

An event on Urban Environmental Peace Building in Colombia was held on 26 April. It brought together institutional actors and community organisations that have been working in urban territories on urban resilience and adaptation to climate change.

The event was organised by the Recycling the City Network (Recnet), an organisation dedicated to urban resilience and adaptation to climate change in cities, with extensive experience in Colombia, and the Psychosocial Laboratory for Disaster Risk Management of the University of Manizales.

Dr. Nausheen H. Anwar, Director of Karachi Urban Lab at the Institute of Business Administration in Karachi, Pakistan, opened the day by highlighting the importance of talking about violence in the study of urban issues including climate change and continuing research on these issues from a multidisciplinary perspective. Carlos Fernando Agudelo, director of the Master's degree in planning and territorial management and the undergraduate degree in Urban Planning at the Universidad de la Salle, then showed progress made in the Local Laboratories for Resilience project, which seeks to be a bridge between academic organisations and informal settlement communities, listening to the voice of the communities in the identification of their own problems and opportunities. This project, carried out with international funding through the Centre for Development Cooperation at the University Politècnica de Catalunya, involves grassroots and academic analysis of three local laboratories in three parts of Bogotá, in a methodology that can be replicated in other contexts of environmental and urban violence. Lina Zambrano, from the Psychosocial Laboratory for Disaster Risk Management at the University of Manizales, then emphasised mental health as an aspect to be supported through community participation, governance and institutional participation, private enterprise and education, in all contexts of urban resilience.

Antonieta Peregrina from Recnet and the NATURA network, as facilitator of the event, then gave way to a second block that allowed us to understand the complexity of community problems whilst identifying points of common concern across the communities, analysing community needs in the face of environmental conflicts and community strategies for the solution of these conflicts. This block included the participation of Alejandra Serna, from the Movimiento de Laderas in Medellín, Luz Dary, from the Corporación Arocoiris in Usme, Bertilda Salas, from the Mesa Técnica de Altos de la Estancia and Maicol Ramírez, from the Red Cultural Manitas and the Red Agroecológica del Sur.

Alejandra Serna, from the Movimiento de Laderas in Medellín, spoke about the problem of resettlement: "Because one of the main risks in our territories is the risk of not being able to stay, of not being able to stay there, either because of natural disasters, or because of macro-projects of urban renewal and intervention by the Mayor's Office of Medellín, among other risks, such as armed groups and pressure on community leaders".

Displacement, a consequence of violence, which occurs at the national level is also reflected within cities, where populations are resettled or displaced to other territories, generating a dynamic of uprooting, with serious social consequences. "So let's say that staying in the territory is our main struggle", Alejandra pointed out.

In the territories, environmental problems are intimately related to risk and this, in turn, to the poor management of rainwater due to the lack of public services, such as public water supply.

Luz Dary, from Usme, pointed out the disproportionate increase in the number of neighbourhoods on the edge of the city, due to the arrival of new inhabitants. She proposes a focus on environmental education and awareness-raising, with adults and above all with children, about which she explains her experience as a community leader: "We try to clean up the streams, we go there, we also bring the community together and we are sharing with them so that they see the need to take care of the environment".

Also from the south of the city, in Ciudad Bolívar, Maicol Ramírez stressed the objective of community organisations to improve institutional presence in the territories, but "we consider that the lack of continuity in institutional processes means that the support they provide is very limited and in the end the organisational fabric, the social fabric, ends up fragmenting and of course we see a lack of territorial identity". Maicol, from the Red Agroecológica del Sur and the Manitas Cultural Network, is committed to the creation of environmental and cultural corridors around the ravines, specifically the Limas ravine, which he has been working on for several years.

In Altos de la Estancia, Ciudad Bolívar, Bogotá, Bertilda Salas has been working as a community leader for decades and highlights the relevance of the Altos de la Estancia technical working group, an organisation of organisations that was founded in 1997 and which has achieved, through strong advocacy work, achievements such as the repeal of resolutions that allowed mining exploitation in certain sectors of the neighbourhood.

The participants in this bloc had in common that they are inhabitants of the urban fringes and the origin of these settlements is a direct consequence of displacement due to violence. According to the testimony and participation of Eder García, president of the Peasant Assembly of Cesar, there is a need for a commitment to the recovery of "peasant identity and good living".

Eder García exemplifies a national trend of displacement from the countryside to the city, but also of the return to the countryside and the work for effective land restitution. In his own words: "In my own case, I was displaced to the city of Barranquilla and we had to live... I left with practically nothing and we had to live in the high-risk areas that many of our colleagues have mentioned in Bogotá and Medellín". On a return to the territory, they have been able to experience the disproportionate impact of mining, which has profoundly affected the environment and their way of life, both for peasants and indigenous communities. Such is the case of the Yukpa community, who have lost their primary source of food, fish from the Maracas River, due to its contamination.

This environmental violence is not only caused by mining, but also has other origins. As explained by Angélica, from the Dutch-based organisation PAX Christi, "it's not just mining: it's industry, it's extensive cattle ranching and it's illegal businesses, which Cesar has a long history of. But Cesar also has a great historical mobilisation of its population despite the co-optation of the state, and of course the ACC is evidence of this. The organisation of the ACC arose in the midst of land restitution and in this sense it is linked to the fifth of the Havana points", making it clear that the conflict and environmental violence must be taken into account in the Colombian peace process to fight against the depopulation and plundering of the Colombian countryside.

Jorge Manrique, UN Habitat's representative in Colombia and Ecuador, focused on the country's strong social inequality, which segregates at different levels "in a country where the highest rates of accumulation of wealth and opportunities are not only in the hands of a few, but where wealth and opportunities are also concentrated in specific territories". And in reference to this segregation, he continued:

"While there are territories in Colombia where people live as they do in the 21st century, with all the comforts and technological developments and access to goods and services, there are others who are living in the same country as if they were in the 18th century, without public utilities, with latrines, with houses on mud floors and waste, with undrinkable water, with infectious and immuno-preventable diseases. That is to say, as they lived in the 18th century, but this difference in inequality between regions is not only in a national context, but also within the cities themselves".

Jorge also stressed the importance of land-use planning in the struggle for environmental peace, as a matter for all the inhabitants of the territories.

In the same vein, the last speaker of the symposium, Martha Ochoa, national consultant in risk management and adaptation, highlighted the problem of Law 1523 of 2012, on risk management, which in essence had a progressive approach, in its transition to land use planning laws and other planning strategies and "one realises that there is a problem of approach", "and in part it has to do with this conception of risk as something that we can delimit and control to the point of zoning it on maps".

The law defines risk through an equation that includes "natural, socio-natural and anthropogenic hazards, and from this framework of the law it is said that intentional anthropogenic hazards cannot be conceived or cannot be included. And what do I mean by intentional, all the logics that have to do with conflict. And in a country where we have gone through conditions of conflict, armed conflict and dispossession, to say that these threats should not be considered in these risk scenarios is to ignore the fact that risk has to do with this social construction and that it is related precisely to development models that are related to dispossession and, let's say, to this vision of territorial control". She concluded, in relation to the territorial identity of the communities in the territories:

"It is necessary to broaden this view and this thinking about how to intervene from the system and policy we currently have in the country to address disaster risks".