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The role of NFE programs in the development process of rural areas in Colombia

A study from NGOs' perspectives

Alejandra Torres Pulecio

Master of Science in International Development Studies

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alejanto@nmbu.no

Noragric

Department of International Environment and Development Studies The Faculty of Landscape and Society

P.O. Box 5003

N-1432 Ås

Norway

Tel.: +47 67 23 00 00

Internet: <https://www.nmbu.no/fakultet/landsam/institutt/noragric>

Declaration

I, Alejandra Torres Pulecio, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

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Abstract

A considerable body of research has explored the importance of formal education to accelerate the development process of nations; yet, the role and relevance of non-formal education (NFE) in this process has been largely overlooked. This study aims to analyze the role of NGOs and its NFE programs, which have been established as alternative and flexible models to respond to different territorial needs related to the processes of learning and development in academic, social and personal areas. The research recognizes that the country has not established a critical debate on this educational model proposed by NGOs, which is crucial to evaluate its impact and actual contribution to the rural development of the country.

The methodology is constructed from Orlando Fals Borda *Participatory Action Research* (PAR) model and Paulo Freire's *Banking Model*, aiming to discover the role played by the rural population in the educational model. The results demonstrate the importance of promoting new approaches in the development of NFE projects proposed by NGOs in rural settings, moving from a mercantilist and technocratic approach to another that prioritizes local knowledge, and focuses on strengthening dynamics and spaces of participation among the population. In this sense, it is essential that alternative educational models understand the needs of rural populations, in order to promote learning schemes more consistent with the needs of the territory.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, international organizations were becoming aware of a profound educational crisis, manifested in the stagnation of the system and the high out-of-school rates. This, together with the strengthening of concepts such as social development, would allow for the appearance of new non-formal teaching models that would eventually configure what is currently known as *Non-formal Education* (NFE) (Pastor, 2001). By then, alternative teaching methodologies were already being developed that contributed to and, in many cases, replaced, formal education, such as job training and adult education schemes. However, not enough recognition was given to the contribution that these educational models made to education.

With the emergence of a new crisis in the education system in the 90s, this time characterized by lack of coverage and social inequality, as well as a marked exclusion and discrimination, and a shortage of qualified teachers to perform pedagogical work, modern states had to facilitate access to the educational scenario to external actors that could cater to the needs that it had not been able to meet, and the incorporation of pedagogical models beyond institutionalized ones (La Belle, 2010). In this way, the notions raised in the 1960s on formal and non-formal education began to be put into practice.

In particular, non-formal education would have an important reception due to its high degree of flexibility and openness to change, as well as the innovation that its organization, pedagogy and delivery methods entailed. In view of the rigid and exclusive model established by state agencies, a strategy was presented that was able to meet the diverse and specific learning needs of children, youth and adults at the end of the millennium (Yasunaga, 2014). Non-formal education, therefore, involves a wide range of stakeholders, including educational establishments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and public institutions (UNICEF and UNESCO, 2014).

This concept would be complemented by the Millennium Goals, thus formulating an approach that establishes education as the main mechanism to achieve sustainable development and to overcome poverty and inequality, through human capital and human development (Espinosa & Reynoso,

2014). It is in this context that non-governmental organizations - NGOs would begin to spread across the globe.

Currently, one of the main purposes of NGOs founded around the world is the fulfillment of the Millennium Goals, and since 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals, mainly through non-formal education strategies, but also through alliances with formal institutions, influencing public policy design in many cases (Bermúdez, 2009). The importance of NGOs in non-formal education has been widely recognized worldwide, mainly in those states where access to education is restricted and where formal education is limited to those who possess the means to acquire it.

In particular, it is worth noting the impact that NGOs have had on rural development around the world and in Latin America. However, in recent decades there has been criticism about the way NGOs operate, in the words of Balcazar (2014):

“NGOs are mostly typical agents in the sense that, on the one hand, they work with resources from a third party, whether it is the State, International Cooperation or any benefactor. By means of these resources, they supposedly support, on the other hand, another set of clients that do not pay for what NGOs do, nor do they have much chance of controlling what the latter do”. (p. 5)

That is, the freedom that NGOs have in terms of management can be problematic in the territories specifically in relation to their autonomy. Now, on the model of non-formal education developed by NGOs, although it is a concept that emerges as an alternative to the failures of the institutionalized educational system and that seeks to impact marginalized populations that by their own means could not access quality training, in practice they continue to reproduce neoliberal conceptual schemes that, far from legitimizing the role of communities and cultural identity in the education process, institutionalize welfare-oriented and paternalistic discourses that threaten autonomy and traditional cultural development. Both NGOs and various political and cultural movements that have worked in non-formal education are currently facing a critical trend that demands their external financing and their direct relationship with public policies, which entails reducing self-management capacity and autonomy of the territories (Guelman, Salazar, & Cabaluz, 2018).

In spite of the general motivations, in practice NGOs continue to be external organizations that do not know the cultural development of the territories and the identity of their inhabitants and in this sense, they can negatively impact the target population, since training through standardized methods developed in other cultural and social contexts reveals a lack of recognition of the training potential for inhabitants of the territories.

In the Colombian context, however, the discussion around the impact of NGOs on rural development has been rather limited, although they are currently an important social and economic sector. By the beginning of the century, the multiple problems associated with NGOs in the country were evident, mainly in relation to financing, legitimacy and identity. Machado (2000) points out that:

“Doubts have been raised about how participatory, democratic and empowering of local capacities NGOs really are. In addition, many are fulfilling a role that is more technical and specialized than political, and the reappearance of social movements is taking away spaces”. (p. 10)

In recent decades there has been no critical discussion about the impact of NGOs in the national territory in terms of rural development and, in particular, with respect to the non-formal education model developed thereby. Although NGOs have ample potential to drive a positive impact in the regions, it is necessary to transform the prevailing commodifying and technocratic approach for another one based on local knowledge and that recognizes the participation of rural citizens in the design and development of educational models, with a special emphasis on the role of young people in this process. It is necessary that alternative educational models understand the needs of their target populations and develop an education for citizenship based on the people's knowledge and cultural identity.

Therefore, this research seeks to understand to what extent the work carried out by NGOs in terms of non-formal education has contributed to the rural development of the country and under which approaches such contribution has been raised. To do so, the study will be based on the concept of citizenship and its relation with education and the social sphere; the concept of youth as active

citizens; and the concept of local knowledge, searching for a critical analysis beyond the interpretation of international organizations such as UNESCO, in order to stress the importance of cultural practices based on local territories.

Understanding that non-formal education has been developed mainly from the dispositions of both national and international non-governmental organizations, this research will aim to present a different perspective based on local contexts and experiences.

Objective and research questions

The aim of this study is to understand to what extent the work carried out by NGOs in terms of NFE has contributed to the development of rural areas in Colombia. The following research questions have been formulated in order to achieve this objective.

General research question

- In which way NFE programs contribute to the development process of rural areas in Colombia?

Specific research question

- What is the approach used by NGOs organizations that deliver NFE programs in relation to the concepts of citizenship, youth citizenship and local knowledge?
- What is the perception of NFE facilitators, recipients and family members in relation to the role of NFE in the development process of rural areas in Colombia?
- What are possible recommendations to strengthen NFE programs delivered by the studied organization that aim to integrate young people in the development process of rural areas in Colombia?

Rational and motivation of the study

Although a considerable body of research has explored education and its importance to accelerate the development process of nations, most of these efforts have concentrated on formal education, paying less attention to the role and relevance of NFE in this process. This may be a result of the unstructured systems that monitor and guide NGOs and the lack of consistency across its NFE programs. Despite its importance and widespread use, NFE tends to be overlooked in comparison

with formal education systems (Romi & Schmida, 2009). Acknowledging this gap in knowledge, the motivation of this study is to explore the ways in which NFE programs are contributing to development process of rural communities in Colombia, from the notions of citizenship, youth citizenship, and local knowledge.

To do so, this research will conduct a literature review to examine the theoretical background of NFE programs and provide an ethnographic framework of the country and its rural territories. Additionally, the researcher will conduct fieldwork with an NGO that delivers NFE programs to rural youth: recipients, family members and facilitators will be part of the study in order to understand their experience with these programs.

Chapter 2: Theoretical background

Defining Non-formal Education

The globally accepted conceptualization of NFE is the one established by the UN, in which it is defined as that type of non-institutionalized education that functions as an addition, alternative and/or complement to formal education in the process of lifelong learning of individuals (Yasunaga, 2014). This type of education, according to Yasunaga (2014) is provided to guarantee the right of access to education for all and is aimed at people of all ages, although it does not necessarily have a continuous structure, as it can be of short duration or of low intensity, through short courses, workshops or seminars. NFE usually provides qualifications that are not recognized as formal or equivalent to the qualifications issued by education authorities, although it may cover programs that contribute to literacy and education of adults and youth who do not attend school, as well as programs on life skills, work skills and social or cultural development (Yasunaga, 2014).

However, there is a difference between informal education and NFE. The origin of this debate is usually attributed to Philip Coombs, who in 1973 would differentiate formal, informal and non-formal education as follows:

- Formal education: hierarchical, structured, chronologically set educational system, ranging from elementary school to university and which includes, in addition to

general academic studies, a variety of specialized programs and institutions for full-time professional and technical training.

- Informal education: a lifelong process through which each individual acquires aptitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experience and from the influence and educational resources available in her surroundings - family and neighbors, work, leisure, at the supermarket, the library and on the media.
- Non-formal education: any educational activity organized outside the established formal system - whether it operates independently or as an important part of a broader activity - that is geared towards serving identifiable target users and learning outcomes. (Coombs, cited in Pastor, 2001).

The difference lies in the context and intention under which the training process takes place. If it occurs naturally and under everyday contexts, one can speak of informal education, while the training models designed with the motivation of impacting a particular target population and under specific precepts and approaches, can be called NFE models as long as they are developed outside the established education institutions, as is the case of NGOs.

However, Yasunaga (2014) states that the conceptualization of formal education is complex as it depends on the context in which it develops. Although the definition given by Coombs remains influential in education theory, in practice experts and pedagogues have conceptualized NFE, reflecting that there are as many interpretations of the concept as there are ways of understanding learning. While some positions maintain that the boundaries between non-formal and formal education are blurred, others have chosen to move away from the simple opposition between the two, since this approach tends to place NFE in a lower position in relation to formal education (Yasunaga, 2014). A possible alternative for this epistemological problem is to assume that both types of education really have a certain degree of "formality" and "informality" to them, and that both aspects can work as attributes or difficulties, depending on the pedagogical design and the social and cultural context.

In the Colombian context, NFE was regulated in 1996 by Decree 114, where it was defined as follows:

The set of educational actions that are structured not being subject to the system of levels and grades, [whose purpose] is to complement, update, supplement knowledge, provide training in academic or labor aspects and in general, training for crafts, artistic, recreational, occupational and technical performance, for the protection and use of natural resources and citizen and community participation, to people who may want it or need it. (Art. 1, Decree 114 of 1996)

However, these definitions are still governmental visions of what education "should be" in the framework of sustainable development. In recent decades, positions have arisen that argue that NFE is not a type of complementary education and that it does not correspond to extracurricular activities, but instead has been established as an independent educational approach that must be analyzed in a particular manner (Romi & Schmida, 2009). The advantage of this model is that it is aimed at all ages and levels of literacy, which manages to challenge traditional concepts of education and directly impacts society as a whole and the behavior of individuals, also influencing formal education, which has adopted many of its theoretical assumptions and pedagogical practices (Romi & Schmida, 2009). Kapur (2018) argues that, unlike formal education that focuses on knowledge that cannot be applicable in the short term, the NFE model focuses on the student and the development of realistic and practical skills and knowledge. The following chart presents the key concepts associated with NFE:

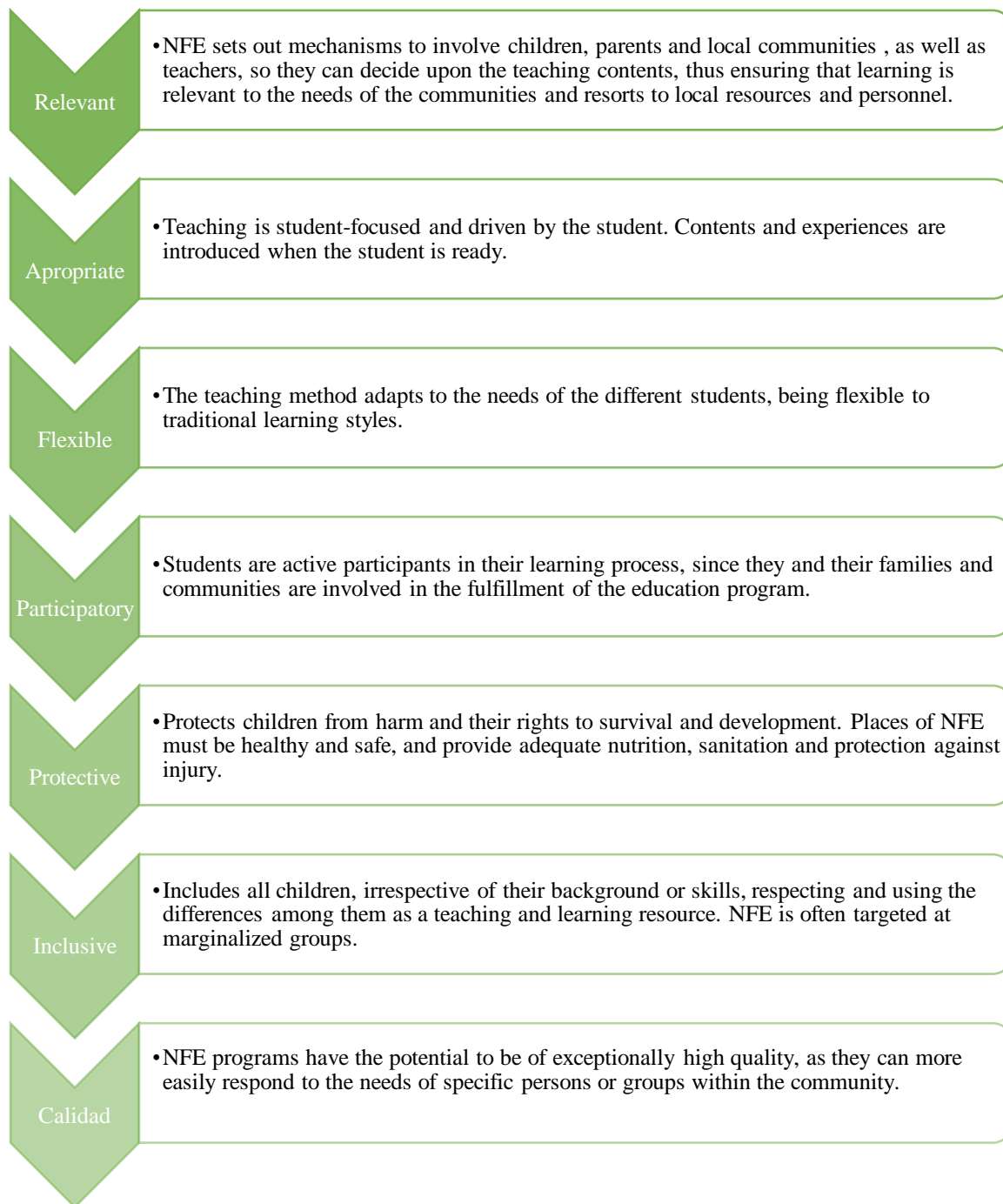


Figure 1. Key concepts of non-formal education.

Note. Prepared based on Khasnabis, Heinicke, & Achu (2010).

There are various types of NFE. A widely accepted classification is the one carried out by Carron and Carr Hill in 1991, cited by Kapur (2018), in which paranormal education, personal development activities, professional training and popular education are mentioned. Paranormal education refers to educational programs that make available an alternative to regular full-time education to its subjects. The main objective of these courses is to offer a second chance to those who, for various reasons, could not take advantage of the regular school system at the established time and grant them equality with qualifications that are equivalent to the formal school system. This type of NFE includes, among others, nighttime classes and distance education programs (Kapur, 2018).

On the other hand, personal development activities group a wide diversity of activities developed by education and arts institutions such as museums, libraries, cultural centers, sports centers, language institutions, clubs, social circles, organizations, associations that promote leisure time activities such as astronomy, observation of the natural environment, playing or listening to music, extracurricular activities, crafts, works of art, sports, dance, physical activities, etc. Professional training refers to programs organized by companies, unions, private agencies and also formal schools that allow an individual to be professionally trained in fields such as medicine, business, administration, technology, education, arts, sciences, agriculture, handicrafts, health assistance, sales, communications, construction, academic support, home economics, gymnastics and aesthetics, foreign language education, human relations, sociology, psychology, advertising and public relations, among others. (Kapur, 2018)

Unlike the foregoing, popular education tries, in most cases, to take distance from the formal school system and its basic standards. The objective of this approach is to replace that exclusive vision of the formal system with one that incorporates these marginal groups of the population, including adult literacy projects, support training, political mobilization and community development movements. In most cases, these movements and actions are led by voluntary organizations and emphasize collective development to the extent that they oppose individual competition.

In particular, it is worth highlighting popular education because it is the one that shows the greatest potential in terms of community empowerment through NFE. For Endresen (2009), popular education must be, above all, a political education, that is, an education for democracy. Starting from a case study in South Africa, the author affirms that the democratic system is in constant transformation and therefore must be strengthened through an active citizenship that is capable of building a civil society that promotes social justice and social reconstruction. In this sense, critical citizen education contributes to raising the awareness of participants about injustice and oppression and can help them express their most immediate needs through solidarity and action.

However, these aspects can be guaranteed when it comes to self-managed popular education, but when facilitators are part of non-governmental institutions with a strong social and political organization and influence, it is necessary that design, management and implementation of learning activities have a strong root in popular tradition, because this approach allows to strengthen awareness through live interactions and the views of students become the basis for mutual recognition and acceptance of the other (Milana & Sorensen, 2009). Thus, in order to guarantee the design of an adequate popular education model, it is necessary to contemplate the socio-cultural tradition of individuals, particularly as regards the development of dialogue and the negotiation of meanings.

In the same manner, Jiménez (2001) and Molina (2008) consider that the ideals of decentralization and the implementation of local citizen participation mechanisms under the enactment of Law 134 of 1994, after 20 years of operation, has demonstrated all kinds of cracks, among which it is worth highlighting the fact that these mechanisms have been designed by the central government to call citizens to decide on lowercase issues, while others of a transcendental nature are taken behind closed doors or away from the people, in high instances of the national or transnational level (Rivera, 2015).

For the purpose of this study, the type of NFE that will be explored is popular education, as the category that relates the most with the concepts of citizenship, community engagement and local knowledge.

State of the Art

As previously mentioned, there have been few studies that have specifically addressed the problem around the role of NGOs in relation to education and rural development, mainly in regard to their responsibility in the process of empowering rural communities and the recognition of their capacities and potentials, as well as the exercise of citizenship within said populations. Therefore, in the following state of the art, research material that accounts for the three concepts proposed for the development of the research will be explored, namely: the citizenship approach, the role of young people as active citizens, and the role of local and traditional knowledge; all of them focused on NFE and rural development in Colombia and Latin America. It is based on initial research that presents critical debates against the traditional education model, and it is complemented by applied research that presents results in relation to the proposed theme and that lays out a systematization of related experiences.

First, it is worth mentioning the research carried out by Torres (2010) titled *Popular Education and Knowledge Production*, where the author makes a review of the different ways in which knowledge production has been incorporated into Popular Education, specifically as regards the Participatory Research Approach (PAR). Torres (2010) points out that, although the main field of action of Popular Education is the pedagogical exercise, it also requires a research-oriented and knowledge production-based approach, that is, if the purpose is to train subjects for and in the social transformation it is relevant to consider the characteristics of these educational subjects, for which PAR has fundamental elements. In the author's words:

“Research has been one of the areas of permanent interest and action of Popular Education, in particular, the incorporation and generation of research approaches and methodologies consistent with its emancipatory political intent and its pedagogical criteria. Thus, proposals such as Participatory Action Research (PAR), collective recovery of history, participatory diagnoses and systematization of experiences have been present in the discourses and practices of Popular Education in its almost fifty years of existence”.

(Torres, 2010, p. 10)

Torres (2010) takes off briefly identifying the place of Popular Education in the context of educational practices at the Latin American level. This current, according to the author, is part of

the “set of educational practices committed to the emancipation of the popular sectors”. (p. 11) In this first part of the research the author differentiates five key moments of Popular Education in Latin America: i) The generation and development of the liberating pedagogy of Paulo Freire in the sixties and early seventies, ii) The emergence of the foundational discourse of Popular Education from the mid-seventies to the mid-eighties), iii) The renewal of the foundational discourse of Popular Education since its recognition of the history and culture of the popular sectors in the second half of the eighties and early nineties, iv) The so-called restructuring of Popular Education in the nineties, and v) The revival of Popular Education in the context of the new people’s movements in the late nineties and first decade of the 21st century.

The author states that although Popular Education and PAR are closely related politically and epistemologically, this relationship has not guaranteed a systematic and rigorous production of knowledge in recent decades in Latin America, particularly in terms of knowledge derived from its own actors. The importance of this research lies in the author's emphasis on the exercise of directly relating Popular Education to PAR in the Latin American context and the need to promote production of knowledge in the field of Popular Education and, in general, the different models of liberating education.

Along the same lines, is Montero's research (2011) ‘Non-formal education in Latin America’. Based on the prevailing economic and social paradigms, it carries out a critical analysis of the pedagogical models that have been developed in Latin America since the 1960s and argues that it is necessary to conceive NFE as a process of Permanent Education in order to reverse the mercantilist approach that prevails at present. According to Montero (2011) since the sixties Latin America

“has been a laboratory where the instrument, or means of education, has been applied in its non-formal sense, as a resource to educate the population and insert it into the consumerist and ‘materialistic’ society, limiting the essence of human beings to one single dimension” (Montero 2011, p. 81).

According to Montero (2011), in Latin America, formal education has been conceived in two different ways: as an instrument of development and as an instrument of control, and certain critical theories have been developed that account for this dichotomy:

- i. **Dependentist theory:** According to this view, increasing state support for private initiatives in the educational, training and cultural field generates a greater dependence of people on the free market system, which results in a reduction in equality and dignity in the exercise of citizenship.
- ii. **Transnationalist theory:** It argues that while the incorporation of foreign educational models represents a contribution to the improvement of national education systems, they carry the risk that their formative and didactic strategies may try to adapt reality to the norm governing these processes.
- iii. **Theory of liberation:** It proposes two essential processes to develop in education systems of Latin America: first of all, targeting those people who, although they are illiterate, have an understanding of their reality as “being” in this world derived from their social immersion in it; and second, the development of inclusive educational processes aimed at raising awareness of the person whose world view is that of "being" a part of it.
- iv. **Anthropagogical theory:** It is part of the focus on continuing education and argues that, in addition to the pedagogical process of formal education focused on children and adolescents, there is also education for the non-formal sector oriented at adults and seniors. According to the author, this theory contemplates a comprehensive educational model where the formal and the non-formal in education constitute a sequential and permanent whole.

In line with these theoretical approaches, Montero (2011) argues that the problem associated with NFE and community action in Latin America is that its planning occurs through international and governmental agencies, which creates a contradiction because it is a Euro-American conception of development that differs from education oriented to social transformation and is rather associated with institutionalized development models by government agencies or international organizations.

A recurring aspect in regard to NFE is the distrust of the pedagogical model that it suggests by existing institutions, since it is argued that it can only function independently as a complementary tool to formal education and not as a model in itself. In this regard, it is worth highlighting the research by Chacón (2015), entitled ‘The evaluation process in non-formal education: A path for its construction’, where the author analyzes the construction and conceptualization of evaluation processes in NFE. According to Chacón (2015), there is currently a need to evaluate and report on the results of non-formal learning processes. Therefore, it sets out to propose a scheme with the basic elements for such evaluation purposes.

According to the author, the main characteristic of NFE can also result in one of its greatest difficulties, that is, the aspect of its diversity: NFE is characterized by its adapting to any required needs, languages, cultures, disciplines and areas of knowledge (Chacón, 2015). However, it is necessary to take into account that although NFE advocates recognition beyond simple qualification, tools are needed to systematize experiences and obtain results that facilitate their analysis, for which it is necessary to develop evaluation instruments. The author maintains that the importance of these tools is that they allow us to understand the way in which groups of learners are made up, that is, an evaluation process requires that the trainer knows the structure of the group in order to cover the variety of profiles that make it up.

Another advantage of the design of evaluation tools in NFE processes is that help establish clear work objectives. Chacón (2015) points out that on many occasions non-formal educators structure a program, a session and even a content strategy without them necessarily being anchored to a pedagogical objective, which makes it difficult, among other things, to measure and analyze the impact that the educational process has on the communities, in the author's words:

“It is true that during learning processes in non-formal education an evaluation is made. However, when this is not planned, it is usually abstract, subjective; it becomes an assessment by the teaching staff based on impressions and impersonal interactions. Any evaluation must respond to its context and be linked to a learning outcome”. (Chacón, 2015, p. 27)

Based on the above, the author proposes a series of key elements to design evaluation strategies in NFE processes, which must start from critical and investigative principles that enable the identification of the needs of the various actors involved and their articulation according to the proposed learning outcomes. The following table summarizes the main currents in non-formal evaluation (based on their frequency of use by organizations):

Table 1. Main currents in non-formal evaluation.

<p>Process Evaluation</p> <p>It refers to the way in which the actions produce (or not) the desired results in the target group, which includes the strategies and forms that have been adopted to reach the goals or outcomes. In those groups, organizations, persons or institutions that have developed processes that respond to a need, without necessarily being part of a structured planning process of objectives, goals, indicators and evaluations, this assessment is fundamental as the process becomes even more important than the final product itself.</p>	<p>Needs Assessment</p> <p>It deals with assessing the relevance of the established objectives and whether these are consistent with the target population. Emphasis is placed on the assessment of the needs of an institution or group, in relation, therefore, to its objectives - whether established or institutional- with respect to its expectations and target groups.</p>
<p>Impact Assessment</p> <p>It is linked to the scope and expected results in terms of living conditions. Impact or product assessment: establish evidence of the relationship between the program and obtained outcomes. The difficulty of this assessment is to establish a causal</p>	<p>Planning Assessment</p> <p>That is to say, of the actions, of the way in which these are structured, their aims, objectives, contents, methodology; the techniques that they develop. Measure whether the actions are being carried out properly, in accordance with ethical</p>

relationship between the observed results and the activities of a program.	principles and control, regulation and registration mechanisms, as they have been structured within the evaluation framework.
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Note. Information taken from Chacón (2015)

The author concludes by affirming that non-formal learning must stem from the understanding of the out-of-classroom context, that is to say, that the evaluator must assess the inputs with a critical and participatory approach, fostering “dialogue, the management of participation, communication and working capacity from a transdisciplinary perspective”. (Chacón, 2015, p. 32) For which it is essential to establish some objectives and steps to follow that ensure an overarching knowledge of the diversity that makes up the learner groups in non-formal learning.

Regarding systematized experiences, it is necessary to mention the research carried out by Franco (2013), entitled ‘Systematization of the experience of the organization “I know who I am”: towards the emergence of knowledge derived from its practices’, in which the author presents the outcomes report of the experience of the community organization “I know who I am”, developed in Cali by women victims of forced displacement of the municipality of *El Charco* in Nariño region. In the author's words, the purpose of the research was

“to unveil the knowledge derived from the practices of those who make up the organization and have participated in the experience, in a constant exercise of participatory dialogue that allowed us to review the social transformations generated by their practices, resignify them and demonstrate their communication process for social change”. (Franco, 2013, p. 1)

Franco (2013) was based on theoretical references that focus on the recovery of practice-derived knowledge, that is, on an epistemology that is respectful and kind to the people’s knowledge and anchored in communication for social change. For the author, it is essential that the relationship between communication and education happens from a critical and dialogue-based approach that moves away from the traditional banking and persuasive approach, that is, a relationship that goes

from the recognition of the territory to territoriality and strengthens spaces to create ties that promote the community life project (Franco, 2013)

The report concludes that the knowledge derived from the practices that have sustained the experience of the members of the organization allow to demonstrate a coordination of elements that are essential to understanding the phenomenon of displacement, but also of the cultural development of the community. The songs that the women of the organization created with the purpose of narrating their experiences account for a resignified reading of these experiences to the extent that they incorporate both specific contextual and institutional data on Human Rights, forced displacement, discrimination and education for black communities in Colombia as well as their own interpretation of various economic, political and social aspects.

Along the same line we can highlight the work of Garay and Medina (2015) entitled 'Systematization of the experience of the Adult Education Program Foundation in the South East', who present a report on the experience of the PEPASO Foundation in the town of San Cristóbal, south-east of Bogotá, and seek to identify the factors and dynamics driven by said organization that have enabled its sustainability over time. The authors begin by clarifying that, for research purposes, systematization is understood as "the analysis of a social and educational practice and of dynamic historical processes that are constantly changing, which are carried out through a process of recovering and interpreting an experience lived with the goal of potentializing it". (Garay and Medina, 2015, p. 1). That is to say, systematization is presented as an input that is essential to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of pedagogical practices such as NFE, as it helps to understand its impacts from the perspective of receiving individuals in order to strengthen it and replicate its positive elements.

The authors start by characterizing the transformations that the identity of the PEPASO Foundation has had as an organization, considering its organizational and educational practices throughout its history, to later focus on the recognition of the links between the members of the foundation and its context, which have allowed it to remain in force. The purpose of these aspects is to determine how PEPASO has incorporated itself into social and inter-institutional processes in the territory (Garay & Medina, 2015).

The authors conclude by stating that the main strengths of the organization lie in the construction of a collective identity and the consolidation of ties; the first aspect refers to the appearance of a sense of belonging to the organization marked by the convergence of various social, cultural and economic aspects that lead to the experience of common rituals, symbols and languages; and the second aspect to the formation of symbolic ties that arose both through collective work based on the recognition of rights and the search for solutions to shared needs or problems, as well as a result of the existence of common referents in relation to intentionally shared interests and values (Garay & Medina, 2015).

Similarly, the research conducted by Rojas (2007), entitled ‘The role of non-formal education in rural development: An analysis of the incidence of the rural health and welfare multiplier program in the recipient community of the municipality of Líbano, Tolima’, the researcher analyzes the meaning of said program for its recipients and the contributions made to the communities. The aforementioned program has been developed since 1988 by the Corporation for the Promotion of Rural and Agroindustrial Development of Tolima (PROHACIENDO) and the Departmental Committee of Coffee Growers of Tolima through its Department of Social Development and sponsored by the National Federation of Coffee Growers. Likewise, since 2006 the Spanish Foundation *Humanismo y Desarrollo* participates (Tolima Peacebuilders- Madrid City Council Agreement - National Coffee Growers Federation, Tolima municipal committees); and its main objective is:

“To train young farmer women to carry out promotion and social development work in their respective communities with the families of their village, allowing them to reach a decent and productive standard of living”. (Rojas, 2007, p. 15)

Rojas (2007) starts from the assertion that there is a fault in NFE in relation to its documentation, as it turns out to be non-existent or difficult to circulate in most cases. Likewise, the author points out that programs such as “Multipliers of Health and Rural Welfare” tend to lack follow-up or analysis on the effectiveness of the proposed outcomes, so the reports are usually limited to the presentation of figures on the number of people trained. It is therefore necessary that this documentation is focused on the analysis of the direct and indirect effects produced in the

recipients, in the community and in rural development, in order to meet the objective of contributing to correct the main educational deficiencies of the population (Rojas, 2007).

The author finally concludes by presenting the perceptions of both the young farmer women recipients as well as those of the community and program managers. On the side of the recipients (Multipliers of Health and Rural Welfare) there is a positive perception because they consider that the program responds to their individual motivations and expectations as well as their personal interests, in the words of Rojas (2007):

“The program fosters maturity and bolstering of values in each of them. In addition, it is a perspective that allows them to expand their capabilities and to search for opportunities they see in the urban sector, to overcome the conditions they live under in the countryside”.
(p. 114)

On the community side, the perceptions are less positive because although they value the knowledge acquired in the program, they believe that it is difficult to put it into practice. Likewise, the community considers that the program does not sufficiently consult with them and fails to take into account their needs and expectations, which decreases the motivation of potential recipients: “it is inferred then, that there is a mismatch between educational requirements and needs and the courses offered by the program”. (Rojas, 2007, p. 114). Finally, the program managers consider that, although the program opens up possibilities and motivates the recipients and the community in search of the improvement of their quality of life, there is a high traffic of influences by the committee to enroll young women into the program.

The Banking Model of Education

A vast part of the global recognition of non-traditional education can be attributed to the contributions of Paulo Freire and its Banking Model of Education. This model is an important theoretical reference for this study as it helps to understand NFE from a perspective that is critical to institutionality, that is, as a mechanism to strengthen rural development from the construction of citizenship based on the cultural identity of the groups that inhabit the territories.

Freire argues that it is necessary to break with the traditional model of banking education in which the apprentice acts as a deposit and the teacher as depositor through an assistance process in which knowledge passes from the teacher to the student automatically and without a preceding critical exercise:

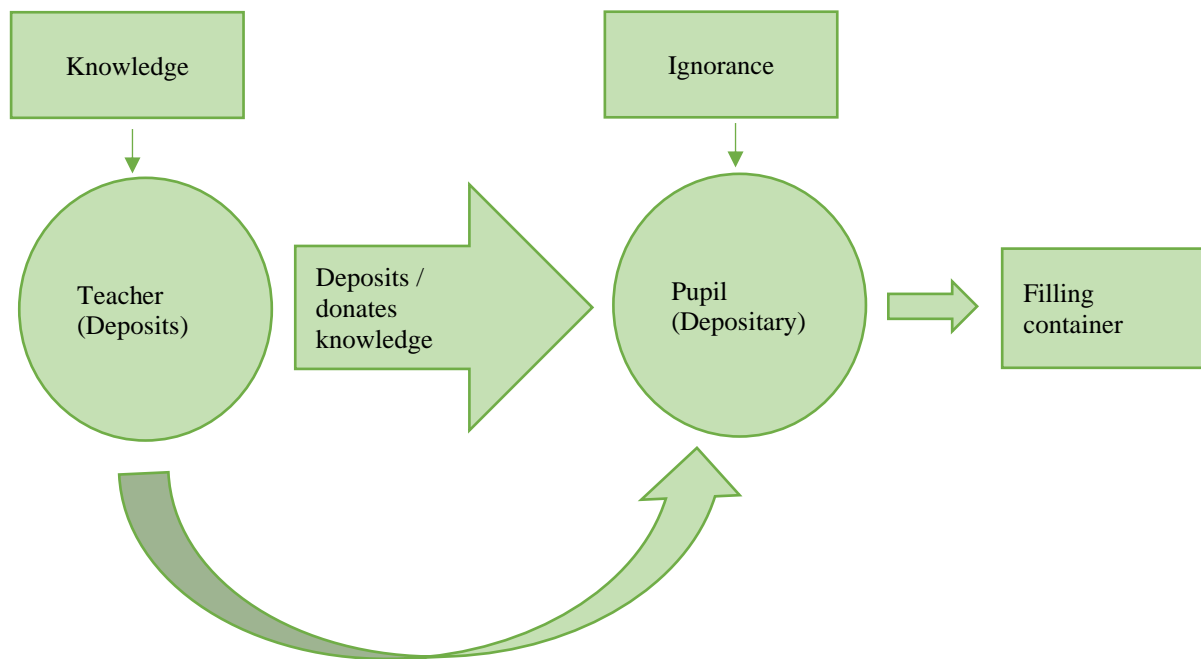


Figure 2. Banking Model of Education

Note. Taken from Freire (2018).

This type of education is characterized by the fact that it reinforces a lack of critical thinking and knowledge ownership by students and, instead, it stimulates an oppressive relationship, where the teacher becomes the oppressor and the student, the oppressed (Freire, 2018). The banking concept of education projects an absolute ignorance in students, a typical characteristic of the ideology of oppression, while teachers allege that they are the connoisseurs. Under this model, students have a limited scope of action to receive, file and store the deposits received from teachers; their ability to be creative and transform the knowledge received becomes non-existent. If students concentrate on storing the deposits they have received, they will have less time to develop the critical awareness necessary to intervene and transform the world. The more students accept the passive

role imposed on them, the more they will tend to adapt simply to the fragmented view of reality that is deposited in them. (Freire, 2018).

On the contrary, in liberating education, a critical thinking arises in which the human being starts from questioning his reality to propose alternatives for improvement, in what Freire defines as “reading his own world”, that is, interpreting it under his own notions of significance. For Freire, teaching and learning occur when there is a dialogue between teacher and student, that is to say, that the learner goes from being an empty box in which information is deposited to be an active subject in the learning dialogue. Thus, the role of the educator is to internalize the strength of the students’ thinking by developing their curiosity through questioning of their surroundings (Freire, 2018).

Likewise, popular education establishes the need for a critical understanding of the social, political and economic reality by the subjects, whose starting point is their cultural, ideological, political and social context. (Freire, 2018). For the author, the oppressed have a knowledge base. However, they must be taught to recognize this knowledge and their reality as a situation that can be transformed, and not as an immutable world. (Freire, 2018) He argues that men and women are unfinished and incomplete beings who participate in a reality as unfinished and incomplete as they are, therefore, there is an ontological vocation within human beings that calls them to be more, and therein lies the difference between humans and animals: while men can perform acts of reflection and give them meaning, animals are determined by their species and enclosed within themselves.

Freire recognizes the fact that men and women are capable of creating objects, sensitive things, social institutions, ideas and conceptions; they are able to make history because they are aware of their reality, they can set goals and make decisions that can transform the world (Freire, 2018). When analyzing Freire's discourse through the reading of “the pedagogy of the oppressed” one can see how there is a relationship between politics, power and the way in which education occurs in a nation. Freire asserts that economic systems and forms of government directly impact the educational models used to teach. In this sense, Freire (2017) points out that any teaching process that is developed under oppressive dynamics, which do not allow the participation of previous knowledge by those who learn, is always a failed process.

Thus, Freire advocates for dialogic teaching processes under which learners and teachers are immersed in communication dynamics for knowledge building. In this sense, the teacher, rather than being a replicator of knowledge that has been learned by heart, is a mediator. He is part of a dialogue in which both parties are capable of learning. This innovative concept of the role of the student and the teacher is produced because Freire analyzes how the predominant banking economic system of the time operates. The system consists of a transactional model in which the teacher possesses knowledge that is granted to the student, who only receives it passively. This model is explained under the premise that there is an educator who knows everything and an apprentice who ignores everything (González, 2007).

Against this model, which suggests the deep relationship between power relations and inequality, Freire proposes the liberating model, whereby education is given through a discursive awareness that is always subject to problematization and discussion. In accordance with this, Freire proposes a final instance called awareness-raising. This process is described as the ability of men and women to, despite limitations, exercise some kind of transformative action on the historical and social conditions that they live under. It is, then, a continuous process of action and reflection.

Freire positions critical pedagogy as the antidote to the banking model, as it is responsible for making students susceptible to a kind of rebellion to resist industrial societies and maintain continuous dialogues to freely discuss issues. Such rebellion must be seen as "engineering" to transform lives and realities and reflect the ontological vocation of each individual. (Gadotti & Torres, 2009). In an education scheme that poses problems for the students, the teacher is not the one who imparts knowledge, but he is rather taught through constant dialogue with students and vice versa. Therefore, the problem-solving approach displaces students from their role as passive listeners to the role of critical co-researchers in their dialogue with the teacher (Freire, 2018).

Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) also presents valid inputs to the current study and the notion of NFE as it recognizes the relevance of community knowledge and community-based actions to solve social problems. The approach formulated by Orlando Fals Borda, is inspired by the concept

of *critical pedagogy* and *adult education* formulated by Freire, and also tries to overcome the relations of domination and subordination between oppressors and the oppressed (Fals Borda, 1999).

PAR is presented as a fundamental theoretical and epistemological input to the extent that such an approach is relevant when the need for social transformation is identified and when the communities themselves are aware of the need for organization around a given problem (Fals Borda, 1999). In the same way, PAR allows the facilitator to assume a more horizontal position with respect to the subjects. It is necessary to bear in mind that when a participatory action research is carried out, information is not collected but constructed by and for the participating subjects, and that both the instruments and the techniques, as well as the research questions must be constructed based on the communities' needs.

PAR is positioned as a participatory methodology, which starting point is the present reality of the communities. For this reason, every action and reflection that is generated in the research process is aimed at affecting a particular context. It is a "collective and self-reflective learning process" (Espeso, 2015, p.60). In PAR, the facilitator is in a constant process of cultural negotiation in relation to the information that is being constructed, since the information obtained must be assessed both by him and by the communities, since the assessment of both parties about knowledge may differ (Fals Borda, 1999). In the same way, it is necessary to mention that PAR does not favor the qualitative or quantitative information, but rather a participatory approach, that is, for Fals Borda both sources of information may be relevant as long as the search is oriented at questioning reality to transform it and solve the community's problems.

According to Balcazar (2007), there are two aspects that characterize PAR. The first one is that this methodology stems from a fundamental fact: a community that is oppressed by its social or political problems. In addition, the people who participate contribute constantly to the process, regardless of their social rank or level of education. Second, PAR always focuses on making transformations to the realities of those who participate in it. Therefore, PAR contributes to the empowerment of communities for the transformation of their own realities by transcending the traditional vertical relationship in which the position of the facilitator or researcher is differentiated

and privileged over the research subject. (Fals Borda, 1999). This model is fundamental when it comes to responding to a particular social problem related to the development of a community through transformative action.

Chapter 2: Social and Ethnographic background

The purpose of this chapter is to understand, first of all, the rural development model that has been implemented in the country and the way in which it has impacted the education policy and citizen strengthening of farmers and inhabitants of rural areas. It also seeks to address the role that NGOs have played in this problem from a critical perspective that manages to understand the weaknesses associated with institutional development models, and, finally, a subchapter is presented that places emphasis on the importance of local knowledge in rural development models and how it has manifested in the Colombian context.

According to official national and international indicators, Colombia has improved in relation to the reduction of monetary poverty, reaching an average of 27% in 2018, where urban centers have a rate of 24% and rural populated centers of 36.1% (DANE, 2018). However, an analysis of the MPI (Multidimensional Poverty Index) shows negative results. This index developed by the DNP assesses five dimensions in addition to the purchasing power of households: education conditions of the household, conditions of children and youth, health, work, access to public utilities and housing conditions. As evidenced in the following chart, adapted from the DANE multidimensional poverty report of 2018, until 2016 the incidence of poverty under the MPI was going down. However, in 2018 it would go back up again:

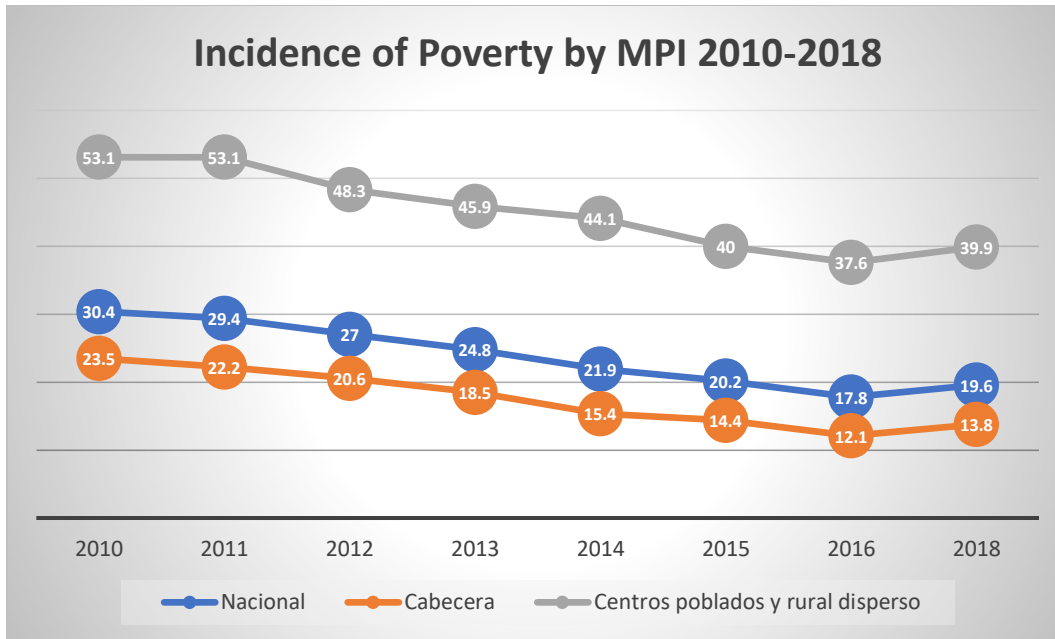


Figure 1. Multidimensional poverty in Colombia 2010-2018.

Note. Data taken from the 2018 MPI report¹.

Although the MPI continues to disregard indicators associated with social equity and focuses on a vision of development anchored to the UN approach (specifically that of the UNDP), in which interests for the modernization of rural areas and competition in the market prevail over alternative rural development models based on family farming economies, these results reveal a serious problem in rural settings that has been reproduced year after year, government after government, under which rural settings have been most affected.

Rural development in Colombia, education and citizenship

One of the aspects that present the greatest inequalities in the urban-rural relationship in Colombia is education and, therefore, the development of the concept of citizenship. According to the *Special Rural Education Plan for rural development and Peacebuilders* (MEN, 2018) there is a rural-urban gap in the education sector that is evident, for example, in the fact that the highest educational level reached in rural areas is “Basic Elementary”, followed by the level “None”, and

¹ In 2017, The DANE reduced the sample whose representativeness would be limited to urban centers. Therefore, in order to maintain comparability, data for that year were omitted.

that only 2.1% of the people residing in rural areas have college or graduate-level training. Although in recent years the approach under which the educational level by itself determines social mobility has been debated, the truth is that this diagnosis allows us to understand that, in general terms, the rural setting is lagging in terms of coverage and, therefore, of quality education.

Now, it is necessary to understand rurality from an updated approach, that is, from what is understood today as "new rurality", which understands this concept from new phenomena such as the influence of the media, the ever-growing connection through road structures, the widespread use of technologies, the opening of markets, among others (López, 2006). This new rurality implies, therefore, a new pedagogical approach. However, although the conception of rurality has changed, the conditions of the countryside continue to present obstacles for the establishment of institutional plans or projects. The lack of coverage, the presence of armed groups, high poverty rates and discrimination against inhabitants of rural areas have prevented the effective implementation of educational plans and projects aimed at the rural population.

Bearing in mind that education and pedagogy are cultural expressions and that, therefore, they are based on the development of social identities, a rural education must necessarily stem from the recognition of the cultural construction of this particular population, as Gaviria (2017) states:

“Rural inhabitants, their world views, the use of the territory, their practices and habits are elements of forms and understandings of knowledge that, in different ranges and categories, allow to identify the structures and systems on which identity has been shaped in the processes of accumulation of knowledge that we could synthesize as "rural pedagogy". (p. 55)

It would then be a heterogeneous educational project that responds to the specific needs of rural inhabitants and that stems from the assessment of the farmers' knowledge (farming techniques and traditional tools), the protection of transfer mechanisms, the recognition of social structures and, mainly, the strengthening of the memory mechanisms of rural inhabitants (Gaviria, 2017). Thus, a pedagogical approach oriented towards the rural inhabitant necessarily strengthens the exercise of citizenship, as it would be based on community participation as a tool for social cohesion. In Espinel's words, (2007) it would be an organizational process that would necessarily entail a

commitment to collective well-being which must be based on respect for social and cultural identity. That is, a process in which both educational actors and parents and, in general, community members, become their own agents of change, in search of improving social conditions through schooling. This exercise would allow the training of “democratic, responsible and participatory citizens, watching over community actions for the benefit of localities and municipalities.” (Espinel, 2007, p. 9).

In a study conducted with young people from a rural school in Carmen de Bolívar, Medina (2015), found that the notions of citizenship were different for each educational actor. While parents show clear consequences of the armed conflict, students have much more positive views, and in teachers, as a connecting but also external axis, notions of citizenship prevail that are identified with elements of a territorial nature, that is, citizenship associated with "living in the city". Additionally, the author found that the community organization is strong and that participation systems are in a significant degree of development. These elements allow us to infer that the Colombian rural setting has the potential to develop an education model based on the citizen's exercise that responds to the needs of this particular population, but also, and mainly, that is based on the validation of rural identity as a core element of the pedagogical model.

However, in Colombia the development of rural citizenship is conditioned to the institutional and state guidelines that have proven to be misaligned with the needs and perspectives of rural inhabitants. In this sense, Rivera (2015) states that:

“The liberal democratic model of the country, despite ensuring citizenship as a legal status, has not been able to guarantee the enjoyment of civil, political, socio-economic and cultural rights to the disenfranchised population, which includes inhabitants of rural areas”. (p. 108)

Therefore, political and citizenship education in Colombia demonstrates an approach that is limited to people from the cities, which ignores the contributions of farmers in terms of social construction. Notwithstanding, within the aforementioned “new rurality” approach, the need for citizen participation becomes imperative as it allows communities to influence the transformation processes that directly affect them. In this sense, education plays a fundamental role, because it

facilitates the “construction of capacities that allow decision making in an effective, inclusive and equitable manner by all rural actors”. (Bartol, 2012, p. 94).

The role of NGOs in the Colombian context: a critical discussion

As defined by the Office of International Information Programs of the US Department of State in the *Manual for an NGO*, (2012) NGOs are organizations that are independent from the government and the business sector, whose mandate is to “promote the public interest and serve the common good instead of obtaining a benefit or promoting the interests of a small group of individuals. Their independence allows them to monitor government performance and advocate for improvements.” (p. 3). This definition is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, as set out by the UN in the Global Compact, the participation of civil society organizations is fundamental in their furtherance. (ONU & Acción Social, 2019). As shown by the following table, adapted from the NGO accountability report in Colombia (2010), the Objectives align with NGOs as follows:

Table 2. Alignment of NGOs with the MDGs.

Millennium Goal	Share (%) percentage
Goal 1 Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	22%
Goal 2 Achieve universal basic education	31%
Goal 3 Promote gender equality and empower women	27%
Goal 4 Reduce mortality in children under five	8%
Goal 5 Improve sexual and reproductive health	6%
Goal 6 Fight HIV / AIDS, malaria and other diseases	4%
Goal 7 Ensure environmental sustainability	14%

Goal 8 Promote a World Development Alliance	35%
None	18%

Note. Data taken from the NGO Accountability Report in Colombia (Confederación Colombiana de ONG, 2010)

However, in Colombia there is no standardized concept of what is understood by non-governmental organizations and, in addition, there are no mechanisms for regulating or controlling civil society organizations. The tool that has been closest to this process of collective self-regulation is the regional accountability initiative *Rendir Cuentas*, which consists of 32 civil society organizations from eight countries in Latin America and the Caribbean in search of establishing systematic self-regulation practices, “through mutual learning, the transfer and adoption of voluntary and common standards.” (ICD & Civicus, 2013, p. 14). The objectives of this initiative are:

1. Promotion and monitoring of the use of the Global Reference Standard for CSO accountability.
2. Performance, monitoring and follow-up of public and collective accountability.
3. Exchange of experiences and training.
4. Development of methodologies and instruments - such as policy models and procedures manuals for their implementation, online courses, and other tools - that strengthen CSO accountability practices.
5. Research, production, systematization and dissemination of knowledge (*Rendir Cuentas*, 2017).

The last report presented by *Rendir Cuentas* in 2016, carried out with a sample of 138 NGOs, showed that there are several fields addressed by NGOs that are self-regulated in relation to the political role:

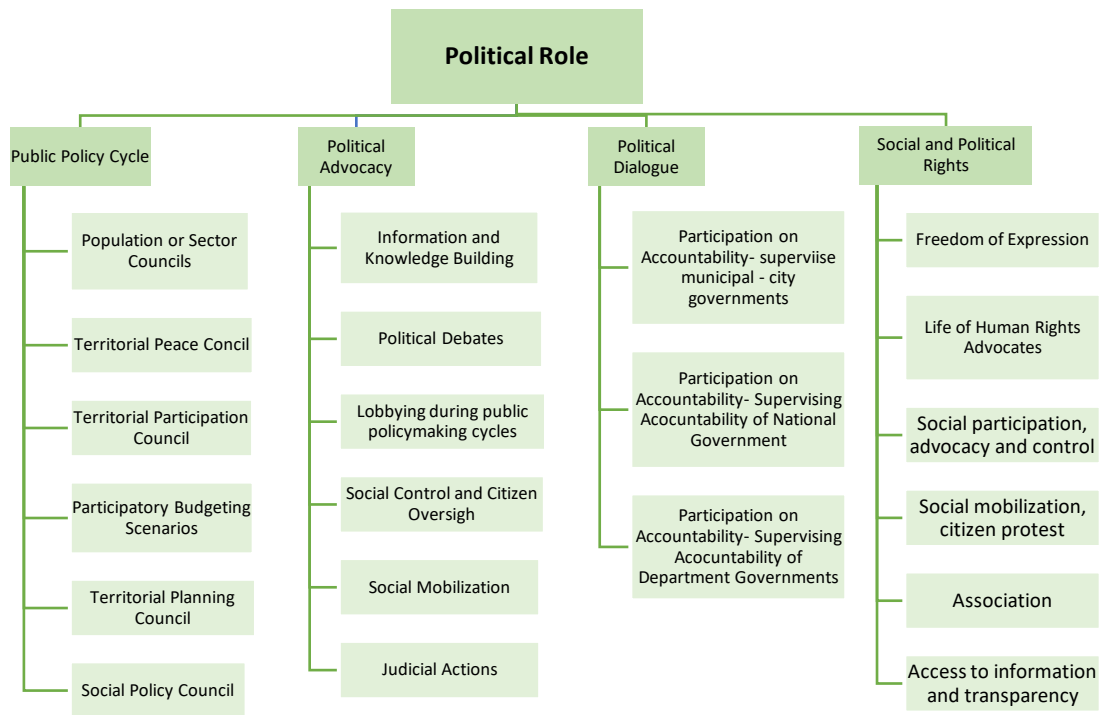


Figure 4. Areas of incidence of NGOs in relation to their political role.

Note. Adapted from the 2016 Public Social Accountability Report (Rendir Cuentas & CCONG, 2017)

Despite the efforts made by *Rendir Cuentas*, this report continues to be unrepresentative in relation to the number of NGOs in the country and is a private and self-regulated initiative, independent of the State. Although NGOs are accountable to donors and auditors, there is still ample ignorance and distrust from society in relation to what NGOs are and do (NGO for Transparency, 2009). The importance of the regulation and control of NGOs lies in their essence, as their purpose is based on the strengthening of civil society in those territories and sectors that the state has failed to reach, so a transparent treatment of their Information is essential to ensuring their purpose. However, there have been several scandals around the world involving NGOs that, taking advantage of their condition, profit from their exercise while evading tax burdens. As Cruz and Pousadela (2007) argue, this shows that NGOs, “in addition to reflecting an awakening of civil society, are also a mirror of the processes that, under the neoliberal wave, have led to transforming the market into the central paradigm of development.” (p. 10)

This last aspect is of vital importance because, while in theory NGOs establish objectives and purposes aimed at strengthening the participation of civil society, in practice these goals stagnate because they end up assuming the State's role under neoliberal and sustainable development approaches that are not consistent with the real needs of the territory. Salas (2017) argues that this neoliberal approach is evidenced by analyzing the relationship, since the mid-90s, between the State and NGOs, where:

“The State designs, formulates and guides public policy, which materializes in geography and population-driven programs and projects and through calls and tenders. It selects private law entities, both for and not for profit, for its execution. Under this ground rules it was possible to establish a social market where the State hires, monitors and pays and NGOs comply with the terms of the contract, receiving operational income and the right to a surplus for performance”. (p. 15)

A part of the problem associated with NGOs is the fact that they must answer to their investors. Although these are NGOs organizations that operate independently of the State, NGOs are subject to a wider chain in which investors play a fundamental role. Directly or indirectly, funders tend to influence the design of the agendas of NGOs and as funding grows scarce, they must adapt to the conditions and requirements of their sponsors (Sorj, 2007).

As state by Salas (2017): “Volunteering before was an important force for relationships and obtaining resources for organizations; it was a support for the materialization of the mission of organizations. As NGOs were professionalizing and remunerating their work team, specializing in the provision of services and acquiring contractual responsibilities with the State, volunteering was losing weight and meaning in the NGOs activities”. (p. 26). The foregoing turned NGOs into simple operators or contractors of the State that care more about obtaining administrative knowledge and whose critical and self-assessment capacity was reduced to mere technical exercises.

Local knowledge in the rural development model

The dominant economic model at present tends towards a commodification of nature and an over-economization of the world (Miranda & Alejo, 2017). Traditional knowledge (TK) as a category

of analysis has been widely debated. Miranda (2011) defines it as “the result of a social process structured by a group or people to build meaningful learnings and representations, to make possible the preservation of the environment, identity and culture that enclose and surround these peoples.” (p. 52). The pillars of traditional knowledge are geographical and environmental diversity, worldview, culture, identity, natural organizations (family and community), spirituality, history, language, production and technologies, all of which are represented in various productive practices such as agriculture, livestock, forestry, horticulture, crafts, architecture, and medicine, among others (Miranda & Alejo, 2017).

A recurring concern when talking about rural development is the apparently obvious contradiction between it and the traditional knowledge of farmers, that is, the poor compatibility of a model based on local knowledge with the technological and modernizing development. As Garzón (2016) argues, “understanding that traditional knowledge has an intrinsic relationship with agriculture is of vital importance for the transformation of agricultural policies that respect diversity, such as building a policy that is inclusive of non-hegemonic or globalized rural practices”. (p. 34)

Despite the relevance it has gained in the field in scientific and government-level discussions, traditional knowledge continues to represent a great theoretical and, mainly, regulatory gap. It should be noted that it is not about adopting a purely traditionalistic position that detracts from the dynamic nature and influence of the context, nor an individualistic approach that fails to recognize the importance of community contribution in the process of consolidating a rural identity. The latter is the model that predominates in the western vision of progress and development and causes “loss of cultural identity, migration to cities, extreme poverty and destruction of the natural biodiversity of its ecosystems, among other things”. (Núñez, 2004, p. 13)

In this way, the traditional knowledge of farmers becomes their cultural capital and it begins to become imperative to establish strategies that allow to preserve said knowledge, but also to potentialize the development of other skills. In particular, Núñez uses the Pedagogy of Farmers’ Knowledge concept to refer to:

“The training processes of generations of farmers from the revaluation of local knowledge and their synergy with universal knowledge, through integrative educational praxis, within

a permanent dialogue of knowledge between rural actors and agents of change to the purposes of guaranteeing the preservation of natural and cultural biodiversity in and for the well-being of persons from rural areas”. (Núñez, 2004, p. 48)

However, it should be noted that the interest of neoliberal states in natural resources does not derive exclusively, as it is sought to establish, from an interest in environmental protection. The valuation of farmers in spaces of natural interest is determined by the economic retribution that they can contribute to the State and not by values of attachment to the land or by the cultural development that has been generated in the community thanks to it (Mora, 2008). However, it is the farmers that possess the knowledge related to these natural spaces and, therefore, it is the main input if what is sought is to understand their operation. On this, Noriera, Almanza and Torres (2012) point out that an approach from agroecology would allow, as environmental conditions are improved, to give farmers a certain degree of self-regulation and independence. The authors propose some alternatives:

- Vegetable cover as an effective measure of soil and water conservation, through the use of zero tillage practices, mulch crops, use of cover crops, etc.
- Regular supplementation of organic matter through the continuous incorporation of organic and compost fertilizer and promotion of biotic soil activity.
- Nutrient recycling mechanisms through the use of crop rotations, crop/ livestock mixing systems, etc.
- Regulation of pests ensured through the stimulated activity of biological control agents, achieved through the manipulation of biodiversity and the introduction and conservation of natural enemies. (Noriero, Almanza, & Torres, 2012)

On the other hand, Landini (2010) argues that local knowledge cannot be reduced to a mere account of knowledge about reality; it is a much more complex concept that encompasses the type of worldview or epistemology of farmers, who, in search of meeting their needs, sort out their experiences and establish various schemes to understand the world by forming “a set of categories, parameters, preferences and contents, which structure experiences and behaviors”. (Landini, 2010, p. 24)

Along this same line López (2014) points out that agroecology applies a comprehensive, transdisciplinary and pluri-epistemological approach that allows it to be assumed as a proposal for sustainability for the rural setting, as long as it is carried out through the implementation of participatory methodologies of social and agronomic research. According to the author, agroecology can be grouped into three dimensions: a) ecological and technical-agronomic dimension, b) socio-economic and cultural dimension, and c) socio-political dimension.

- Ecological and technical-agronomic dimension: it emphasizes the ecological and design aspects of the production process, as well as those related to energy efficiency and the flows of other physical productive resources.
- Socio-economic and cultural dimension: it focuses on the evaluation of local social resources without neglecting their relationship with the economic and market aspects.
- Sociopolitical dimension: refers to the impact on decision-making spaces that seeks to question policies that may hinder local sustainability projects and promote others that may open up space for them.

Chapter 3: Methods

Research strategy

A research strategy provides the pathway on which a research will be conducted and clear guidelines on how the research questions subject to investigation will be answered (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). This research has used qualitative methods to explore and analyze NFE programs in Colombia and its contribution toward the development of rural areas. As described by Bryman 2012, qualitative research focuses on words, rather than quantification of collected data.

There are three main characteristics that define and differentiate qualitative research from quantitative: the direct relationship between theory and research, in which the former is generated out of the latter; the position of understanding the social world through its actors, instead of scientific models; and a constructionist perspective that understands social phenomena as the result of the interaction between individuals and not as separate events not influenced by human beings

(Bryman, 2012). Coffey & Atkinson (1996), define qualitative research as “doing research with first-person accounts of experience: the different ways in which social actors *produce, represent* and *contextualize* their personal experiences and knowledge (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Qualitative analysis occurs when *raw data* suffers a transformative process and can be classified as a “finding” or “result” (Lofland & Lofland, 1995).

Data collection and data sampling

In qualitative research, there is a wide range of methods to collect information. In this study, the information has been collected through focal groups and semi-structured interviews, some of the most used methods in qualitative research (Bryman, 2012). As the author acknowledges, focus groups offer the opportunity to observe individual’s interacting in a group and building their arguments as members of it. It is a useful technique to among others, analyze how individuals change their opinions based on the interaction that occur within the group.

On the other hand, qualitative interviews allow the researcher to understand situations and reconstruct past events, while comprehending social or political processes occurring within a specific social group or community (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). It is possible to generate empirical data about the social world through interviews, as a special form of conversation (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). These conversations can vary in their form: highly structured, standardized, quantitative survey focused, semi-formal guided interviews, and free-flowing informational interviews; however, they all are interactional and produce data *in situ*, as the results of a discussion between individuals (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). Additionally, a process of passive observation took place during the fieldwork, where the researcher perceived behaviors, attitudes and interactions between the target group, complementing the focus groups and interviews. These observations were recorded in a field diary.

This research collected data from the NFE project “Women Peacebuilders” (Mujeres Constructoras de Paz) developed by the Corporation for Social and Economic Research and Action – CIASE during December 2019 and January 2020. This project provides NFE workshops for teenage women between 14 and 20 years old, dealing with issues related to gender violence, citizen participation, leadership, civil and political rights, among others. In the past, the CIASE

organization has carried out this work with adult women, but three years ago it decided to start its work with adolescent women, developing the “Women Peacebuilders” program. By 2019, the program had 140 active young women, distributed in five regions: Santa Marta (Magdalena), Villa de Leyva (Boyacá), Buenaventura (Valle del Cauca), Palmira (Valle del Cauca) and the province of Vélez (Santander). Each region has one facilitator leading the project.

The contact with this organization began with the researcher reaching out to one of the facilitators of the project. Through this initial contact, the researcher gained access to the project and started reaching out to more facilitators that would be interested in the study. For this specific research, it was necessary to first generate the contact with the facilitators delivering NFE programs, as they work directly with the recipients of the program and would create the link between them and the researcher. As mentioned by Bryman (2012) “the ethnographer relies a lot on informants, but certain informants may become particularly important to the research. They often develop an appreciation of the research and direct the ethnographer to situations, events, or people likely to be helpful to the progress of the investigation” (p. 439). Two out of the five facilitators showed interested in the research project and decided to participate.

Based on this, the fieldwork carried out for the research was conducted during five weeks in two, out of the five regions, where the project is implemented: the province of Vélez in the department of Santander, and Villa de Leyva in the department of Boyacá. The decision to conduct field work in two different regions, was based in the overall purpose of the “Women Peacebuilders” project, which is to *contribute to the national analysis and transformation of all forms of discrimination and violence against women*. The project has been designed as a national movement that aims to impact rural young women indistinctively of their region of origin. Following this rational, the present research aimed to explore two regions, intending to have a larger sample group to explore the NFE project “Women Peacebuilders” and its potential impact.

The work carried out in the province of Vélez took place for three weeks, combining three municipalities: Barbosa, Puente Nacional and Chipatá. Because of their proximity, the three municipalities have worked together for the last three years on the project, involving adolescent women between ninth and eleventh grades. In Villa de Leyva, the fieldwork took place for two

weeks and no other municipalities in Boyacá were visited, for this region only works with teenage women from Villa de Leyva. In order to have a triangulation process in the study, three different groups of informants were targeted: NFE facilitators, NFE recipients and NFE recipients' relatives. This allowed the researcher to cross-check the collected information and make sure findings were trustworthy. Bryman (2012), argues that there can be more than one account of social realities, there lays the importance of listening to different actors.

The data collection process started with an observation phase where the researcher had the opportunity to recognize the municipalities, connect and create rapport with the facilitators, the recipients of the project, and their parents or relatives. As Bryman (2012) points out, access to a group does not finish when the researcher has entered the group or organization; it is still necessary the access to people. During this time, it was possible to attend cultural activities organized by the local governments due to the end-of-year celebrations; visit some of the young women's houses; and share informal spaces with the facilitators, the young women and their relatives, before applying the main data collection methods. Focus groups and interviews were organized based on the participants' availability and preferred location, using an interview guide designed for each group of participants (Appendix 1). Interview guides were designed to steer the conversations; however, they did not delimit the interactions between the researcher and participants. Focus groups and interviews were flexible and followed the organic rhythm of the conversations, paying special attention to how interviewees were sharing their experiences and in which areas there were focusing the most.

Focus groups

The focus group method was applied to interview rural young women recipient of the NFE project "Women Peacebuilders". As Bryman (2012) affirms, "the focus group practitioner is invariably interested in the ways in which individuals discuss a certain issue as members of a group, rather than simply as individuals. In other words, with a focus group the researcher will be interested in such things as how people respond to each other's views and build up a view out of the interaction that takes place within the group". (p. 501). This aspect was important for the study, as the experience that these young women have had with NFE has been co-shared with their peers, creating the *joint construction* of what this type of education means for them.

Before organizing the focus group sessions, the researcher consulted with the participant's parents/guardians for their permission. Some relatives decided to attend the sessions and stay present for the entire period. Two focus groups were applied in each region. Due to the end-of-year celebrations it was challenging to find suitable dates for some participants, but their goodwill and positive attitude towards the study facilitated the process.

The first focus group in the province of Vélez was attended by five participants and was conducted in Chipatá; two participants from Puente Nacional, two from Chipatá, and one from Barbosa. The second focus group was attended by six participants and was conducted in Barbosa; one participant from Puente Nacional, two from Chipata, and three from Barbosa. The participants living outside the municipalities where the focus groups were organized, traveled with the researcher and facilitator to the chosen place.

Table 3. Focus groups participants in the Province of Vélez (names have been changed).

Province of Vélez			
	Name	Age	Municipality
First Focus Group	Laura	15 years	Puente Nacional
	Sol	16 years	Puente Nacional
	Sofia	15 years	Chipatá
	Tatiana	16 years	Chipatá
	Ana Maria	17 years	Barbosa
	Luz	15 years	Puente Nacional
	Angelica	15years	Chipatá

Second Focus Group	Katherine	16 years	Chipatá
	Juliana	17 years	Barbosa
	Camila	15 years	Barbosa
	Cindy	16 years	Barbosa

In Villa de Leyva, the researcher also organized two focus groups. The first focus group had six participants and the second four participants.

Table 4. Focus groups participants in the municipality of Villa de Leyva (names have been changed).

Villa de Leyva			
	Name	Age	Municipality
First Focus Group	Silvia	17 years	Villa de Leyva
	Angie	17 years	
	Milena	15 years	
	Andrea	16 years	
	Maria Paula	16 years	
	Juanita	15 years	
	Isabella	17 years	Villa de Leyva
	Lina	15 years	
	Tatiana	14 years	

Second Focus Group	Angela	16 years	
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Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with relatives of the young participants and the NFE facilitators. The aim was to know and understand the interviewee’s point of view and personal experiences with the NFE project “Women Peacebuilders”.

In the Province of Velez six relatives decided to participate in the interviews; all women, three were moms, two aunts and one grandmother. In Villa de Leyva five relatives decided to participate, four moms and one grandmother.

Table 5. Semi-structures interviews with relatives in the Province of Vélez (names have been changed).

Name	Relation	Municipality
Nohora	Aunt	Chipatá
Martha	Mom	Chipatá
Gloria	Mom	Barbosa
Nancy	Aunt	Barbosa
Mireya	Mom	Puente Nacional
Miriam	Grandmother	Puente Nacional

Table 6. Semi-structures interviews with relatives in Villa de Leyva (names have been changed).

Name	Relation	Municipality
Ligia	Grandmother	Villa de Leyva
Carmen	Mom	
Kathia	Mom	
Sol	Mom	
Blanca	Mom	

Additionally, the two facilitators leading the project in each region were interviewed. Sandra Saenz, who leads the project in Santander and Trinidad Gonzalez who leads the project in Villa de Leyva.

Data analysis

The used framework to analyze the collected data was grounded theory, the most widely used method to analyze qualitative data (Bryman, 2012). Glaser and Strauss (1967) define grounded theory as the process of *constructing abstract theoretical explanations of social processes*. For the authors, to produce grounded theory there are two main conditions that need to be present: first, it is necessary to categorize/code the collected data; afterwards, the researcher needs to do a constant comparison between the data being coded and the assigned category, so that there is a direct correspondence between concepts and categories and theory can be generated (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

All the interviews were recorded and afterwards transcribed by the researcher. Afterwards, the most common themes among the answers were classified in the three conceptual categories identified at the beginning of the study: citizenship, youth citizenship and local knowledge. Through this process, it was possible to extract the key messages from each informant and start the process of identifying trends to further inform the results of the research. As Bryman (2012) mentions, this process is under constant *revision* and *fluidity*, and the concepts are constantly being

evaluated to see if they fit into the selected category or should be rearranged. The interviews were conducted in Spanish and there was no need to use a translator as the researcher speaks the language. This also facilitated the process of creating rapport with the interviewees, having more fluid conversations and analyzing the information afterwards.

Limitations and ethical considerations

One limitation for the present study was the season during which the fieldwork was conducted. December and January are holiday seasons in Colombia. This influenced the number of informants that participated in the data collection phase, as many were not available until late January. Additionally, for the semi-structured interviews with family members, work-related obligations also limited the number of participants. Nonetheless, the constant support from the facilitators, made possible to reach out to numerous young women in each region, in order to get a significant number of informants for the research.

One additional limitation for the study is its focus on rural young women. Considering that the chosen project only works with young women in rural areas, the impact of NFE can only be analyzed under the specific characteristics of this group. In order to have a more holistic view from this educational model, it will necessary to study NFE projects focusing on different target groups such as young men, and adult women/men.

In terms of ethical considerations, before conducting the focus groups and semi-structured interviews all participants were informed about the purpose of the study and how the information would be handled afterwards. As described by Bryman (2012) the main consideration when conducting research is to do no harm. This study was conducted under this framework and all participants were asked to provide their verbal consent to participate in the study; additionally, they were informed about the anonymous character of the research and all their names have been removed from this document and sensitive information has been kept confidential.

Chapter 4: Findings

The following chapter presents the findings from the fieldwork conducted during the data collection process of the study. It should be noted that the findings of the research process will be presented according to the research strategy applied, which in turn respond to perception criteria (of the NFE recipients, their families and the facilitators). Therefore, it is necessary to clarify that although the focus groups and semi-structured interviews were conducted independently in each region, the results will be presented jointly as the research objectives do not seek to discriminate or compare the results between them but, rather, to evaluate the work performed in terms of the established categories.

During the first days of fieldwork in both regions, an observation process was conducted to identify and determine baseline aspects related to the interaction and the relationships that were woven among the members of the project and their daily doings. Subsequently, focus groups were carried out with young women benefiting from the project. They voluntarily decided to take part in the research and tell about their experience within the project. At a later time, the researcher inquired about those relatives of the recipients who wanted to convey their point of view through a semi-structured interview. Although the relatives did not respond to this request massively, their interventions are of great value in terms of qualitative and perceptions analysis. Finally, the facilitator for each region was interviewed in order to obtain the perspective of an institutional and organizational agent, whose contributions are essential to address the problem in a critical and comprehensive manner.

CIASE and its NFE project “Women Peacebuilders”

CIASE is a mixed-type feminist non-governmental organization that advocates for the recognition and integral realization of Human Rights in conditions of equality that values difference in order to build democratic, fair, equitable and sustainable societies.

“CIASE promotes plurality and diversity; the free expression of opinions and the negotiated resolution of conflicts, based on respect among human beings, recognizing and valuing differences and cultural, political, gender, sexual orientation, religious, and other

identities. We promote respect for other species and an exercise in development for human well-being and dignity, in balance with nature". (CIASE, 2017)

The "Women Peacebuilders" project is implemented through the core axis "feminisms and peacebuilding" of the CIASE. The main objective of this axis is "to contribute to the analysis and transformation of all forms of discrimination and violence, for the construction of a sustainable and lasting peace, from innovative approaches inspired by feminism, active nonviolence, human rights and full citizenship" (CIASE, 2015)

By the end of 2019, the project had 140 active young women, distributed in five regions: Santa Marta (Magdalena), Villa de Leyva (Boyacá), Buenaventura (Valle del Cauca), Palmira (Valle del Cauca) and the province of Vélez (Santander). Each region has one facilitator leading the project. The project is delivered through workshops conducted at the local level and one national workshop every four-to-six months. These national workshops invite all the young women from the five regions and usually takes place in the capital of the country.

Rural young women and the NFE project "Women Peacebuilders"

During the focus groups participants were first encouraged to talk about the way they got to know the programme and why decided to join. Most of the young women mentioned the important role of the facilitator in their decision making. In both, the Province of Velez and Villa de Leyva, the facilitators visit local schools to introduce the program and invite young women to participate. In the Province of Vélez, some adolescents also got to know the project through their relatives (moms or aunts), that were part of CIASE's projects for adult women.

Although all the young women expressed themselves positively about the project, they also mentioned that it was not like that always. Many of them did not see the purpose of the workshops. This is the case of Silvia in Villa de Leyva, who states: "The truth is I was completely reluctant - back then I did not understand the purpose. The facilitator came to my classroom proposing the project, and I did not give it any importance. However, some of my friends from other grades did join... then I decided to join too. When I started attending the workshops, I realized that violence or gender discrimination are issues that need to be addressed, and it is not about being a feminist

or belonging to the patriarchy, but rather about being fair. That called my attention the most, because to be honest, Boyacá is one of the regions where *machismo* is more ingrained”.

Apart from not finding it interesting at the beginning, some other adolescents decided to join just to use it as an excuse to skip classes. This was a major problem in Villa de Leyva, where the school facilitated the space to organize the workshops in their building and during weekdays; the facilitator early realized that this was being used as an excuse to not attend classes, and participants were not genuinely engaging with the topics. It was then decided to conduct the sessions during the weekends and outside the school building. Similarly, there was a consensus during the focal groups facilitated in the Province of Vélez, that at first, participants were not interested in the project or the topics addressed, but the perks that came with it. Sofia shares: “At the beginning, I wasn’t really interested, but when I started attending the workshops, I saw that there were violent behaviors around me that I didn’t notice before. Also, it caught my attention that there was someone who wanted to fight against that (the facilitator), so now I really appreciate her efforts”.

Additionally, during the observation phase, it was possible to have informal conversations with some of the participants and get to know more about their social contexts and some challenges that prevent them from attending and staying within the project. In the Province of Vélez it was found that the workshops are organized during the weekends and the meeting point is constantly changing; some days they meet in Barbosa and other days they travel to Chipatá or Puente Nacional. They have to incur in transportation costs and also need to ask for permission from their parents to attend the workshops that are not in their hometown. These limitations occasionally prevent them from attending every workshop and keep up with the learning plan. In the same way, it was observed that the families of some young recipients have some sort of business at their houses; adolescents need to help with these tasks, especially during the holiday season where they are off school. One additional reason not to attend the workshops in a regular manner, are family responsibilities and their role as caregivers for younger siblings while the mother works. This was mentioned by participants in both regions.

Despite these potential challenges, an aspect that stood out the most during the focal groups, was that all the participants emphasized the novelty that the project entailed in their particular contexts,

regardless of their individual commitment to it. Adolescents pointed out that the project offers a different way to learn, but also to socialize and connect with more young women. Katherine affirms that the project “is something different that occurs in the region; because these are opportunities that are not easily found elsewhere”. Adolescents agreed that they could talk with no shame about topics that are not taught in school or cannot openly be discussed with teachers. Milena affirms that “the facilitators were friendly and act more like friends than teachers”. In every focus group, participants highlighted the facilitator’s attitude and training method as a reason to stay in the project. These perceptions were reaffirmed with the information collected during the observation process, where I witnessed the close relationship between the adolescents and the facilitators in both regions. During the informal meetups they were discussing personal topics, planning Christmas celebrations, or social activities. It was evident that there was a close relationship, more friend-to-friend than facilitator-to-recipient.

These differences between their experience in school, and their experience with NFE was a recurrent topic of discussion among all focus groups. All the young women indicated that the knowledge acquired in school is *insufficient, superficial, partial* and sometimes *biased*, because they do not deal with fundamental issues that affect young people such as sexuality, abuse, bullying, discrimination and teenage pregnancy. Likewise, there is no emphasis on the political role and leadership of women. According to the participants, this is mainly due to taboos, decontextualized methodologies, and social norms that have not evolved together with society. Adolescents pointed out that classes in schools are not engaging nor didactic; they also mentioned that there is some degree of inequity, as some students have better skills in *x* or *y* subject, and they will always end up learning more and faster than others. The NFE workshops instead, tend to adapt more to the needs of each group, and the facilitator always aims for a joint learning process, in which all young women develop skills and acquire knowledge in an equitable manner.

Sol, from the first focus group in the Province of Velez states: “Sandrita (the facilitator) is always asking us what we think of each topic or if we agree with the information that she gives us. There is always a two-way conversation. Sandrita has told us that they also learn from us and from the things that we share... so we all come out with something new from here that contributes to us all”. Ana Maria adds: “Sometimes, when nobody is participating or contributing in the discussion,

Sandrita prefers to end the workshop and asks us what or how we would like to continue the conversation next time. Because if we don't participate, then it doesn't make any sense to keep talking; they always want us to be the ones who conduct all the discussions”.

In that line, adolescents were also asked to describe the program the type of activities conducted, to which most of them responded that these were workshops to learn about violence against women and ways to prevent it. Although it was not the only subject dealt with, it is was mentioned by all the participants during the conversations. Other topics mentioned by the participants were early pregnancy, gender discrimination, women's rights, leadership, and sexism. The young women emphasized that the project was a fundamental contribution that goes beyond what they learned in school, where the knowledge acquired does not seem to have a constant, every day, practical application. According to Angela from Villa de Leyva “the topics that we learn here, are things that we can also apply every day, such as speaking up and not remaining silent, and the fact that our opinion is also valid”.

During the discussion, it was equally important to understand whether these topics were chosen by the participants and to what extent they were involved in the designing process of the workshops. Adolescents pointed out that their voice is always taken into account; they are constantly being consulted on what content they would like to learn and in what way. An element worth highlighting is what Cindy, from one of the focal groups in the Province of Vélez, points out, stating that each time a new adolescent joins the project, the facilitators asks them some guiding questions about them and their families, which allow them (the facilitators) to design the workshops in a more contextualized way. Likewise, when conducting the focus groups in Villa de Leyva, the participants confirmed that they had the same process when fist starting in the project. “Since the first meeting we are the ones who say we want and how we want to do it [...], the idea is to learn from the things that we live through and are interested in” shares Lina.

Participants are also encouraged to express themselves and their ideas using their own skills, talents and passion. This was validated throughout the observation process in both regions. In Villa de Leyva, the adolescents have done very interesting work on the issue of violence. At the workshops, the young women realized that violence has affected them in one way or another.

However, throughout the learning process, they acknowledged that it was not easy to talk about it or freely express their experiences without feeling guilt or embarrassment. Instead, they decided to write a book telling their stories. In *"Tales that are not tales"* (Cuentos que no son cuentos), they shared their experiences with violence in their own words and in a way that did not bring them down, but instead gave them a liberating experience. Participants in both focus groups agreed that this was an eye-opening activity that refreshed them and gave them a new perspective on how to manage these situations and possible consequences.



Figure 5. “Tales that are not tales” (Cuentos que no son cuentos) book made by young women belonging to the Women Peacebuilders Project in Villa de Leyva.

Note. Own image taken from the researcher's field diary.

Similarly, they also made paintings on fabrics, reflecting what they have lived through and what they do not want to live through ever again. This has been an important process for these young women, because they have used art as a tool to heal their pain, and as mentioned by them, free the soul without feeling judged or ashamed.



Figure 2. Paintings made by young women belonging to the Women Peacebuilders Project in Villa de Leyva.

Note. Own image taken from the researcher's field diary.

The participants linked these experiences with the relevance of their empirical knowledge. For the young women, the training process in these topics contributes to changing behaviors that are seen on an everyday basis, and the fact that they had all somehow experienced some kind of gender violence helped to articulate the conversation among them and generate knowledge. Likewise, workshops usually started the discussion by assessing how much the young women knew about a certain topic and what experience they had had on it. In this respect, Luz in the Province of Vélez highlights that “it is important that they ask us first that we think about this or that, because we would otherwise be doing the same thing we do at school, using a book to learn, but not our everyday experiences”.

In general terms, the participants pointed out that the workshops are adapted to their needs, background and interests. During the focal groups, the adolescents agreed that the creation of an exclusive workshop for young women is a breakthrough, because it is a sector of the population with particular problems that differ from those experienced by adult/elderly women and men. They also believe that the project has given them a clear and explicit role within their communities, that is, being able to take what they learned in the workshops to transform their own realities, starting with family and friends. Angie in Villa de Leyva points out: “Young people are going to be, in the future, the ones who make decisions and manage things in our country. So, right now I have to learn and inform myself, in order to make good decisions that will help us to be better than we are right now”.

Related to this, when the young women were asked to evaluate the project according to the impact it has on the community, all the participants affirmed that the change was generated in the workshops and that through these workshops, it started spreading to families and finally to the whole community. It is worth noting the remark made by Camila in the Province of Vélez: “A better education for young women does have an impact on the community, the people that we belong to. Many people will say that we do nothing, but the results will be seen later on in every good decision that we make”. Likewise, the majority of the participants emphasized the possibilities offered by the program to empower women so that they can exercise leadership and can contribute to improving the conditions of their peers in the region, mainly through the exercise of pedagogy. Most of the remarks were aimed at highlighting the positive impact that the program

has had individually on each of the participants, and how this small impact can positively affect the communities in which they live. As Juanita in Villa de Leyva shares: “The community benefits from having women who know their rights and own worth. If there are no women who let themselves be mistreated or who believe that they are not able to go far, then it is good for the whole country”.

Nevertheless, when inquiring about the involvement of the community and whether it participates actively and jointly in the proposed activities, most of them pointed out that, apart from mothers, grandmothers and aunts (in general women who take care of them), the community does not usually get involved. Even at the school, one of the spaces through which the articulation between the participants and the project was achieved, participation is minimal: “The school knows that this project exists, but they do not get involved, I don't know whether it is because they don't want to or because they don't understand what we do” shares Andrea in Villa de Leyva. In general terms, the participants indicated that the most involved actors within the community are the parents (in particular the moms), who often take part and collaborate with the activities. However, their participation is often reduced to specific support when the adolescents are holding events such as barbecues, dances and bazaars; they are not directly involved in the designing of the workshops or its delivery.

The same level of involvement comes from other actors such as the local government. Many of the adolescents pointed out that the only way in which they, as “Women Peacebuilders”, embed themselves within the community and raise awareness about their mission, is participating in external events. During the observation phase in the Province of Vélez, the Mayor’s office organized the celebration of the day of the elderly. The event was organized at the school of the municipality and some of the adolescents who participate in the “Women Peacebuilders” project offered a performance for senior adults and the community in general. The mothers and relatives of these participants were also there, and some of them also organized a performance for the event. As mentioned by the young women, they do need to pursue the spaces to interact with the community and position their program and its objective. Other than that, the relationship with external actors is minimal.



Figure 7. Celebration of the day of the elderly in Chipatá, municipality in the Province of Vélez. In stage, members of the Women Peacebuilders project.

Note. Own image taken from the researcher's field diary

Overall, during the interactions with the Women Peacebuilders it was possible to get an understanding of their character and the way they relate to the project based on it. Although they all had different personalities and backgrounds, they all found something in common to be together, and that is, their interest to learn and grow as well-informed women. It is worth mentioning that, although currently young women have developed a critical sense through the program, this was an incipient process at the beginning. A reflection from one participant resonated with all her friends during the focal group in villa de Leyva “The fact that we are receiving more education helps educate my surroundings too, because, if I learn, I can teach. So, since I’ve been taught many things, I have been changing my perspective and making others change the way that they see the world. I think the workshops may in fact only focus on us as young women, but we continue to pass the knowledge on to other people and to the community”.

Family members views on the NFE project “Women Peacebuilders”

For the purpose of the study, it was likewise relevant to recognize the perceptions and opinions of the young women’ parents/relatives, as they are key actors in the development and decision-making process of the adolescents. Through semi-structured interviews it was possible to hear and understand their views on the project and whether they consider it to be impactful for the overall development of the regions.

In the province of Vélez, some relatives that decided to participate in the interviews have been part of CIASE and the programs that the organization offers to adult women. During the conversations, it was evident that they had a greater knowledge of the project and at some extent their opinion was influenced by this past experience. For them, the creation of this space is essential to continue educating women leaders, but now under different conditions, with a greater access to technology but also greater dispersion. They recognized the continuation of the project and its positive impact to keep their relatives from other activates that are not as enriching as the workshops. There was an interesting case in Barbosa, where one interviewee works for the local government as councilwoman. She shared during the interview, that although she didn’t attend college, some years ago CIASE, in partnership with another organization, was offering courses in politics and local leadership. She joined those classes, and by 2019, she had been acting as councilwoman for two years in a row. During the observations, I had the opportunity to meet her and two additional mothers outside the interviews; it was evident that she was advocating for the program and sharing her experience not only as a part of CIASE, but as a proud aunt to one of the young woman peacebuilders in the municipality.

On the other hand, the relatives who were interviewed in Villa de Leyva have a more *every day* and experiential approach, that is, their points of view are more related to the changes that they have been able to see in the young women through family life. In this sense, they affirm that the workshops have changed the attitude and behavior of the young women and have improved aspects that were previously problematic, such as the lack of reflection and self-respect. The participant grandmothers in Villa de Leyva, shared with us the personal story of her granddaughter and recognized that for some years they had a difficult relationship. She admitted that having the

additional support of the facilitator and the project has impacted positively their relationship. Now they recognize each other not only as family, but as women, as equals.

In regard to their involvement in the development of the workshops and the different activities, all the interviewees agreed that their participation was usually limited to attending events held by the project and their relatives. However, they did not see this as problematic, on the contrary, they expressed they are excited every time there is an event, because they can perform activities outside their daily routine while contributing to the growth of their relatives. This was the case of Kathia, in Villa de Leyva, who help sewing the different pieces of the paintings created by the young women. She shares: “My daughter told me that they need it to put all the paintings together to create like a flag, so I told her that I would help her. For three or four sessions, I don’t remember, I was there in the workshops with them, while there were finalizing their paintings, talking, joking around and just enjoying the activity. I also enjoyed it”. Likewise, some other mothers said that the activities have allowed them to meet other women and create bonds of friendship with them. Additionally, there was a consensus that although the relatives are aware of the needs of their adolescents, they (the adolescents) are better qualified to decide what to learn and how to do it, as owners of their reality.

When discussing their thoughts about the formal schooling system and the NFE workshops delivered by CIASE, all the interviewees had similar opinions to the ones shared by the young women. They agreed that school tended to conceal or superficially teach some topics that are fundamental for the formation of women, as is the case of sexuality and early pregnancy, and that in that sense, the NFE workshops are an important contribution because they show young women that these are not forbidden topics but, rather, very important for their education and personal growth. These specific topics, sexuality, early pregnancy and relationships, were mentioned by most of the interviewees. It was evident that having their young adolescents pregnant or leaving their houses to move in with a partner was a common concern among the relatives. Interviewees agreed that in rural areas there are not as many opportunities to growth or to develop oneself professionally as in the big cities, and when young women do not see a clear future or do not have dreams to fulfill, they are easily attracted to starting relationships that may not be the best option for a 14-16 years old woman, losing interest in other aspects of life.

This was an interesting reflection, as some of the young adolescents interviewed were quite open to share that they were in relationships, yet, they were also explicit in saying that when they notice conducts that are not healthy as jealousy or controlling behavior, they can now recognize it, and discussed with their partners. Relatives agreed that there is no need to *demonize* or create taboos around these topics, but is necessary to teach it openly and correctly, so that young women can develop criteria to engage in positive and healthy relationships and still pursue their personal and professional development.

Regarding the direct impact that NFE workshops have in the community, interviewees were convinced that having informed youth does impact the development of their communities. They see the workshops as an opportunity for the young women to socialize, get exposure to different settings and learn from different perspectives; one of the mothers shared that she is happy to see how the adolescents have been invited to national workshops with politicians. This was the case in 2019, when CIASE organized the national workshop in Bogotá, and some representatives of the national government were invited to listen to the young women and their areas of concern for the current government. Additionally, during the protests that took place in November 2019, in Bogotá, the young women were invited to participate in a national concert, as part of the strikes. They had the opportunity to be in stage for 10 minutes talking about the project and their requests for the government as rural young women. Gloria shares: “this has been an incredible experience for her; she did not stop talking about it for the following two weeks. They were so upset with the government; they were upset that riot police were killing students for protesting; they were upset for the death of social leaders. They were exposed to the reality of the country and now feel the responsibility in their shoulders to make things change. It was the first time the I saw my daughter so involved in social problems”.

Altogether, the relatives of the young women see this project as an important opportunity for them get involved in the reality of their communities and country. They appreciate that there is a space outside the formal schooling system that can openly discuss topics that directly impact rural women.

Facilitators of NFE: raising Women Peacebuilders

After interviewing young women and their families, it was important to also get the opinion and perceptions of the facilitators that lead the project in the Province of Vélez and Villa de Leyva, as they represent the *organizational agents* in the study.

Both facilitators have been working for many years in the area of NFE, not only with CIASE, but with other organizations. They both live in the regions where they lead the project and know the context of the communities. When inquired why the focus on rural young women Sandra said that they realized that young women in rural areas many times feel discouraged about life, about not having a clear life project, or finishing school and not knowing what to do, as there are no opportunities; based on this, it became necessary to design a project that focused on this particular sector of the population so that young women could get involved in the problems of their municipalities and contribute to the development of solutions, identifying themselves as key actors to create opportunities in rural areas. For Trinidad, this was a commitment long overdue with rural young women. According to her, historically women have been mistreated and undermined, they have lacked opportunities to grow and develop their full potential. The project then, was created as a learning opportunity for rural young women to equip them with the necessary tools to develop themselves as well-informed citizens. Facilitators agree that once people know their rights, they tend not to let it violate.

For Trinidad, working with young women has been a challenging experience. She points out that “it is hard to have to listen to all the cases of violence suffered by adolescents. When we worked on the paintings it was difficult to see drawings saying *don't kill us or respect women's life*. Do we really need to ask our society the obvious?”. For Sandra, the social profile of these young women is problematic because of the composition of their families and the socioeconomic conditions that lead them to work and take care of their siblings; many times, this aggravates their realities and interactions with the outside world.

There is a clear distinction between the learning processes for adult women and young women. For the facilitators, somehow it is *more* expected that adult women face violence or discrimination, but it is not always expected to have 14 or 15 years-old girls sharing similar experiences. That is

why facilitators find necessary these non-formal spaces, where young women can be guided and supported to learn, be aware, heal if necessary, and move on with their lives. The goal has always been to open up a space so that adolescents can express themselves in their own ways and at their own pace.

Understanding the reality of the project's target group, the organization found imperative to have young women creating the project's agenda. The facilitators stated that when the project first started, different workshops were held in order to define the topics and to establish a prioritization. This process was carried out by young women themselves, since the only tool provided by the organization was the methodology. Every region conducted the same exercise and a final national workshop was organized to convey priorities and establish the final agenda. Apart from that, every session is planned and organized together with the adolescents.

This topic led to a discussion about the formal education system. There was a general consensus that education is standardized for everyone in the country. Sandra points out that the main problem is that education is homogenized for everyone. She shares: "Teachers do not see the person that is sitting in front of them, because they see us all using the same glasses: we all have to be excellent, we all have to learn at the same pace. But no, all human beings are absolutely and completely different, so we need a more personalized education that is designed around the person and not around a curriculum, something that is pedagogical". In addition, Sandra points out that these pedagogical problems are somehow related to the despair of teachers in remote areas of the country and the negative impact that violence has had on the countryside.

Trinidad states: "For me, formal education is becoming outdated, because in my opinion it is too rigid, and whoever gets out of the box is not good. He who thinks differently is not good. The thing is, the formal education system should be undergoing some serious changes already. Then we come (CIASE), and we present a different model that the girls like, one that includes them, that listens to them. That should be assessed when planning formal education systems". She shares that the local school did not actively contribute to the project, beyond granting one hour per session to conduct the workshops. The administration of the institution was not interested in generating a long-term or deeper relationship to complement each other's work.

In that line, facilitators were also asked why they think organizations in the third sector have to intervene in the educational processes of the country. Sandra thinks that the national government is not interested in projects that do not generate profits. For the facilitator, “if there were no social organizations and international cooperation, Colombia would be in much more precarious conditions”. According to her, it has been the social organizations that have been responsible for fulfilling the role of the State through foreign investment, carrying out work such as the reduction of gender gaps, the reduction of violence, the construction of roads, among other things. Sandra adds that for the government, education is not a genuine priority because it is not convenient to have informed and aware citizens who demand their rights and can see what the real condition of the country is and its levels of corruption. Trinidad shares a similar opinion, “for the government it is better not to have a good education system. They just want an average system that teaches you how to read and write, nothing else.”

Facilitators agree that coverage has improved, but in terms of quality, formal education is still falling behind, and that’s why they are several third-sector organizations intervening. For Trinidad, it is essential to use the local knowledge to design curriculums. She shares: “this would break with the practice that when rural adolescents graduate from school, they have no other choice but to go to the city to continue their studies or find a job, because they do not know anything about their territories and how to develop their life here”. This dynamic not only increases the misery in cities, but also in the countryside, where there are not many young people left and the few that remain repeat the issues associated with the rural settings.

In the specific case of young women, facilitators agree that the school is not tackling topics such as gender violence or sexual rights, when over the past years, the country has experienced an increase the number of cases of violence against women. Sandra states: “that should be a priority for the government, and its strategy should be preventive. From school our children need to learn these things”. This was validated during the interviews with young women, when they share that such topics are not incorporated in the curriculum of the schools.

On the other hand, Trinidad believes that there is more potential for NFE projects, not only working independently, but in partnership with local governments and academic institutions. She believes

that a multisectoral approach can potentialize the impact of the different educational models in the country. Additionally, she acknowledges that in order to have a deeper impact in the community and the transformation of rural young people, the project should now target young men as well, understanding that the learning process involves both men and women, for their interaction is constant in every aspect of life.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the findings of the fieldwork phase, the results obtained in relation to the three established categories are presented below, namely: i) the citizenship approach proposed in the Non-Formal Education models developed by NGOs in Colombia, ii) young people in the citizenship approach raised in the Non-Formal Education models developed by NGOs in Colombia and iii) the role of local and traditional knowledge in the citizenship approach proposed in the NFE models developed by NGOs in Colombia.

The citizenship approach proposed in the NFE models developed by NGOs in Colombia.

As expressed by the young program recipients, their families and the facilitators of the program, the project has had a positive impact in relation to the strengthening of the participation of women who have been part of it. The young women point out that, within the program, they have the opportunity to express their own opinions and give their point of view on the situations that are addressed within the framework of the chosen topics. In the same way, it was observed that the project has had the role of strengthening the specific knowledge of young women so that they may replicate them in their family and community spaces.

The foregoing not only allows the population to show the positive results of the program but also facilitates the creation of awareness in the community through mutual learning: the young women share their concerns and knowledge in a community that has traditionally been of a sexist nature, thus driving spaces for discussion, which are normally absent. In short, it promotes the creation of leadership figures that transcend the setting of the workshops. This becomes more evident when

some of the participants indicate that they would like to replicate the program in other spaces or that they would like to become political figures in their local settings.

As the focus of the program is the rights of women and the elimination of all types of gender violence, it was found that the “Women Peacebuilders” program poses a calculated route of action that seeks to empower participants and turn them into key actors within the municipality and the region. The exercise of becoming aware of the specific problems that women experience in their context allows both them and their social circle to question and criticize certain institutionalized practices. There are many cases in which young women point out that they were not aware of certain forms of violence and that they considered them to be normal, until they entered the program and started becoming aware of the inequality and inequity underlying these normalized behaviors.

It should also be noted that during the focus groups, the young participants emphasized that the facilitators were constantly inquiring about their experiences, interests and skills (which responses were not mandatory), in order to design the contents and methodologies of the classes as per the needs and motivations of the population. This can be observed when the facilitators point out that they do not propose themes or approaches; they simply propose a methodology that, in any case, is always subject to being changed.

Thus, it is concluded that the citizenship approach is seen as a priority for the Young Women Peacebuilders program, because it provides the baselines to design action lines and areas of focus for the project. In particular, CIASE is focused on strengthening the citizenship of women in vulnerable contexts and turning them into decision-making entities in their respective contexts. However, it is necessary to emphasize that focusing on this aspect tends to set aside others, such as the development of citizenship in populations such as young males, adolescents and boys, and other issues beyond gender violence.

The type of project approach has a well-established process: women are trained in vulnerable contexts on issues that can potentially make them leaders in their territory; they then bring this knowledge to their community and apply it by training their relatives and closest people; and

finally, progressive changes start being made to the way of thinking of the community, which lead to social transformations. Although this process is valid and, as we saw, it shows results, it neglects the active training of citizens and the development of concrete leadership skills that guarantee the exercise of citizenship within the community.

Therefore, to conclude, it is recommended that the project integrate a module of citizen rights which, in the case of its particular focus, would be women's rights and female leadership. This would allow to overcome the training stage and move on to apply the knowledge acquired through concrete tools that help foster active female citizens that promote social transformation in their communities.

Young people in the citizenship approach proposed in the NFE models developed by NGOs in Colombia.

The research showed that the creation of an exclusive workshop for young women in schooling age allows to highlight some specific problems of this sector of the population. One of the most recurrent, mentioned by both young women and their relatives and facilitators, is the huge difference in pedagogical terms between school and NFE processes. All of the participants who addressed this issue indicate that the school they attend would rather conceal or, in the best-case-scenario, very superficially address issues associated with sexuality and women's rights.

As mentioned by some of the young women, and reinforced by relatives, young people have a greater disposition and have more energy. Another one of the recipients said that they are less afraid and don't have as many restrictions to express what they believe. These elements combine to generate a critical mass that, properly oriented, could give rise to spaces for deep discussion and reflection. The purpose of the program is to take advantage of the potential of young women to generate strategies of empowerment and collective construction, in particular on the issue of gender violence, but which can be applied to various fields.

An element worth mentioning at this point is what was mentioned by one of the facilitators: the high violence rates present in the study group. It has been shown that among women the ages surrounding youth, adolescence and childhood are the most prone to the emergence of various

types of gender violence, and where they most commonly tend to remain hidden for different reasons. Therefore, it constitutes a sector of the population that is both highly vulnerable but, at the same time, due to its knowledge of the subject, becomes a potential tool to fight against the phenomenon.

It is concluded, therefore, that the focus on young women is paramount in the program, as it is considered as a decisive stage in their formation process, in which strong differences are marked with respect to traditional education. During the fieldwork, it was found that the differences between the formal education provided by the school and the one provided by CIASE are marked in terms of approach, and that students, relatives and facilitators tend to prefer the form of education received through the workshops rather than the one taught in classrooms.

However, for the purposes of the discussion under this research, it is necessary to point out that this perception is biased towards specific issues, that is, the opinions gathered through the fieldwork are focused on the gender issue, in which the workshops have a long track record and knowledge, unlike traditional schools. However, when the field expands and other key knowledge for citizen education is incorporated, such as politics and economics, the workshops turn out to be insufficient. It was found, then, that the NFE provided by this corporation is too focused, which, although allows specialization, it also shows a bias and a delimitation of knowledge and training, and it also fails to establish strategies for measuring and monitoring of students.

Therefore, it is recommended to broaden the conceptual and curricular framework used in the workshops so that young women can acquire tools to strengthen community decision-making within their territory and not only technical data and information. This would bring about the generation of a curricular structure that, even if it delimits contents to a certain extent, would also enable a more concrete organization that would also open up room to establish monitoring and measurement mechanisms for the corporation and for the project, which are essential to be able to assess its effectiveness, an element that stands out as a recurring weakness in NGO-driven projects, as early mentioned in the study.

Role of local and traditional knowledge in the citizenship approach proposed in the NFE models developed by NGOs in Colombia

This last element is perhaps the most problematic, as evidenced in the project. The findings made it possible to determine that the facilitators are constantly communicating with the young women, inquiring about their particular contexts in order to improve and enrich the process. Although this dynamic has positive elements, it is insufficient because it only focuses on recognizing problems in a particular population without delving too deeply into the subject.

As analyzed in the proposed theoretical framework, local knowledge is the basis for the development of NFE projects, as it constitutes the input for the design of pedagogical strategies. Although in the process carried out by CIASE there is an exercise in contextualization, this shows operational and depth gaps, since it is limited to investigating the issues of young women but without emphasizing on their individual and collective capacities, which could be fundamental for the development of subsequent phases of implementation. In the case of women living in rural areas, it can be said that the range of knowledge and complexity thereof constitutes an input that is being almost entirely wasted within the program. It was possible to show that students and facilitators tend to demerit traditional knowledge because they consider it to be outdated, and thus generate cognitive barriers that can hardly be removed later. For this reason, women, and in general, young people from the region, continue to prefer migrating to the city rather than staying in their region.

It is then concluded that the role of local and traditional knowledge within the corporation's training model is limited, which creates a two-way problem: first, the implementation of an educational model that does not contemplate the point of view and complexity of the people who inhabit the territory can lead to internal disputes and conflicts. On the other hand, a large body of knowledge is wasted, which could strengthen the development of the workshops and even generate a new line of research within the CIASE focused on rural knowledge.

As a recommendation, it is proposed to delve into the socialization phase of the projects, incorporating the perspective of the people from the region so that the workshops are built in a

participatory manner, driving a direct relationship with the community. For the implementation phase, it is recommended that the workshops constantly emphasize on the need to recover traditional knowledge (without this entailing going backwards), and safeguard the body of knowledge contained within the population through a critical and reflective discussion about such knowledge.

From Freire's theory (2018), it is understood that the educational process responds to development as a liberating act, which allows people to criticize and confront themselves against their environment to carry out an individual reconstruction that allows them to have a different worldview, to discover, analyze, problematize and exercise actions that have an impact on their daily lives, families and communities. Therefore, it is important that NFE projects start from establishing constructions on the elements that are part of the context of the students, so that they can understand it and articulate new ideas that derive in deep transformations and concrete changes for their reality.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview guides

Interview guide for focus group with young women

1. Could you briefly describe how you arrived at the training program Women Peacebuilders?
2. Could you describe in your own words the program?
3. Does the community participate actively and jointly in the proposed activities? Does the community have complete and timely knowledge of these activities?
4. Do you think that the this NFE model adapts particularly to your needs (time, knowledge, skills, among others)?
5. Do you consider that your previous knowledge is taken into account in the learning process?
6. What do you consider is the importance of your empirical knowledge in your learning process?
7. Do you think there is a marked difference between education provided by the State and that provided by the NGO?
8. Does the training process constantly inquire about your particular problems and those of your community? Have you or your community been invited to design or socialize the content?
9. What do you think is your role as a young person in your learning process?
10. From what you have seen, do you think the project has had a positive or negative impact on your community? Why?
11. How are decisions made inside the workshops? By vote? By the facilitator's decision?

Interview guide for semi-structured interviews with family members

1. Do you think that the Women Peacebuilders project has helped your daughters/granddaughters/nieces? If so, in which aspect?
2. Are you involved in the development of the different workshops? How do you get involved in the different activities?
3. Do you think this project complements the knowledge that young women are receiving at school?
4. Do you think that the this NFE model adapts particularly to the need of rural young women?
5. Do you think NFE can contribute in the development of rural areas?
6. Has the project benefited your community?

Interview guide for semi-structured interviews with facilitators

1. Why do you decide to focus on rural young women?
2. What is the profile of the young women that join the project?
3. What do you think NFE is important in the development process of young people?
4. What do you think is the importance of NFE in the development of the rural areas?
5. How do you perceive the concept of citizenship in rural areas?
6. How do you incorporate local knowledge and traditions in the designing of the project?
7. Did the young women participate in the creation of the agenda?
8. How do you perceive formal education in rural areas?
9. Why do organizations in the third sector have to intervene in matters such as education?
10. What should the government do to ensure quality education in rural areas?



Norges miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet
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Norwegian University of Life Sciences

Postboks 5003
NO-1432 Ås
Norway