



Global Initiative for
JUSTICE, TRUTH +
RECONCILIATION

CREATING CHANNELS OF TRUST: Community Truth-Telling in Outlying Regions in Colombia

A Toolkit by Darío Colmenares Millán



About The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience

The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC) is a global network of museums, historic sites and grassroots initiatives dedicated to building a more just and peaceful future through engaging communities in remembering struggles for human rights and addressing their modern repercussions. Founded in 1999, the ICSC now includes more than 250 Sites of Conscience members in 65 countries. The ICSC supports these members through seven regional networks that encourage collaboration and international exchange of knowledge and best practices.

Learn more at www.sitesofconscience.org.

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Designed by Lori J. Dawson

ABOUT THIS FIELD GUIDE

The present document describes the process of developing seven community projects aimed at integrating truth-telling in collective memory narratives in rural areas of Colombia in 2018.

The project was developed by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience as a pilot experience to explore methodologies to foster autonomous truth-telling initiatives in indigenous, peasant and Afrocolombian communities in outlying regions of Colombia, as a program to complement the participation of local CSOs, victims and survivors in the country's Truth Commission.

This practical guide highlights ways to support local communities in truth-telling efforts and raising public awareness, in the hope that similar programs, both in Colombia and in other post-conflict societies, could benefit from its lessons learned.

ABOUT THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE FOR JUSTICE, TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION CONSORTIUM

Around the world, there is an increasing call for justice, truth, and reconciliation in countries where legacies of grave human rights violations cast a shadow on transitions. To meet this need, the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC) launched the new Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation (GIJTR) in August 2014. The goal of the GIJTR is to address new challenges in countries in conflict or transition that are struggling with their legacies of past or ongoing grave human rights violations.

The GIJTR Consortium comprises the following nine partner organizations:

- International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, in the United States (lead partner);
- American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative, in the United States;
- Asia Justice and Rights, in Indonesia;
- Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, in South Africa;
- Documentation Center of Cambodia, in Cambodia;
- Due Process of Law Foundation, in the United States;
- Humanitarian Law Center, in Serbia;
- Forensic Anthropology Foundation of Guatemala (Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala – FAFG), in Guatemala; and
- Public International Law & Policy Group, in the United States.

In addition to leveraging the different areas of expertise of the Consortium partners, the ICSC draws on the knowledge and longstanding community connections of its 250-plus members in 65 countries in order to strengthen and broaden the Consortium's work. The Consortium partners, along with the ICSC's network members, develop and implement a range of rapid response and high-impact programs, utilizing both restorative and retributive approaches to criminal justice and accountability for grave human rights violations. The Consortium takes an interdisciplinary approach to justice, truth, and accountability. On the whole, the Consortium partners possess expertise in the following areas:

- Truth-telling, memorialization and other forms of historical memory, and reconciliation;
- Documenting human rights violations for transitional justice purposes;
- Forensic analysis and other efforts related to missing or disappeared persons;



A plaque at a killing site in Bangladesh sponsored by the Liberation War Museum.

- Advocating for victims, including for their right to access to justice and their need for psychosocial support, and trauma mitigation activities;
- Providing technical assistance to and building the capacity of civil society activists and organizations to promote and engage with transitional justice processes;
- Reparative justice initiatives; and
- Ensuring and integrating gender justice into these and all other transitional justice processes.

Given the diversity of experiences, knowledge, and skills within the Consortium and the ICSC's network members, the Consortium's programming offers post-conflict countries and countries emerging from repressive regimes a unique opportunity to address transitional justice needs in a timely manner while simultaneously promoting local participation and building the capacity of community partners.



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COMMUNITY TRUTH-TELLING IN OUTLYING REGIONS IN COLOMBIA

Background

On December 2016, the Government of Colombia and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP), the largest guerrilla group in the country, reached a peace agreement to end an armed conflict of more than 60 years. Shortly after, the FARC-EP guerrilla demobilized and disarmed under United Nations supervision. The full implementation began in 2017, but significant challenges remain. Colombian society is divided and highly polarized between those in favor of the agreement and those against. Additionally, armed groups of paramilitaries and the smaller ELN guerrilla are still challenging state control over some outlying territories.

For most victims and citizens, particularly in rural areas, truth-telling is an absolute necessity for the stabilization of peace. The peace agreement addresses this claim by establishing a transitional justice system with three mechanisms - a Special Jurisdiction for Peace (Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz – JEP) and two non-judicial mechanisms, namely the Truth Commission (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición – CEV) and the Unit for the Search of the Disappeared (Unidad de Búsqueda de Personas Dadas por Desaparecidas – UBPD). These mechanisms were formally created and given Constitutional status in 2017.

Preparing for the coming implementation of the transitional justice system, the Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation (GIJTR) conducted a needs assessment during the peace negotiations in 2016 to identify the main challenges for a successful implementation. Based on the assessment findings, the GIJTR developed a program to support peace-building and reconciliation in Colombia with the leverage of the technical expertise of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC) and the Forensic Anthropology Foundation of Guatemala (FAFG).

The program, called “Supporting Truth, Justice and Reconciliation in Colombia”, consisted of capacity-building activities in the areas of archives and documentation, community truth-telling, and forensic training, to support both civil society organizations (CSOs) and the non-judicial mechanisms of the transitional justice system including the Truth Commission and the Search Unit.

This toolkit introduces the methodology applied by the GIJTR to support community truth-telling projects in Colombia. The toolkit serves as a guide for CSOs wanting to support community truth-telling initiatives in post-conflict or post-authoritarian societies. However, its implementation will necessarily require adjustments to the corresponding local and political contexts and security conditions.

Truth-telling in rural areas of Colombia

As a result of such a long lasting conflict, Colombian human rights advocacy CSOs have become highly organized and specialized. Around the country, there are more than three thousand victims' organizations registered with the Victims Assistance Unit. Additionally, over the last decade, especially encouraged by the 2011 Law of Victims¹, numerous historical memory initiatives have been developed by local communities, aimed at raising public awareness on human rights violations to promote a culture of peacebuilding and non-recurrence of political violence. Very often, however, such initiatives have been developed within a context of personal security risks for the community, and particularly their leaders.



At the local level, conflicts have not come to an end, with some armed groups still exerting influence over local authorities and some of those responsible for promoting violence still in influential positions. Within this context, truth-seeking frequently represents a security risk for participants. However, stimulated by the new opportunity for a national commitment to truth-seeking led by the Truth Commission, a growing number of communities are overcoming fear and looking for innovative ways for truth-telling.

The Truth Commission is encouraging communities to distinguish between historical memory and truth-telling. In many ways, these two concepts are similar. However, community truth-telling requires an extra effort in gathering more factual information within the community through dialogue, testimonies, and validation of information. It requires researching individual stories, providing psychosocial support to victims, and developing specific ways to facilitate its collection and dissemination. Historical memory on the other hand is more focused on building a common narrative within a community. While they follow slightly different priorities, that is, *fact-finding vs. building common narratives*, the two are complementary and contribute, in the case of community truth-telling initiatives here described, to one unified result: a historical memory narrative built on the factual information collected by the community in a truth-telling process.

Developing truth-telling community projects in Colombia

Aware of the need to support local capacities among indigenous, peasant and Afrocolombian communities to develop autonomous initiatives for truth-telling, the GIJTR initiated a pilot project to share truth-telling methodologies and systematize the experience to enable its replication throughout the country.

In close coordination with the Colombian Truth Commission and several networks of organizations, the GIJTR selected seven communities from diverse regions, with special care to include women, as well as vulnerable and underrepresented groups. The purpose was to support them in conceptualizing and implementing a short term community truth-telling project.

THE INTENDED PROJECTS WERE TO MEET THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS:

1. Bring new information to the public about a violent past of violations of human rights in the participating communities.
2. Find innovative ways to present the truth to the public.
3. Develop an idea that was not already being done in the community.

¹ Law 1448 of 2011, also known as Law of Victims, created a framework for land restitution and reparations to victims of the Colombian armed conflict, including the creation of the National Center for Historical Memory to develop research on recent history and to support the development of memorialization initiatives around the country.

4. Be autonomously developed by members of a community, without intervention of external organizations or institutions.
5. Include personal stories of members of the community, anonymously if required.
6. Engage members of the community in truth-telling activities about their experiences as part of the process.
7. Develop the project within a time-frame of three months and with the designated budget of US\$ 1000.

THE PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS FOR THE PROGRAM, AND THE CRITERIA FOR SELECTING THEM WERE THE FOLLOWING:

Community / Organization	Criteria
Asfaddes Barrancabermeja	Families of the disappeared in one of the most violent areas during the conflict, the Middle Magdalena. ASFADDES, the Association of Families of Detained Disappeared Persons, is the national organization with the longest tradition in searching for the disappeared in Colombia, and its main office in Bogotá chose their branch in the city of Barrancabermeja to participate.
Guacoche	African Colombian community council in the Caribbean region. The organization was proposed to participate by the CNOA – National Confederation of African Colombian Organizations. The paramilitaries killed the community leaders in front of all the villagers, and took control of the population for decades. The villagers were confined to the town perimeter, and those who would transit through forbidden areas would risk their lives.
Pueblo Bello – Remanso de Paz Museum	Peasant community in a conflict afflicted zone of Urabá in Antioquia. The civic committee was proposed to participate by the RCLM Colombian Network of Sites of Memory. Pueblo Bello had a museum built as part of a reparation program from the government, but the community has had difficulties to keep it operative and focused on its mission of historical memory. An added difficulty in the area is the continued operation of armed groups, even after the demobilization of paramilitaries and the guerrilla.
Comité de Memoria de El Castillo	Peasant community in a conflict afflicted zone of the Llanos. The committee was proposed by the RCLM Colombian Network of Sites of Memory. The Memory Committee of El Castillo is composed of over a dozen organizations.
Tras las Huellas de El Placer museum	Peasant community in the conflict afflicted zone of Putumayo, proposed by the RCLM Colombian Network of Sites of Memory. The community museum has been inactive for a long time due to lack of funding and to a stressing context with armed groups still operating in the zone.
Fuerza Mujeres Wayúu	Women organization of the Wayúu ethnic community. The Fuerza Mujeres Wayúu CSO is a leading experience of a network of women striving for historical memory developed by the Wayúu community in their own terms.
Mariposas de Alas Nuevas	Women organization in the indigenous and African Colombian communities in the region of Buenaventura in the Pacific. Buenaventura has undergone an intense violence from several armed groups for many years. In some urban districts, gangs have flourished and keep territorial control by disappearing or killing anybody who dares cross "invisible boundaries" determined by them from street to street. The leading organization for the project is a network of more than a dozen different organizations, all of which have developed support groups of women in Afrocolombian and Indigenous communities of the surrounding geographic areas.



STAGE 1: PREPARATION

Once the participating communities had been selected, a detailed document was sent to them describing the scope and methodology for the community truth-telling workshop, and for the subsequent projects to be developed with the small grants program.

Each community was asked to appoint two people to participate in the project development workshop, as it is more likely to reach ideas representing the community if they are discussed by two of its members. It was very important that the participating communities and organizations fully understood that the two members participating in the project development workshop had to be in the position to make decisions regarding the structure and main features of the resulting community project, along with its general activities, as the program required a commitment to develop the project in the months to follow the workshop.

The projects resulting from the development workshop were going to be draft versions which would require validation and adjustments through consultation with the community. However, the core concepts had to be discussed during the workshop. Consequently, in preparation for the workshop, communities were encouraged to discuss their priorities and expectations in advance.



STAGE 2: PROJECT DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

1. Introducing participants

After a general introduction about the Truth Commission, the main concepts and the description of activities that were going to be developed in the 3 day workshop, a trust-building activity was introduced for participants to get to know each other. The initial ice-breaker exercise consisted of selecting one general question about community truth-telling, and allowing participants to introduce themselves by giving a short answer to it. The suggested questions were:

- What kind of truth-telling does my community need?
- What kind of truth-telling is possible in my community?

FACILITATORS: The role of facilitators in this activity was to generate a friendly environment for informal dialogue among participants by asking simple questions for clarification, and encouraging other participants to point out similar challenges. Alternatively, participants could be grouped by pairs from different communities, giving them a moment to introduce themselves and take notes about the other person's answer and general information, and finally taking turns to introduce their newly acquainted peer to the group.

2. Introducing truth-telling examples

As a basis for initial discussions, a wide range of examples from Sites of Conscience community truth-telling initiatives were presented to participants. In selecting the examples, it was important to keep in mind that innovation in form and format plays an important role in strengthening community truth-telling capacities for many reasons, among which the following could be highlighted:

- In cases where direct oral testimonies could expose witnesses and victims to security risks, there are many ways to anonymize stories preserving their truth-telling capacity.
- In a context of continued violations of human rights, the public may have become insensitive to stories due to saturation of a repetitive stating of general facts by media. Unfortunately, this has been the case in Colombia. Symbolic languages, art and innovative forms have the capacity to renew interest and draw the attention to true stories from the communities as if these cases were told for the first time.
- Symbolic languages and art forms produced by community members can easily motivate other members of the community to overcome silence and contribute to the collective truth-telling initiative.

FACILITATORS: The role of facilitators was not only to show the examples, but to underline ways in which each individual example connected with fact finding and truth-telling within the community.

SOME OF THE EXAMPLES DESCRIBED AND DISCUSSED DURING THE WORKSHOP IN COLOMBIA WERE THE FOLLOWING:

Body mapping, Kenya, Uganda, Sri Lanka

Victims tell their stories of loss, displacement and destruction caused by war through a life-sized drawing of their own body, complemented by symbolic descriptions of their traumatic past. In community workshops, sharing stories and developing their drawings, participants find relief and are able to examine and discuss their concerns about past and future. Sites of Conscience have successfully implemented this technique in diverse countries such as Sri Lanka, Uganda, and Kenya.



Family artwork remembering the disappeared in Guatemala

The Forensic Anthropology Foundation of Guatemala carried out workshops with families of the disappeared to tell their stories through artwork. Participants deliver their messages through painting and collage and share their stories with other families during the creative process.

Photo by Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala



Storytelling through narrative scenes: Patchwork from Costureras de la Memoria in Colombia and Arpilleras in Chile

Survivors and families gather in community workshops to share traumatic stories and create scenes in patchwork technique to express their concerns about political violence through their artwork. This technique has been extensively used in many Latin American countries, such as the Arpilleras in Chile, and the Costureras de la Memoria in Colombia.



Storytelling through narrative scenes: Sarhua wood plaques, Peru

Traditional artists in the Peruvian region of Sarhua, Ayacucho have depicted stories of the local population subject to violence during the armed conflict between the Government of Peru and the Shining Path guerrilla. The plaques often include text descriptions of the images.

Photo by Andina / Agencia Peruana de Noticias



Storytelling through narrative scenes: graphic novels in Colombia and Chile

Graphic artists in Colombia developed graphic novels based on the oral history archive of the Center for Memory, Peace and Reconciliation, where fictional characters preserve the anonymity of the original testimonies. In Chile, graphic novels have been also used to portray moments of a recent violent past supported on thorough research and documentation.

Community Social Mapping, Sri Lanka

Community members create a non-technical map of their community surroundings and mark locations of human rights violations. This shared view of the community allows for group discussions about relevant and significant facts. Organizing the community to create their own map displaying their stories, and displaying the map in a place that is significant to the community acts to reclaim histories, recover losses, and promote social justice.



Memorialization through community art in permanent sites: ceramic mosaics in Laja and Paine, Chile, mural in ANFASEP Community Center, Ayacucho, Peru

Survivors and families of victims participate in community workshops to develop artistic interventions in community centers for memorialization, in a process seeking to rebuild conflict-afflicted communities. These participatory memorialization initiatives contribute to personal and collective healing.

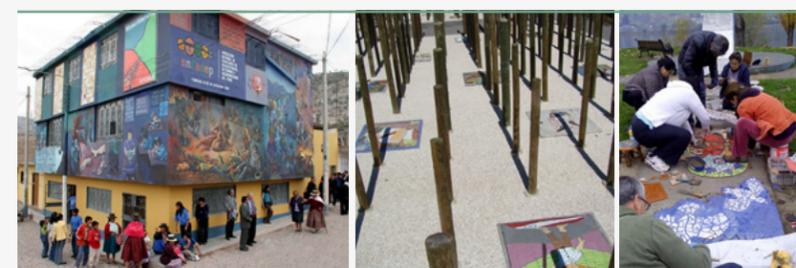


Photo of community house by ANFASEP, others by International Coalition of Sites of Conscience

Memorialization through traditional sewing and textiles in Peru, Quipus and Chalinas

Traditional Andean techniques of quipus and chalinas have been used to produce collective artwork describing timelines of events related to human rights violations and remembering those absent, killed or disappeared during the conflict as a means to promote hope within the community and non-repetition of a violent past. The most powerful aspect of the quipus and chalinas is the capacity to group many community members in a collective sharing of stories and advocacy for non-repetition.

Photos by Perú Folklórico and Colectivo Desvela



Talking tree, Centro de Memoria, Paz y Reconciliación, Colombia

Truth-telling songs and voices were collected from victims participating in oral history workshops with communities at the Center for Memory, Peace and Reconciliation. The recordings are played back in a loop through a "contact speaker" attached to the roots of a tree. Visitors of the Center can listen to the voices placing their ear against the trunk. This format for truth-telling preserves anonymity of witnesses and survivors.



3. Developing projects

Based on the examples presented, participants were asked questions that could spark ideas for their own projects. Some of these questions included:

- Which members of the community participate in the activities, and how?
- Which could have been the sources of truth-telling in each example?
- What truth-telling activities could be developed to support the production of artwork and objects?
- How are these objects capable of reaching the public in an innovative way?
- Which ideas can be communicated in each example?

FACILITATORS: The end result of each project was expected to be some kind of a product, usually attached to activities within the community or beyond. The role of the facilitators was to help participants steer away from fixed ideas regarding final form, and instead focus in the ideas to be communicated, the public, the sources of information, etc. Discussions about forms and formats were postponed while the basic concepts of the project were being defined.

The process of focusing the projects required a combination of individual work, work in pairs by organization, work in larger groups, and sharing in plenary sessions, through a variety of techniques. Although it was important to give participants the chance to work with their partner from the same organization when it came to describing the community's expectations, it was also very useful to encourage the exchange of ideas between diverse organizations and



help participants understand not only how peers responded to similar challenges, but also how their ideas were perceived by others.

THE MAIN BLOCKS OF ACTIVITIES REQUIRED TO FOCUS THE PROJECTS WERE:

1. Defining the target public. This required deciding on the main recipients of the end result. Truth-telling could be targeted to young students, local authorities, survivors, families, external visitors to the community, nearby communities, etc. For example, different age groups respond to different communication forms and styles, and some groups require more context information than others. Moved by the need for recognition, participants often wanted to address the largest possible public, from all over the country to even from the international community. But experience shows that the most natural public will more likely be their own community and similar communities, where truth-telling has the most impact potential.

FACILITATORS: The role of facilitators was to help participants keep in mind that the beneficiaries of truth-telling are not only the public viewing or receiving the products, but also the members of the community involved in the actual preparation of the product, in collecting information, and in sharing their stories.

2. Identifying main truth-telling issues for each community. Which facts and concepts is it necessary to communicate? How much truth is it possible to communicate within the security conditions of the community? Participants could include their own personal list of priorities, but it was important to focus on the issues prioritized by the community from the beginning. It is most likely that in the validation and consultations after the workshop, the home community would demand these core issues to be part of the project.

FACILITATORS: The role of facilitators was to help participants synthesize the main issues into simple and clear action steps.

3. Listing the sources of information. Community truth-telling relies on personal stories of the past from actual community members. Even if the individual stories do not appear in the final product, it will however be based on them, and it is best to develop a project concept if the sources of information and validation of information are clearly stated from the beginning.

FACILITATORS: The role of facilitators was to help participants determine the most relevant information required for truth-telling priorities established earlier by each group.

4. Finding the right format for each project. At this point in the workshop, the discussions naturally progressed to what could work best for each community. It was sometimes useful to return to some of the examples introduced at the beginning of the workshop and focus on the following aspects:

- How different groups within local communities could become part of the process,
- How this could benefit participants, and
- How both the process and the end result could convey the priority messages discussed earlier.

This required a combination of exercises, including working in pairs, individual and larger group work.

FACILITATORS: The role of facilitators was to identify ideas with potential impact, and provide feedback on variations that could strengthen their impact in the communities, building on the experience of participants with their specific communities. Enough time had to be assigned for this section to make sure that each organization reached a solid central idea for their community project. Otherwise, the main concept proposed for the community project was not going to survive the consultation and validation process.

At the end of this block, participants were asked to prepare a brief description of their intended community project.

The descriptions of the proposed community projects were then briefly discussed to verify their compliance with the general criteria (to include truth-telling activities, to involve members of the community in the actual production process, to represent something that was not already being done, etc.).

It was also necessary to make sure that the means to develop the project are within the reach of the organization and its community. Digital design or developments relying heavily on technology could make the project depend on external resources, leaving little space for the participation of members of the community.



FACILITATORS: The role of facilitators was to help participants design a realistic project that met the program criteria and successfully integrated the main issues and the sources of information described earlier.

5. Defining a list of activities and materials required to develop the projects. Once the central idea had been established for each project, participants were asked to produce a list of activities and the corresponding materials required to develop it (meetings, interviews, art materials, logistics, etc).

FACILITATORS: The role of facilitators was to individually review with each organization whether there were activities or materials that could have been left out of the list, and to make sure that all the elements described were necessary and not redundant.

6. Preparing a draft budget and timeline. The final activity in the development workshop consisted of preparing an estimate budget based on the list of activities and materials, and defining a reasonable timeline including all the actions described. In the case of the truth-telling program in Colombia, communities were to develop their projects throughout a period of three months, with the support of a small grant of US\$ 1000 each.



FACILITATORS: The role of facilitators was to make sure that the proposed list of activities and materials was complete and sufficient, and that the timeline and budget was realistic. Some individual items required further development and local research before budgeting, but this had to be expressly noted in the draft proposal.

At the end of the development workshop, participants returned home with a project description, a list of activities and materials, a rough budget, and a timeline, to discuss with their communities and produce a detailed project description.



Photo: ANFASEP

STAGE 3: CONSULTATIONS IN COMMUNITIES FOR VALIDATION OF PROJECTS

Implementers, in most cases those who participated in the development workshop, presented the draft plan of their projects to local community members. As a result, some adjustments in activities and budgets were introduced. In remote rural areas, where convening meetings require complicated logistics, this process introduced delays in the development of projects.

In two cases, particularly those where the participating organization were umbrella organizations instead of individual organizations, there was a complex consultation process where other member organizations of the network felt that participants attending to the workshop did not fully represent them and wanted to introduce major changes. This negotiation of contents was a normal part of the process, but working with umbrella organizations introduced new actors with a challenging diversity of expectations.

Although adjustments could be introduced at this stage, the organizations had to be reminded that the main features of the projects had to be preserved. In any case, the projects had to have an end product and activities to reach the public, it had to be something that was not already being developed, exploring new forms, it had to involve the community in truth-telling and production of the final products, it had to be developed autonomously, entirely by the community, and it had to be developed within the agreed budget and timeframe.

Once the projects had been adjusted and validated by the community, a final concept note was submitted to the GIJTR project partner. In most cases, at this stage it was necessary to get back to the organizations to get them to include additional details regarding the delivery of supporting materials such as pictures, recordings and digital versions of designs. Based on the approved projects and budgets, each organization was sent an MoU to sign, stating the terms of the agreement, and the procedure for payments, along with the attachments of the approved description of activities, timeline, and budget.

THE RESULTING PROJECTS WERE THE FOLLOWING:

1. **Project Name:** Memory and Dignity – Teenagers illustrate stories of the disappeared

Organization: Asfaddes Barrancabermeja

Location: Municipality of Barrancabermeja, department of Santander

The local branch of the Association of Families of Detained Disappeared Persons – ASFADDES in Barrancabermeja was to develop a participatory travelling exhibition of life stories of disappeared persons from the local community. In close collaboration with the families, they were to collect the main biographical facts about a group of disappeared persons from the local community, including details about their everyday life, what happened to them and what had been achieved in the search for that person. These stories were then to be shared in a workshop with students of the last two grades of the local Ciudadela Educativa highschool, where students would be encouraged to illustrate the stories with their own drawings, providing a particular attention-grabbing style to the exhibition. The exhibition would also be developed in a booklet format.

2. **Project Name** El Castillo Memory Stories – Testimonials of El Castillo dolls

Organization: Community Memory Committee of El Castillo

Location: Municipality of Medellín del Ariari, department of Meta

A group of women, victims of the armed conflict from El Castillo, were to develop in handcrafting workshops a total of 10 cloth dolls resembling victims of the armed conflict. Their testimonial accounts would be recorded into MP3 players to accompany the dolls in an exhibition. This exhibition was intended to travel through villages in the Ariari region, especially in schools, but could be taken to other regions in the country.

The stories told by the dolls witness the killings and forced disappearance in the El Castillo region.

3. **Project Name:** Timeline for the Memory Museum –

Exhibition for the *Tras las Huellas de el Placer* community museum

Organization: Community Museum “Tras las Huellas de El Placer”

Location: El Placer village, Guamuez Valley, department of Putumayo

The project consisted of producing an exhibition of a timeline for the local community of the Valley of Guamuez, both to account for the facts of the conflict and for relevant facts of resistance by the villagers. The timeline was to be built through interviews with villagers, local authorities and community leaders. The process would also include collecting pictures and other graphic material. The result would be an exhibition printed in banners to activate the local museum “Tras las Huellas de El Placer” (Following the Footsteps of El Placer Township). Member of the Colombian Network of Sites of Memory, this local museum had been inactive for over two years and would again be activated through this timeline exhibition, which would also include the collecting of popular songs telling stories of the armed conflict in the surrounding area of the Guamuez region, where several killings took place.

4. **Project Name:** TÙÙ KATTO UKAT SHIMÙINMAJATKAT - The Bag of Truth-telling – Truth-telling “mochilas” in the Wayúu indigenous community

Organization: Fuerza Mujeres Wayúu – Women Organization of the Wayúu People

Location: Municipalities of Maicao and Hatonuevo, department of Guajira

The Fuerza Mujeres Wayúu, a women organization in the Wayúu ethnic community was to create large bags with the traditional technique of “wayúu mochilas” containing 36 small “mochilas”, each with short messages in their Wayúu native language explaining stories of violence, killings and resistance lived by villages of the Maicao and Hatonuevo regions. The mochilas would then travel from village to village recording stories of oral tradition about the armed conflict and the population’s resistance.

5. **Project Name:** What we lived and endured before and during the armed conflict in Guacoche – Community mural

Organization: Ethnic Afrocolombian Community Council of Guacoche

Location: Guacoche township in Valledupar, department of Cesar

The community was to be convened to produce two murals for the community center through a participatory collaboration. One of the murals should depict life of the community before the armed conflict, and the other one should show the hardships of life during the armed conflict, when their community leaders were shot and the village was forced to become a support center for the paramilitaries.

6. **Project Name:** Chit-chatting my Truth – Community Traditional Singing to Tell Stories

Organization: Mariposas de Alas Nuevas Network – Afrocolombian and Indigenous Women Organization

Location: Buenaventura municipality, department of Valle del Cauca

The project intended to work with two groups of women, one Afrocolombian, the other one from Indigenous communities. Each was going to develop the story of a woman searching for a disappeared son, one of them killed by an armed group for crossing the imaginary boundary to the adjacent neighborhood, the other one abducted by the guerrilla. The Mariposas de Alas Nuevas Network has developed a methodology of interviews, research and psychosocial support by community groups of women, both in Afrocolombian and Indigenous communities. The result would be a documentary with the stories told in the alabao traditional song, which would be shared from village to village.

7. **Project Name:** Shedding Light on Truth

Organization: Remanso de Paz Community Museum

Location: Pueblo Bello town, Turbo municipality, department of Antioquia

The local community of Pueblo Bello, Antioquia, would prepare an exhibition printed on banners to activate the Remanso de Paz (Haven of Peace) Community Museum in Pueblo Bello, which was being used for other community activities different from its original mission of historical memory. The contents of the exhibition would be developed in a participatory process with the surrounding rural areas of Sinai, Galilea, Caucho, Unión, Ilusión, Esperanza, Monomacho, and Luicio.



STAGE 4: PROJECT MONITORING

Once the projects were approved and the implementers received the first disbursement, the GIJTR local partner held bi-weekly calls with implementers to monitor the progress and ensure that objectives were being met. In most cases, implementers needed an additional 2-3 weeks to plan before they could really get started with the agreed activities. Requesting pictures from their meetings, interviews and material production activities proved to be an effective way to virtually monitor projects, and discuss successes and challenges experienced.

Some projects required more technical support than others, and advice was not always put into practice. However, flexibility was often necessary to preserve the principle of autonomy of communities. As projects reached the final stage, most of the participating communities requested an extension to complete their projects.



STAGE 5: EVALUATION WORKSHOP

At the end of a five month period, an evaluation workshop was convened to discuss the results of the projects, again with the attendance of two members from each community, in most cases the same participants of the development workshop.

Each project was presented in detail, describing the impact in the community, the challenges of developing and implementing it and the possible future developments to maximize its impact. Each presentation was followed by questions by other implementers and a group discussion. In several cases, there was an interest to develop similar projects in other communities, or an interest in inviting some of the projects to visit other communities.

Group discussions also provided the opportunity to exchange learned lessons and to explore ways in which the program could have included other features.

THE FOLLOWING PICTURES ILLUSTRATE THE RESULTS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE PROJECTS:

1. Teenagers illustrate stories of the disappeared in Barrancabermeja. The Association of Families of Disappeared Detainees ASFADDES prepared a travelling exhibition to raise public awareness on this tragedy. For a higher impact innovating through a different approach and to reach new audiences in schools, ten life stories were illustrated by teenagers. The main challenge they came across in developing the project was that teenagers were too self-conscious of their own drawings and were reluctant to elaborate on graphic descriptions of the stories collected from families. According to the findings of this project, younger students aged 7 to 10 were prepared to express more freely, avoiding graphic stereotypes more easily. Additionally, teenagers in Barrancabermeja were very worried about the direct threats to be recruited by gangs, and related disappearance to gang dynamics, which opened a whole new subject to work with them in the future.



2. Testimonials of El Castillo dolls. The Memory Committee of El Castillo developed community workshops with victims and families of disappeared persons to record their stories and manufacture personalized rag dolls for an exhibition where each doll told a story via earphones connected to an MP3 player. People attending the exhibition felt encouraged to record their stories and to make the corresponding doll to go with the testimonial. Participating communities from other regions were very interested in replicating the experience.



3. Activation of the “Tras las Huellas del Placer” community museum in El Placer, Putumayo. An inactive community museum was painted and conditioned to host an exhibition of the timeline of the community during decades of the armed conflict. The exhibition was based on interviews with community members, and included pictures collected from them. After the opening, many people in the community regretted not having participated in the interviews and picture collection stage, and were then willing to work on an extension of the exhibition to include more stories.



4. Mochila bag of truth in the Wayúu ethnic community. Fuerza Mujeres Wayúu, an indigenous women organization, collected interviews from survivors in the municipalities of Maicao and Hatonuevo. During the sewing of the mochilas, many community members became interested in telling their stories to better document the killings represented in smaller mochilas that go inside the large mochila of truth. When carrying the mochilas from village to village, still other community members became interested in contributing with documentation and telling stories.



5. Community mural in Guacoche, Cesar. The Community House has become a landmark for the village. Locals, and even visitors from surrounding areas like to visit the place and have pictures taken with the house in the background. Visits to the Community House quickly became an opportunity to recall stories of the armed conflict told by community members and painted in the walls.



6. Chitchatting my truth, a documentary about two mothers' search for disappeared sons in Buenaventura. This documentary entirely produced by the community reenacts two cases of the harsh process of a mother looking for a son when he went missing. In one case, the son was found dead in a nearby district. The Mariposas de Alas Nuevas women network composed a traditional "alabao" song explaining the stories, as a background for the documentary.



7. Activation of Remanso de Paz Museum in Pueblo Bello, Antioquia. The community of Pueblo Bello prepared an exhibition to activate one of the sections of the community museum, which had become a building to host receptions and all kinds of events not related to its mission of truth-telling. Some of the meetings convening people from nearby villages to record interviews couldn't take place due to an ongoing pressure by armed groups, so the original project had to be reduced, for now, to a limited version.



LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Colombian society is aware that the Truth Commission will not be able to investigate and address the large numbers of individual cases of human rights violations that occurred during the 60 years of armed conflict. However, the commission strongly encourages communities to develop autonomous truth-telling initiatives to complement the commission's missions of recognition, acknowledgement, clarification and establishing the basis for non-repetition.

Sharing the experience of the community truth-telling program developed by the GIJTR in Colombia during 2018 could benefit the replication of this experience, both in Colombia and in other post-conflict contexts. For institutions interested in implementing a similar approach, the following lessons learned from the program could offer useful advice:

- It is important to inform participating organizations well in advance of the development workshop of the procedures, and make sure that they are aware of the methodology of the program, including the capacity to decide on behalf of the community of those commissioned to attend to the development workshop. This is particularly relevant when dealing to a committee composed of several local organizations, or an umbrella organization.
- In developing the list of activities for community truth-telling projects, facilitators should focus participants' attention on the broader benefits of the activities for the community.
- Developing truth-telling initiatives in communities emerging from a recent violent past benefits all those participating in the process, including survivors, families, witnesses and other community members. Implementers should be encouraged to include as many community members as possible, including a diversity of age groups and focusing on gender equity.
- Very often, non-participating community members become interested in being part of the truth-telling process when they see the first results. It is useful for the projects to include some early advances to help engage more people in the community.
- Community workshops where survivors and families produce artwork and artefacts intended to serve the purpose of truth-telling become a cathartic and healing space for participants. Project implementers should be prepared to provide emotional support if needed. While it was not included in this workshop, it is also recommended that a session on psychosocial support and referrals be included to provide implementers the basic skills to address any trauma that may arise from the process.
- The disruption of unexpected claims and issues in community activities should be welcome, but may challenge the stability of the process. As a way of example, there was one case where present violent threats by local gangs became the main immediate concern for a group of students, overshadowing the initial purpose of working around enforced disappearance.

- Projects in rural areas that heavily rely on technological resources, even if only for digital design, should make sure that the resources are easily available and that such dependence does not reduce the space in the project for community truth-telling activities. Sometimes, adjustments could be introduced to replace computer design for artwork that can be produced more collectively.
- An efficient sharing of project development among a varied diversity of organizations can produce unexpected benefits of mutual influence. In sharing the final results, cross influences and invitations from other communities allow for further development of joint projects beyond the timeframe of the initial projects, and should be encouraged.
- One of the main limitations in developing community projects is the actual availability of implementers and coordinators based on voluntary work. In the stage of project development, it is necessary to examine time-intensive activities with some flexibility.
- Whenever truth-telling poses security risks to community members, it is necessary to anonymize statements by means of indirect creative methods, such as transcriptions read by other voices, excluding specific names, or finding a different media like paintings, talking objects, etc. The relevance of preserving or excluding information stemming from direct testimonials should be assessed by the community, deciding always in favor of the guarantees of safety for those involved.
- It is possible to develop appropriate materials for children and teenagers, but this requires special developments. An example was an innovative exhibition of life stories of 10 disappeared persons illustrated by children. However, developing graphic material with teenagers met the challenge that teenagers are overly self-conscious of their drawings and regularly follow graphic stereotypes which diminish the expressive capacity of illustrations. The project working around enforced disappearance in schools found that many were not comfortable illustrating a story, and the results were scarce. According to our experience, younger students in the age range of 5 to 8 draw more freely, with naivety, but with a strong imagination.
- However complicated it may seem at first, it is best to include in the project planning some kind of intermediate product to deliver in the middle of the process as an early advance of the project. This is particularly useful to verify whether remotely supervised projects are still on track or may require more technical support. Additionally, it may be useful to consider that payments subject to the successful delivery of products, including intermediate products, represent a simple way to ensure compliance with the agreed terms.
- It is necessary to allow for some flexibility in time when developing community projects. Very often, projects run out of time before finalizing, and sometimes communities may feel tempted to overlook important components and set them completely aside in order to deliver on time. In developing the timelines, it is a good idea to allocate some extra time after completion of products for adjustments, and also include time for dissemination activities that should be an integral part of the products.
- Finally, some of the most successful ideas seem weak at first, but they may just be lacking some further elaboration. Fruitful feedback from facilitators and coordinators could make the difference.



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