



Economic Reactivation And Social Regulation From The Perspective Of Children: A Challenge During The Implementation Of The Peace Agreement In The Catatumbo Region

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ABSTRACT

The results of a research developed through a hermeneutic analysis of drawings and narratives of children, adolescents and young people from the municipalities prioritized for the implementation of the Peace Agreement in Catatumbo - Norte de Santander, who participated in a training on the peace process in Colombia since the emergence of the guerrilla movements. They contributed to the pillars of the Program for Development with a Territorial Approach (PDTA) and to the vision of the territory from artistic and narrative approaches, drawing and narrating the Catatumbo they dream of and can build. Emphasis is placed on the contributions of the NNAJ to the pillars "Social organization of rural property and land use" and "Economic reactivation and agricultural and livestock production". The analysis allows recognizing the social phenomena typical of post-conflict scenarios and even of permanent armed conflict, which define the condition in which the inhabitants of this territory find themselves, for land use and economic reactivation, where the presence of illegal armed groups persists and restricts legal economic alternatives to illicit crops, all this in a scenario of transitional justice and the implementation of the peace agreements between the FARC and the Colombian State.

INTRODUCTION

This article presents the results of the research entitled "The Catatumbo we dream of "1, focusing on the categories of analysis of the pillars of the Development Program with a Territorial Approach (PDTA),

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in particular, "Social organization of rural property and land use" and "Economic reactivation and agricultural production".

In this regard, it is important to mention that the research participants were Children, Adolescents and Youth (NNAJ) from the municipalities prioritized for the implementation of the Peace Agreement in Norte de Santander, Catatumbo region, who through a pedagogical exercise learned about the history of the Colombian conflict, the peace process between the national government and the FARC-EP, and point 1 of the Final Agreement for the termination of the conflict and the construction of a stable and lasting peace signed between both parties.

The study was motivated by the recognition of the main conflicts in Catatumbo which, despite its extensive natural wealth and diversity of soils and lands, is the area of greatest armed violence in the department due to the presence and actions of illegal armed groups that increase social, political and economic inequalities in the region (Jaimes et al., 2019; Jaimes et al., 2019; Oliveras et al., 2018). Likewise, the exploitation of the soil through illicit crops such as coca, and the expansion of monocultures such as palm, oil or coal extraction are factors that increase the exclusion and marginalization of the inhabitants of the Catatumbo region (United Nations Development Program -UNDP, 2014).

Therefore, it is important to mention elements of the context that evidence how this region has historically been highly affected by the armed conflict for decades, being the scene of various victimizing events and conflicts, among which stand out the tenure, use and ownership of land, illegal economies, insecurity for social leaders, multiple and systematic human rights violations, among other situations that afflict the population.

According to the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES, 2006) the department of Norte de Santander has historically been permeated by realities such as the abandonment of the State in many rural sectors, which added to its geographical location on the border with Venezuela, which implies great human mobility and illegal trafficking; and the fading of its economy that has been transformed into a series of illegal economies and parallel political institutionalism, which constitute factors that originate conflicts and humanitarian emergencies.

All this set of situations associated with the armed conflict has made the territory a priority for the implementation of the peace agreement. This article shares the analysis of two of the eight pillars of the PDTA, which are respectively the "Social regulation of rural property and land use" and "Economic reactivation and agricultural production", and therefore, it explores issues related to these pillars such as the situation of victims of the armed conflict, illicit crop substitution, security guarantees, early warnings, and forced recruitment. Other factors of the implementation process of the peace agreement will be further elaborated in subsequent articles whose analysis focuses on other pillars of this Development Program with a Territorial Approach PDTA.

Thus, about the situation of victims, it is clear that one of the main problems affecting the territory is the armed conflict, with the consequent violation of civil society rights, generating high rates of victims (Forero-Salcedo, 2019), which, according to the Unit for the Attention and Integral Reparation of Victims (UARIV, 2022), currently total 9,310,377 people in the country recognized as victims and included in the Single Registry of Victims (RUV, for its acronym in Spanish). A distribution by life cycle identifies the number of people between the age ranges of 0 and 5 years: 202,894, between 6 and 11 years: 769,114, between 12 and 17 years: 1,053,501 and between 18 and 28 years: 2,110,761, for a total of 4,136,270 children, adolescents and young people victims of the armed conflict (UARIV, 2022).

In Norte de Santander there are 347,889 victims of the armed conflict, 303,284 of whom are victims of forced displacement, and these, a little more than half, that is, 167,095 people, are victims of forced displacement, according to their life cycle, i.e., more than half of the victims of forced displacement are children, adolescents and young people. This information is consolidated as of June 2022 (UARIV, 2022).

These massive forced displacements are the result of systematic attacks against the civilian population, leaving serious consequences for individuals and their communities. Displacement deprives the victims of housing, food, basic services and productive resources, and can lead to marginalization, extreme poverty and loss of autonomy (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, 2011).

Thus, this research assumes that a person victim of forced displacement "suffers serious human rights violations that disrupt their daily lives, their economic assets, their moral integrity, their family, their mental health and many other rights, generating irreparable damage" (Corporación AVRE, 2008, p. 19). This information is key for the present study, since it is people from indigenous or Afro-Colombian communities, together with poor peasants, who are mainly affected by displacement. It could then be affirmed that these communities have always been excluded from electoral processes throughout history, which is why they feel invisible within their cultural context. These communities that have been victimized have managed to get ahead by their means, given that they have almost always been ignored by society and even worse, by the Colombian State (Medellín, 2004).

Furthermore, according to the guidelines for the differential care of children and adolescents (NNA) of the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (ICBF and UNHCR, 2010), during forced displacement, children and adolescents suffer the interruption of their harmonious and comprehensive progress, violating a wide range of rights such as protection against abuse, physical or psychological mistreatment, abandonment, kidnapping, exploitation, discrimination or recruitment. For this reason, it is considered that the children and youth should have the possibility to express their points of view and their memory of all these problems, because although some persist in their territories, despite the conflict, and others have managed to return to rural environments, although not specifically to their former homes, it cannot be ignored that rural children in Catatumbo, displaced or not, have grown up during the armed conflict, which has undoubtedly permeated their vision of the world and territory, as well as their views on war and peace.

The armed conflict in Catatumbo has generated social and political affectations, which among countless consequences materialized in millions of people exiled from their lands claiming justice and protection (Colombia Joven, Presidency of the Republic of Colombia, Vice-Presidency of the Republic and UNHCR, 2010).

On the other hand, regarding the substitution of illicit crops, the state created as a strategy the National Integral Program for the Substitution of Illicit Crops (PNIS), which has currently been implemented in two municipalities of Catatumbo: Tibú and Sardinata, with some drawbacks such as the delay in payments to families, and at the beginning of technical assistance, and also in terms of coverage, since in the case of Tibú there are 2,698 families linked to the program, of which only 500 are receiving technical assistance. There is little clarity about the commercialization lines of the productive projects proposed as an alternative to the substitution of illicit crops, and about the families that will finally be able to access this program, taking into account that this is one of the main economic activities in rural areas, which affects both security and the economy. There are key aspects that generate tension in this process, such as security in the face of threats from armed groups that are present in the territory and control this

market, the financing and resources to carry out this program by the state, the fear of forced eradication, the fumigation with glyphosate and the historical distrust of the communities for the state (Fundación Ideas para la Paz, FIP, 2020).

In this line, in terms of security guarantees, the armed confrontation between the ELN and the EPL persists in Catatumbo, adding to the resurgence of the dissidence of the 33rd Front of the FARC, which generates conditions for the increase of coca crops and the strengthening of illegal economies such as smuggling and irregular migration from Venezuela. This painful circle brings with it new displacements and, therefore, a strong humanitarian impact (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OCHA, 2020).

In this way, early warnings make it possible to identify an increase in armed conflict and a consequent humanitarian impact. According to the Ombudsman's Office in the first ten months of 2019, there were 58 massive displacements throughout the national territory, and of these, six occurred in Norte de Santander affecting more than 500 families (1,779 people) (El Tiempo, 2019).

Among the municipalities that reported early warnings are four in the Catatumbo region (Abrego, Teorama, El Tarra, La Playa) along with Puerto Santander, which reported increases in the number of clashes between illegal groups, affecting peasant, indigenous and migrant communities (Ombudsman's Office, 2021). This situation directly affects both social organization and land use, as well as economic reactivation, since it is the armed actors who determine the dynamics in the territories, and by positioning illicit crops in the market within the framework of an illegal economy, peasants are left in the middle trying to find new economic alternatives that, in addition to legal resources, allow them to consolidate stable and lasting peace scenarios.

In Catatumbo, homicide rates exceed those registered at the country level (Ministry of Defense, 2022). Starting in 2015 and for four consecutive years, municipalities such as Tibú reported 260 homicides per hundred thousand inhabitants, followed in descending order by municipalities such as Convención, El Tarra and Hacarí with 175, 108 and 82 homicides per hundred thousand inhabitants, respectively. These figures are alarming given that the national average does not exceed 26 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants (FIP, 2020, p. 10).

Finally, the forced recruitment of migrants and NNAJ reappears, which has been expressed by organizations such as Save the Children (2018), who have warned about the recruitment of minors.

In this context, children and youth are a vulnerable population at high risk of recruitment and other forms of use by illegal armed groups, who have been attracted by activities associated with coca leaf production, which generates attractive economic rewards for these children and young people who do not see opportunities in the countryside to build a prosperous future with opportunities. In addition, there are the psychosocial effects of living in such a complex context that triggers situations where children and youth run the risk of becoming victims or perpetrators in their territory.

This project emphasizes the differential approach to recover the voices of children and youth, who besides being one of the most significant victims of the armed conflict in terms of numbers, are usually not heard or taken into account as key actors in the formulation of public policies in their territories, ignoring that they are responsible for materializing the territorial peace bets in each context. This project aims to make visible the devastating effects that the conflict experienced in Catatumbo has caused on their lives, dignity and physical, moral and psychological integrity (ICBF-ACNUR, 2010), and how from their experiences the NNAJ made a reading of their reality and at the same time proposed alternatives for the future based on narratives and drawings.

The human rights of children and adolescents are inalienable, therefore they are considered subjects and holders of rights. Several norms protect them, including the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Colombian Political Constitution and Law 1098 (2006) (Childhood and Adolescence Code), which recognize and establish this condition. These recognize the prevalence that the rights of children and adolescents have over the rights of others, enshrining the principle of "best interests" as a legal tool to be guaranteed in all decisions (UARIV, 2015).

Consequently, the participation of children and adolescents in the implementation of the peace agreement and, in particular, in the construction process of the PDTA Catatumbo became an essential task for their vision of the future to be included in the public peace policy.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research responds to a hermeneutic design, so the analysis of the information collected was carried out from the comprehensive interpretative paradigm. For this perspective of analysis, the text is the basis for reconstruction and interpretation. Its particular interest lies in "describing, understanding and interpreting phenomena through the perceptions and meanings produced by the experiences of the participants" (Hernández et al., 2010, p. 11).

In this way and based on a dialectical model, it is considered that knowledge emerges from the dialogue between the research subjects, who are the NNAJ of Catatumbo, and the object of study, which represents both their reality and that of their territory, and the pillars of the PDTA. In addition, within the design, the virtues of hermeneutics are recognized to facilitate the understanding of actions in the context, which is why it is a key tool in the understanding of the artistic manifestations of the NNAJ, through their narratives and drawings, emphasizing the individual, that is, their individual experience, and their subjective and collective experience. In this way, hermeneutics makes it possible to discover meanings through the analysis of oral or written manifestations.

For Ricoeur (1985), the stories of each subject define and differentiate them from each other, so they play a role in the construction of identity, which was significant for the research to understand the view that the children and youth had about their reality, the territory and the pillars of PDTA. For the author, the story leads the subject to choose to assume or ignore his or her position on a particular issue.

Thus, according to Ricoeur (2004) "Hermeneutics is the theory of the operations of understanding related to the interpretation of texts" (p. 71), where discourse is considered a text that can be understood.

The following figure shows the methodological design used in the process:

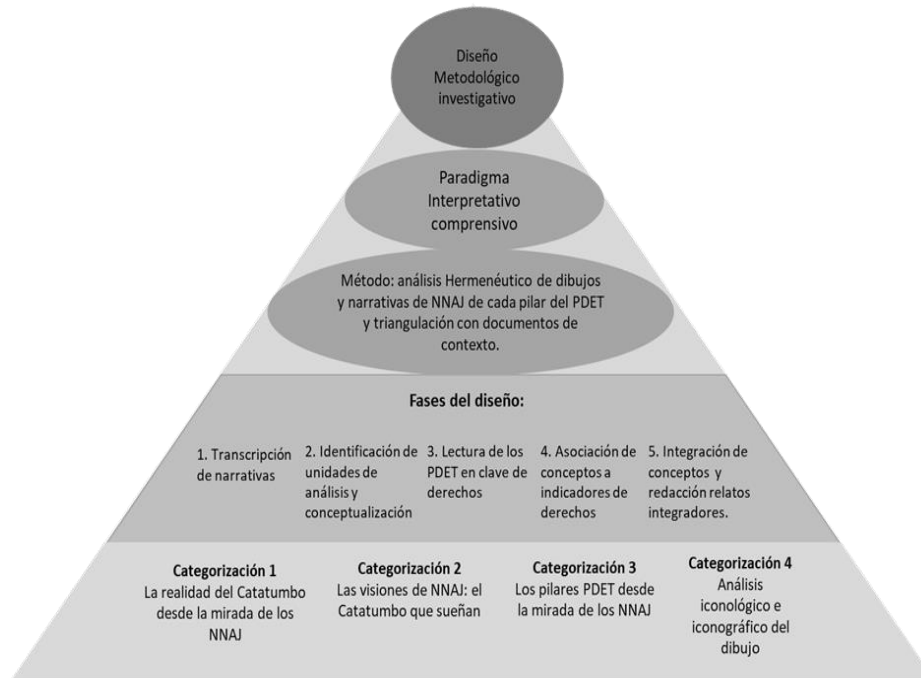


Figure 1. Methodological research design

The methodological route used made it possible to collect the voices of the children and youth through drawings and narratives that tell the stories represented by these drawings. In this sense, a matrix was elaborated that includes 5 major categories of analysis: a) characteristics of the evolutionary development of the drawing, b) iconological and iconographic factors of the drawings, c) perspective of the children and youth about the PDTA pillars, d) the reality of Catatumbo from the perspective of children and youth, and e) visions for the future.

Consequently, the narrative, expression and communication of the drawings were documented to interpret, understand and make visible the reality, emotionality, senses and meaning that the drawings represent from the vision of the children and youth, for which the characteristics of the evolutionary development of drawing were analyzed (Lowenfeld and Lambert, 1980), and the iconological and iconographic factors (Martínez, 2002).

For the analysis of the narratives, the starting point was the understanding of the territory as a socially constructed space, which has representations associated with spaces, relationships, conflicts, needs, actors and possibilities, aspects that were presented in the perspective of change and desired future, mobilizing reflective action from the question of interest: What is the Catatumbo that you dream of about land use, rural property and economic reactivation?

The following is the route that allowed the written objectification of the participants' view of Catatumbo based on the pillars of the PDTA:

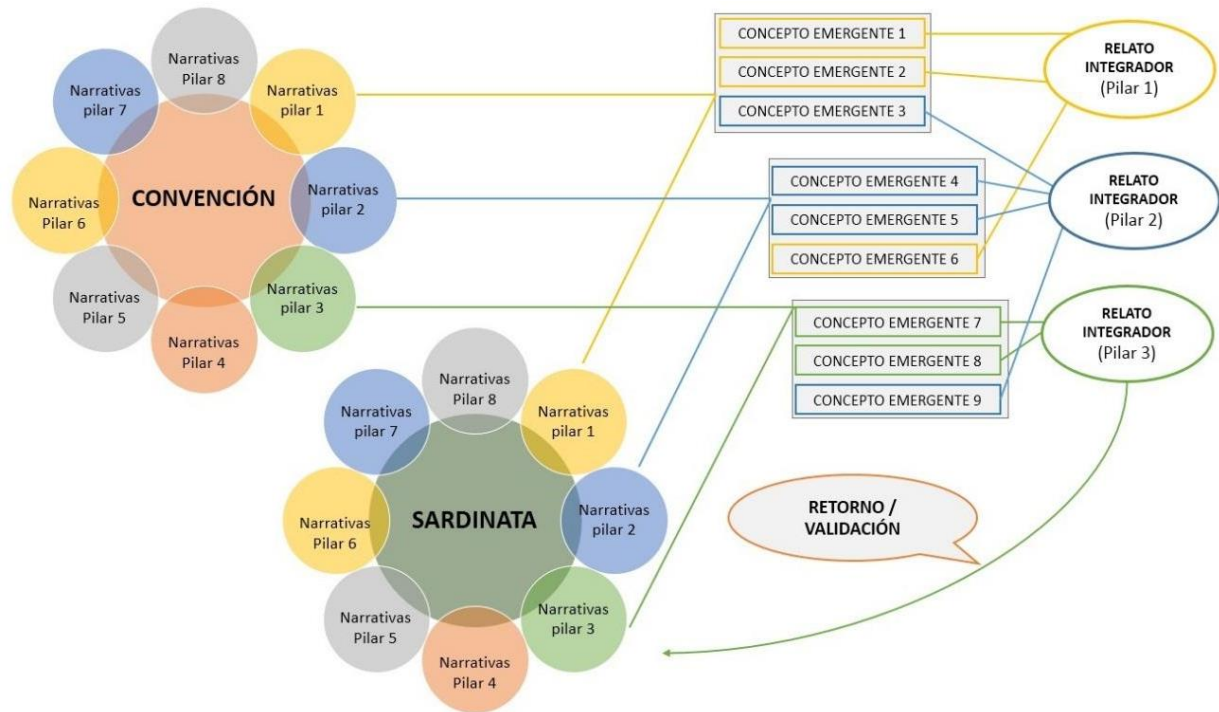


Figure 2. PDET objectification pathway

Subsequently, the narratives were analyzed globally, identifying how some aspects interrelate with others, for example, the economic reactivation of the countryside with the need for road infrastructure. This exercise required avoiding information leakage by 1) grouping the narratives by pillars and identifying aspects that could be migrated to another pillar; 2) defining specific frames of reference within each pillar; 3) elaborating new narratives integrating the findings of the analytical exercise.

Subsequently, the findings were triangulated based on a reading in terms of the rights of children and youth (Law 1098, 2006), which were organized for discussion with the PDTA pillars as preliminary categories of analysis. This analysis followed the following path

1. Transcription of the narrative using a word processor: respecting the written code, the grammatical aspects were adapted without losing the essence of the realities and dreams expressed in the stories.
2. Identification of units of analysis and conceptualization: from the live narratives of the participants, units of analysis were identified, or significant fragments of the enunciated voices, which were then associated with integrating concepts that encompass the particularity of the unit.
3. Reading the PDTA pillars in terms of rights: the PDTA pillars were associated with the rights of children and adolescents.
4. Association of concepts to rights indicators: in a matrix of association of the rights of children and adolescents to the PDTA pillars, the concepts were migrated from one pillar to another according to their nature.
5. Integration of the concepts: the concepts were grouped by affinity, generating deductive categories that in turn shape the development of the interpretative narratives expected from the analytical and integrative exercise. It should be clarified that the interest in generating concepts and groupings is not quantitative, but rather a framework of ordering and significance was sought in the various data emerging from the narratives.
6. Elaboration of integrating narratives: narratives were elaborated that integrate the voices of possible incidence in the PDTA, complying with the conditions of conciseness, deductive character, ethnicity, pertinence and integration.

Figure 3. Outline of the analysis route of the information collected.

Participants

The participants in the study were students from educational institutions and rural schools in the eight PDTA Catatumbo municipalities: Sardinata, Tibú, El Tarra, Convención, Teorama, San Calixto, El Carmen and Hacarí, whose ages ranged from 9 to 20 years, with an average age of 14 years. Young members of the Red Joven Pasa la Paz, and the Red Nacional de Jóvenes Rurales (National Network of Rural Youth) also participated. A total of 192 NNAJ participated, of which 113 were girls and 79 boys.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results presented here for discussion focus on the categories of: a) rural property and land use; and b) economic reactivation and agricultural production, taking into account the relationship between them given the central characteristic of "land".

In this sense, we analyzed the dreams of the children and youth and their perspective on peacebuilding in Catatumbo, which is based on the recognition of the various problems that have arisen in the territory for the presence and actions of illegal armed groups, and in particular, the armed violence suffered daily by the inhabitants of the region.

The findings around these categories put "land ownership" as a central axis, taking into account that historically there has been informality in the legal relationship with the land and the peasants have been limited in their access to land, which is why the children and youths dream that in Catatumbo the farms and plots have property titles that regularize their links and protect their property rights. As expressed by a 15-year-old girl from the municipality of San Calixto, "We all want to have our land, a document that has our

name on it and we can say: This land is mine. To have a better piece of land to cultivate, to separate the zones and also to distribute the animals."

These expressions show the desire for a productive territory, where it is possible to coexist while respecting the peasant, indigenous and natural territory, based on the recognition of peasant reserve zones, forest reserve zones and the territory of indigenous peoples. To this end, state intervention must strengthen the cohesion of the territory and the effective involvement of young people as peacebuilders.

Giving a social order to rural property is "a restructured and organized change supported by all as a path to progress and development" (15-year-old youth, El Carmen municipality), that is, the transformation of the countryside implies putting industry and its infrastructure at the service of the peasant, allowing rural development not to affect the environment and making it possible to reactivate an economy based on a culture of legality.

In this sense, a more urgent action for the reduction of violence in the territory is the substitution of illicit crops, allowing to promote the agricultural vocation of the soil of the region and the traditional crops of each municipality. Here, academia plays an important role, since its research centers can make relevant contributions from studies of soil type and its vocation to optimize planting and reduce the risks of crop loss, making it possible for the peasants to "return to productive crops, thus generating wealth for the region and completely eradicating illicit crops, since this only brings violence, poverty and war to the region" (15-year-old young man, municipality of Convención).

Consequently, the children and youth dream of a democratization of access to land in which the distribution of rural property is more equitable and thus effectively enjoy their rights and with guarantees of a stable and lasting peace in which peasants are not forced to abandon their lands or are dispossessed of them. This element is key because it shows that the phenomenon of forced displacement has affected the region for decades, and continues to be a victimizing fact present in the territory that directly affects children and youth, among other aspects, their right to access quality education and access to food security. Let us remember that, as of September 2020, according to the UARIV, there are 167,095 NNAJ victims of forced displacement in Norte de Santander, most of them coming from the municipalities of Catatumbo, where the dynamics of the armed conflict persist.

These reflections are presented hand in hand with the dreams of the NNAJ for the economic reactivation of the countryside, which necessarily requires the intervention of the government at the local, departmental and national levels, guaranteeing the means for the development of their work in a demined countryside and without the presence of illegal armed groups, so that it is possible to cultivate agricultural products that allow the peasants to include their crops in the commercialization chain in the regional market.

Regarding the commercialization process, there is a need to manage direct sales agreements, avoiding intermediaries that monopolize the largest percentage of profits, with the peasants having the lowest sales income. Evidently, for this to be possible, state investment must be present from the creation of seed banks, storage, conservation, transportation for marketing, points of sale and promotion of consumption of products at the regional and national level, prevailing over imports.

The element of the illegal economy around illicit crops appears again as a limiting factor for the productivity of the field since it is a factor of great incidence for the children and adolescents to relegate their school activities seduced by the economic income from coca leaves, "because where I live the children do not study because they go to scrape coca, they leave school because they say that they earn money working and everybody knows that" (Adolescent, 14 years old, municipality of Tibú).

This reality expressed by the children and youth is associated with the deep desire to improve the family income and living conditions of their loved ones, affirming that the peasants of Catatumbo lack recognition for their valuable work, "I want to say to them that I congratulate them, they are people who deserve applause from everyone because they work hard together" (11 years old, municipality of Hacarí).

In this order of ideas, the NNAJ make a clear distinction between urban and rural areas, giving relevance to the countryside as the articulating axis of the cities given that it can supply food, and yet there are still wide gaps and social imbalances between the two.

Moving forward in the requirements to make possible the economic and productive reactivation, it is evident in the stories that the "road infrastructure" is an indispensable component so that the products of the Catatumbo region can be competitive in the market, with sufficient retribution to improve the living conditions of the peasantry, in the words of the children they dream that "the farmers can sell the harvested products of their work, but for this, there must be good roads to carry the products" (Girl 12 years old, municipality Teorama).

A relevant aspect found in the stories of the NNAJ is the need for investment in training centers for the technification and instruction of farmers with emphasis on land and product management and associativity to be generators of decent jobs in the region.

The drawing presented below is the representation of the prosperous countryside dreamed of by the children and youth of Catatumbo, in which the farmer is related to the ecological factors of the context represented in the drawing such as grass, trees, fruits, soil, crops, reflecting expressions of hope, patience and longing, also the vision of peaceful countryside, with the right to cultivate, to healthy food and a farmer with guarantees.

Figure 4. Drawing Pilar 6, municipality of Tibú, teenager 14 years old



FINAL NOTES

- 1 Project institutionally endorsed by the Universidad Francisco de Paula Santander and funded in 2018 by the Colombia Transforma program, code NDS153.

CONCLUSIONS

This research shows the importance of giving a voice to children, adolescents and young people, to bring their vision of the territory to a scenario of public policy advocacy, and with greater emphasis in a region that has historically provided them with an environment of war to which they have had to adapt as if it were a survival instinct in the face of the aberrant forms of violence of which the inhabitants of Catatumbo have been victims. Consequently, the inclusion of the perspective of children and youth in the PDTA implies the conceptualization of peace as a human right.

Likewise, in methodological terms, creative tools are required that adapt to the particularities of the participating population, in this case, being the artistic-narrative component of the articulating axis of the information gathering process and for the citizen appropriation of the participation spaces.

The research findings show that, concerning rural property, land use, economic reactivation and agricultural production, the NNAJ dream of a prosperous, productive and safe Catatumbo, with formalization and ownership of land and investment in infrastructure to enhance the marketing and transportation chain of products. It is evident that currently there have been stumbling blocks for the implementation of programs such as the PNIS, due to the growing distrust of the communities towards the government for the different attempts of forced eradication, which closes the possibilities of dialogue and agreement with the peasantry.

For this, the political will of the government at its different levels is fundamental, which has the mandate to advance the different actions aimed at the implementation of the peace agreement and in particular, the programs oriented to the social and economic transformation of the countryside, the vindication of the rights of peasants, social leaders, human rights defenders, victims of the armed conflict, indigenous peoples, women and youth who have been demanding spaces for dialogue and the joint construction of that dream called "Peace".

The above highlights the need for institutional articulation that allows the advancement of joint actions in terms of territory, particularly from the academy as a key actor to continue the research process aimed at understanding the achievements of the participation of children and youth in public policy, and to continue proposing creative and practical alternatives that bring the academy closer to the community and contribute to the implementation of the peace agreement.

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