialogue. This is not a call for finding consensus, but rather a call for starting an organized and proactive agonistic contest. Even though the PDET is a unique space for debate, it is important to promote other spaces particularly those created for the civil society and where organizations work together to guarantee sustainable and long-lasting peace.
- At the institutional level and in accordance to the previous point, to preserve the openness of the spaces of agonistic dialogue and equal conditions for all the participants, there must be financial, technical, and political support from cooperation agencies and the international community to the grassroots organization's efforts, as guarantors of the process of implementation of the Peace Agreement.



- At the relational level, the commitment of all actors involved in agonistic dialogue through the PDET spaces is necessary. The ART must ensure in the oncoming stages of the process the participation of all parties, but the organizations and communities must be open to attending, hearing, and actively participating under rules of mutual respect. The same applies to municipal and departmental authorities, the private sector, academics, and all actors engaged.

Undertaking an alternative and critical perspective of political reconciliation such as the one suggested in this article can provide new avenues for facilitating the necessary tasks to move toward sustainable and long-lasting peace in Colombia that recognizes the intrinsic link between peace, reconciliation, and development.

## REFERENCES

- Aponte, A. (2012). Cúcuta y el Catatumbo: entre la integración y la marginalización. In F. González *et al.* *Conflicto y territorio en el oriente colombiano*. Bogotá: Odecofi-CINEP. Retrieved from <http://libreriasiglo.com/ciencias-sociales-y-humanidades/3158-conflicto-y-territorio-en-el-oriente-colombiano.html#.Wxumo4ozY2w>
- Aponte, A., Arboleda, Z., & Barrera, V. (2016). *Ambiente, Minería y Postconflicto en Colombia: los casos del Catatumbo y Sur del Bolívar*. Bogotá: Fescol, Nimd, Cordais, Cinep/PPP. Retrieved from <http://colombia.nimd.org/publications/ambiente-mineria-y-posconflicto-en-colombia-los-casos-del-catatumbo-y-sur-de-bolivar/>
- Bashir, B., & Kymlicka, W. (2008). *The politics of Reconciliation in Multicultural Societies*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Carvajal, C. (2016, June). Lecturas territoriales en clave de paz del Catatumbo. *Redprode paz*. Retrieved from <http://redprodepaz.org.co/sabemos-como/lecturas-territoriales-en-clave-de-paz-departamento-del-catatumbo/>

CINEP/PPP & CERAC. (2019). *Documento de balance de los primeros 30 meses de la implementación del Acuerdo de Paz*. Bogotá: Secretaría Técnica del Componente internacional de verificación CINEP/PPP-CERAC. Retrieved from <https://www.verificacion.cerac.org.co/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Balance-30-meses-Implmentaci%C3%B3n-Acuerdo-de-Paz.pdf>

Consejería Presidencial para la Estabilización y la Consolidación. (2020). En Catatumbo se lanza la primera hoja de ruta para ejecutar los PDET. Retrieved from <http://portalparalapaz.gov.co/publicaciones/1272/en-catatumbo-se-lanza-la-primer-hoja-de-ruta-para-ejecutar-los-pdet/>

Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social. (2013). Documento Conpes 3739. *Estrategia de desarrollo integral de la región del Catatumbo*. Bogotá: Departamento Nacional de Planeación.

Coronado, S. (2013). La tierra y el desarrollo rural: más allá de la encrucijada de la paz. *Cien Días vistos por CINEP/PPP*, 31-35.

Criado de Diego, M. (2018). *La paz en el territorio: poder local y postconflicto en Colombia*. Bogotá: Universidad Externado de Colombia.

De Roux, F. (2018). *La audacia de la paz imperfecta*. Bogotá: Ariel.

Defensoría del Pueblo. (2018). Homicidios de líderes sociales y defensores de DDHH. Retrieved from <http://www.defensoria.gov.co/es/public/contenido/7399/Homicidios-de-l%C3%ADderes-sociales-y-defensores-de-DDHH.htm>

El Espectador. (2018). El reciclaje de las guerras en Catatumbo. Retrieved from <https://colombia2020.elespectador.com/territorio/el-reciclaje-de-las-guerras-en-catatumbo>

El Espectador. (2019). Comunidades del Catatumbo denuncian que no son incluidas en la toma de decisiones del PDET. Retrieved from <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/nacional/comunidades-del-catatumbo-denuncian-que-no-son-incluidas-en-la-toma-de-decisiones-del-pdet-articulo-885228>

- Garzón, J. C., Cuesta, I., & Zárate, L. (2020). *Inseguridad en el Catatumbo: el punto débil de la transformación territorial*. Bogotá: Fundación Ideas para la Paz. Retrieved from <http://ideaspaz.org/media/website/catatumbo-FIP.pdf>
- Gery, R., & Bernard, R. (2013). Techniques to Identify Themes. *Field Methods*, 15(1) February, 85-109. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X02239569>
- International Center for Transitional Justice. (n. d.). *Antecedentes: Desmovilización de grupos paramilitares, Ley de Justicia y Paz, Ley de Víctimas y diálogos de paz con las FARC*. Retrieved from ICTJ: <https://www.ictj.org/es/our-work/regions-and-countries/colombia>
- Kroc Institute for International Peace. (2019). Third report on the status of implementation of the 2016 Colombian Peace Accord. Retrieved from [https://kroc.nd.edu/assets/315919/190408\\_actualizacio\\_n\\_informe\\_3\\_instituto\\_kroc\\_feb19.pdf](https://kroc.nd.edu/assets/315919/190408_actualizacio_n_informe_3_instituto_kroc_feb19.pdf)
- La Silla Vacía. (2017). El difícil despegue de la paz en el Catatumbo. Retrieved from <http://lasillavacia.com/historia/el-dificil-despegue-de-la-paz-en-el-catatumbo-60829>
- Maddison, S. (2014). Relational Transformation and Agonistic Dialogue in Divided Societies. *Political Studies*, 2015, 63, 1014-1030. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12149>
- Maddison, S. (2016). *Conflict Transformation and reconciliation: Multi-Level Challenges in Deeply Divided Societies*. London: Routledge.
- Maruster, L., & Gijsenberg, M. (2013). *Qualitative Research Methods*. Los Angeles, London, New York: SAGE.
- Mesa Nacional de Seguimiento a los PDET. (2018). Seguimiento al proceso de consolidación de los Planes de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial (PDET). Bogotá. Retrieved from [https://issuu.com/asominga/docs/seguimiento\\_y\\_sistematizacio\\_n\\_imp](https://issuu.com/asominga/docs/seguimiento_y_sistematizacio_n_imp)
- Mesa Regional de Seguimiento del PDET Catatumbo. (2019). Al PDET le falta gente: comunidades del Catatumbo expresan preocupaciones por su forma de implementación. Comunicado público de las Comunidades del Catatumbo. Ocaña. Retrieved from <https://ati.org.co/index.php/biblioteca/documentos/2-uncategorised>

- Misión de Observación Electoral. (2018). *Mapas y factores de riesgo electoral: Elecciones nacionales Colombia 2018*. Bogotá: Misión de Observación Electoral (MOE).
- Mouffé, C. (2000). *The Democratic Paradox*. London: Verso.
- Mouffé, C. (2005). *On the Political (Thinking in Action)*. New York: Routledge.
- Mouffé, C. (2013). *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*. London: Verso.
- Muldoon, P. (2010). The very basis of civility: On Agonism, Conquest and Reconciliation. In B. Bashir, W. Kymlicka, & (Eds.). *The Politics of Reconciliation in Multicultural Societies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 114-135.
- Neuman, L. (2014). *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Boston: Pearson Education.
- Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz. (2016). *Acuerdo Final para la Terminación del Conflicto y la Construcción de una Paz Estable y Duradera*.
- Pugh, M. (2013). The problem solving and critical paradigms. In R. M. Ginty, *Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding*. Abingdon: Routledge, 8-21.
- Restrepo, D. (2018). *Dilemas y retos del enfoque territorial en la implementación de los acuerdos de paz*. Bogotá: Departamento Administrativo de la Función Pública.
- Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., & Elam, G. (2013). Designing and Selecting Samples. In L. Maruster, & M. Gijsenberg. *Qualitative Research Methods* (Chapter 4). Los Angeles, London, New York: SAGE.
- Salinas, Y. (2014). *Catatumbo: Análisis de conflictividades y construcción de paz*. Bogotá: PNUD, Embajada de Suecia. Retrieved from [http://www.co.undp.org/content/colombia/es/home/library/crisis\\_prevention\\_and\\_recovery/catatumbo—analisis-de-conflictividades-y-construccion-de-paz.html](http://www.co.undp.org/content/colombia/es/home/library/crisis_prevention_and_recovery/catatumbo—analisis-de-conflictividades-y-construccion-de-paz.html)

Schaap, A. (2005). *Political reconciliation*. London, New York: Routledge.

Semana. (2019). A cerrar la brecha de la Colombia rural con la urbana. Retrieved from <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/planes-de-desarrollo-con-enfoque-territorial-pdet-cerraran-brecha-entre-colombia-rural-y-urbana/638849>

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2020). Situation of human rights in Colombia 2019. *Annual Report of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights A/HRC/43/3/Add.3*. Geneva. Retrieved from <https://www.hchr.org.co/documento-seinformes/informes/altocomisionado/informe-anual-2019-ES.pdf>

Vargas, A. (1992). *Colonización y conflicto armado: Magdalena Medio Santandereano*. Bogotá: Cinep/PPP.

Verdad Abierta. (2018). El Catatumbo: de espaldas al Estado y de cara a la guerra. *Verdad Abierta*. Retrieved from <https://verdadabierta.com/el-catatumbo-de-espaldas-al-estado-y-de-cara-a-la-guerra/>

Verdad Abierta. (2019). Catatumbo: Los pDET de la incertidumbre. Retrieved from <https://verdadabierta.com/catatumbo-los-pdet-la-incertidumbre/>

## INTERVIEWS

### Organization/Institution

Agencia de Renovación del territorio de Norte de Santander – ART

Fundación para la participación Comunitaria – Parcomún

Corporación Nueva Sociedad de la Región Nororiental – Consorcio

Corporación Construyendo Poder, Democracia y Paz – Poderpaz

Pastoral Social Norte de Santander

Asociación Minga

Movimiento por la Constituyente Popular – MCP

Universidad Nacional de Colombia

Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular – CINEP

