

COLOMBIA

ADDRESSING THE MULTIPLE CAUSES OF URBAN CRIME AND VIOLENCE IN MEDELLÍN

Medellín is one of the most violent cities in the world. In the districts where poverty prevails, this has meant the need to develop networks to tackle the social causes of violence and crime and the physical environment in which crime prospers.



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In Medellín, with a population of 1.8 million, robberies, muggings, kidnappings and murders have become part of normal life. In 1990 there were 15 violent deaths per day, a sharp increase from 4 deaths a day in 1982. In addition, Medellín is a centre for drug cartels, with high rates of drug use. Young people are especially affected, their lives shaped by violence, drugs and crime. About half of Medellín's unemployed are youths and young adults between 15 and 25 years of age. Yet it is not only unemployment that is responsible for the high level of violence, but also the breakdown of family, school and local communities. In the early 1990s, there were hundreds of projects and youth initiatives in the peri-urban areas of Medellín, but they worked in isolation from one another and were not able to achieve structural change.

For this reason Programme for Institutional and Social Support of Youth in Medellín (PAISAJOVEN) was founded in 1994, with support from GTZ (the German Technical Cooperation Agency). PAISAJOVEN is a network of about 50 organisations, including representatives of youth organisations, NGOs, the municipal administration, the city council, the school board, municipal organisations, vocational training facilities, the urban youth council, universities, churches and employers' associations. Its general objective is to improve and diversify the pro-

grammes and services that public and private institutions offer to young people.

The network coordinates youth work in peri-urban areas and offers participating organisations advisory and training programmes to expand and improve ongoing activities for unemployed young people, single mothers, drug users and drug-related criminals. Young people can also come directly to PAISAJOVEN for information about vocational training and the job market. It specifically supports projects that are initiated by young people and based on their own motivation, potential, interests, and perception of their own immediate reality.

The network has improved coordination and integration between previously separated organisations, around seven issue-related sub-networks: municipal youth policy, drug addiction, training, labour market opportunities, coexistence and participation in schools, youth activities coordination, and pedagogical consultancy. It has also improved the capacity of individuals and organisations working with youth by providing training to 500 people in 70 organisations and 120 people from 26 organisations from other cities in Colombia. Its training activities were consolidated into a School for the Training of Youth Coordinators, which has provided consultancy services to similar initiatives in Paraguay, Guatemala, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic.

While PAISAJOVEN has been mainly financed through international and municipal contributions, almost 30% of its finance now comes from revenue from its consultancy and training services, co-financed projects, and the membership fee paid by members of the network.

One initial barrier for PAISAJOVEN was the diversity of its membership with many of the organisations failing to agree on a common set of issues. Related to that was the difficulty in establishing the 'institutional setting' for the initiative, with the municipality pushing at first to have direct executive powers, which raised the risk of the initiative being controlled by local politicians. Under the final agreement, however, the mayor of Medellín presides over a wide, diversified executive board. This arrangement has seen PAISAJOVEN 'survive' three municipal administrations, but permanent lobbying with the local government is necessary to guarantee the stability of this compromise.

In another programme to address the city's critical insecurity under the impact of narco-traffic, the local government embarked (in 1990) on a broad consultation and diagnosis process. A wide range of issues and programme areas was mapped out, including

promotion of citizenship and citizen participation, peaceful cohabitation, education, employment and income generation, and the urban environment. These were developed into two complementary programmes - PRIMED and Urban Centres for Civic Life in Low Income Areas.

PRIMED (Integrated Programme for the Improvement of Informal Settlements) focuses on improving the quality of living for some 200,000 people living in 70 peri-urban districts. The programme is based on increased public participation in urban renewal, improving streets and roads, water and sewage, schools, health facilities and recreation opportunities, renovating apartments and assisting residents in clarifying and legalising titles to ownership. So far, 4,000 houses have been improved, 3,800 properties legalised, almost 30,000 m of roads and pedestrian walkways paved, and 20,000 m of aqueducts, drainage and hydraulic works provided, as well as 100 classrooms, parks, sport facilities, and health centres. The approaches developed by PRIMED are integrated into the municipal administration, and the project is now incorporated in the Strategic Plan for Medellín Metropolitan Area 2015. Important principles of PRIMED, such as participatory planning, found their way into new legislation for urban reform (1997) and are being applied in other cities in Colombia.

The Urban Centres for Civic Life is a complementary initiative to PRIMED, focusing on community building. With militias and delinquency controlling the 'barrios', community organisation had weakened through the years. The programme addresses the absence of public and community spaces and the lack of neighbourhood identity by establishing community centres. Two primary centres have been built and are operating, along with eleven secondary neighbourhood sub-centres. Some 16,000 people have benefited directly from education, culture, social and youth programmes. The greatest impact was achieved through the creation of an Inter-Centres Community Committee, which allowed for a clear and effective dialogue to be established with the local government.

The experience of Medellín demonstrates how networking can help foster mutually supportive approaches of a large number of organisations and initiatives to bring about changes to critical and apparently intractable social and economic problems.



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