

## Social Innovation and Local Development: Significant Experiences in the Cauca Department

Innovación social y desarrollo local: experiencias significativas en el departamento del Cauca

Yury Yohana Castillo-Molina, Omaira Calvo-Giraldo  
and César Augusto Gómez-Villamarín

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### Abstract

This chapter analyzes the influence of social innovation on local development processes that take place in communities in the Cauca department of Colombia. To understand this influence, the concept of social innovation used in participative exercises conducted in the region is defined, and one of the most representative experiences of social innovation in the department is described. The featured experience has been the result of joint work between the community of trout producers in the Silvia municipality and Cauca's private, state, and academic sectors.

**Keywords:** local development, social innovation, rural producers, University-Company-State relationship.

### Resumen

En este capítulo se analiza la influencia de la innovación social en los procesos de desarrollo local que tienen lugar en las comunidades del departamento del Cauca, Colombia. Para comprender esta influencia se define la concepción de innovación social que ha estado presente en los ejercicios participativos desarrollados en la región, y se describe una de las experiencias más representativas de innovación social en este departamento, y que ha sido el resultado de trabajo conjunto entre la comunidad de productores de trucha del municipio de Silvia y los sectores privado, estatal y académico del Cauca.

**Palabras clave:** desarrollo local, innovación social, productores rurales, relación Universidad-Empresa-Estado.

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## Author profiles / Perfil de autores

### Yury Yohana Castillo-Molina

Master's candidate in Interdisciplinary Development Studies. Professor in the Department of Administrative Sciences, Universidad del Cauca. Researcher in the Regional Models of Competitiveness Group, Universidad del Cauca, and the Regional Center of Productivity and Innovation in Cauca (CREPIC).

E-mail: yycastillo@gmail.com

### Omaira Calvo-Giraldo

Currently undertaking a Master's Degree in Interdisciplinary Development Studies. Professor in the Department of Administrative Sciences, Universidad del Cauca. Researcher in the Regional Models of Competitiveness Group, Universidad del Cauca, and the Regional Center of Productivity and Innovation in Cauca (CREPIC).

E-mail: omairacalvog@gmail.com

### César Augusto Gómez-Villamarín

Business Administrator. Researcher in the Regional Models of Competitiveness Group, Universidad del Cauca, and the Regional Center of Productivity and Innovation in Cauca (CREPIC)

E-mail: cesarg\_v@hotmail.com

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## Introduction

For decades, innovation has been considered one of the most influential factors for achieving economic advantages in developed countries. These countries have made major investments to obtain new products and services in order to consolidate their economies and thereby increase their global power (Lacayo, 2007).

Innovation has therefore been a fundamental starting point for improving competitiveness in various countries that have achieved considerable economic growth through these innovative practices (Lacayo, 2007). This economic growth, however, has not been across the board, nor has it resolved pressing problems affecting society such as poverty and unemployment, or ineffective health and education systems, that make it increasingly difficult for people to access these services.

As a result of this situation, cases are being seen in Colombia and in a large number of Latin American countries where novel ideas are used to find solutions to social problems. These cases are known as social innovation, a type of innovation that can be defined as the search for, and application of, creative ways of solving problems that affect collectives of people, especially problems related to poverty and social exclusion. While productive innovation focuses on improving profits and competitiveness in companies, the aim of social innovation is to improve the living conditions of people whose basic needs are not met by the State or the market (Cepal, 2008, p. 13).

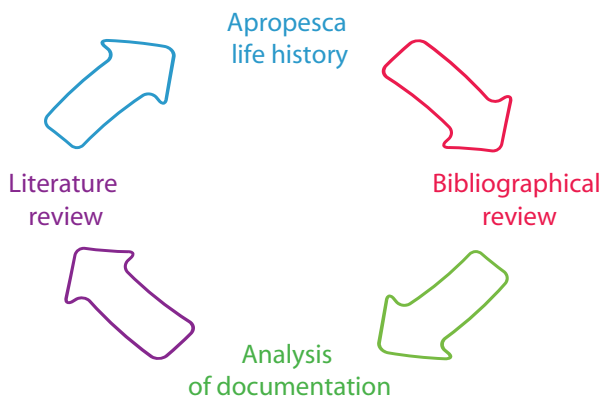
The conception and execution of these solutions involves participation from the entire community that feels affected by the issue, searching for a collective solution to meet their needs; consequently, social innovation experiences can create their own development dynamics in which communities are active participants in the processes through which they seek to improve their quality of life.

This chapter reflects on the importance of social innovation in the development of communities in Cauca. This reflection begins in the first section, which presents the methodology used in the research. The second section describes the theoretical framework that supports the research, within which three concepts are expanded upon: social innovation, local development, and the University-Company-State relationship. The results of the research are presented in the third section, including an analysis focused on the influence of social innovation on Science, Technology, and Innovation (CTI) initiatives in Cauca, along with a description of a representative experience of social integration in the department. The chapter finishes with the conclusions of the research.

## Methodology

The research is descriptive, as it sought information in order to identify and analyze the characteristics of the social innovation phenomenon and its influence on both the participative exercises conducted in the region and the experiences of communities in Cauca. The research was conducted using tools such as a review of the literature, semi-structured interviews, and life histories, through the phases shown in Figure 12.1.

**Figure 12.1** Research methodology



Source: The authors.

## Theoretical framework

### Social innovation

Research into the topic of social innovation is recent. Although there are now various bibliographical references and perspectives on what is understood by social innovation, there is still no unified definition of the term. Neither have we identified the fields in which it can be applied, nor the criteria that an experience must meet in order to be considered social innovation.

The study of Cloutier (2003) is used here as a basis for what is considered social innovation. This study suggests that definitions of social innovation can be divided into three levels: 1) individual, 2) social or territorial, and 3) business. Additionally, there are four aspects that should be considered when conducting a comprehensive study into this type of innovation: 1) its nature, 2) its objectives, 3) the process of creation, and 4) results.

Definitions that fall into the individual category are those proposed by authors who conceive of social innovation as a support mechanism for bringing about lasting changes in the individual so that they can regain control of their own life. With regards to this category, Chambón, David, and Devevey (1982) state that social innovations are seen as practices that allow an individual or group of individuals to find a solution for needs that have not been satisfactorily met. The authors define social innovation as a “way of doing things” and not as a product; according to their assertions, social innovation is created with the involvement of all stakeholders; the user is not the beneficiary of a service, but rather a participant in a project that they recognize as their own, whose aim is to resolve a social issue.

The social or territorial category includes definitions of social innovation that focus on the contributions these kinds of innovations make to the development of a defined territory with the aim of improving quality of life. These can be further divided into: 1) social innovation for development, and 2) social innovation for consumption.

The first dimension includes definitions such as that of Handerson (1993), which states that social innovation means transcending purely economic aims and upholding new social values. The author claims that social innovations are not only part of a “correction” to help resolve current social issues, but also a way of preventing problems that may threaten human survival.

In social innovation for consumption, the definition provided by Gershuny (1983, as cited in Cloutier, 2003, p. 18) stands out. According to this author, social innovation is the key to explaining the impact of technological change on the lifestyle of the population and the economic structure. Gershuny defines social innovation as a change in a society’s consumption habits to ensure its well-being.

Finally, the business category includes definitions of social innovation related to work organizations. This too can be divided, into instrumental and non-instrumental perspectives.

The instrumental perspective groups together definitions that relate social innovation to ways of restructuring work organizations, with no concern for the well-being of the worker—the goal is to improve capacity for technical innovation. Here, definitions such as that put forward by DeBresson (1993 as cited in Cloutier, 2003, p. 21) stand out, in which social innovation refers to social organization of production within a system of social organization. The author also asserts that social innovation is a condition related to control of technical change.

Definitions from a non-instrumental perspective, on the other hand, relate social innovation to forms of work organization, taking into account the interests of the people and the guarantee that their needs will be met, and seeking employees’

cooperation in order to achieve the company's goals. The most prominent definitions here are those similar to Brooks' (1982, as cited in Cloutier, 2003, p. 26): social innovation consists of new forms of work organization that improve productivity and quality of the employees' working lives.

Analyzing these three categories of definitions in light of the four aspects of analysis—1) its nature, 2) its objectives, 3) the process of creation, and 4) results—provides the following information.

Nature refers to what a social innovation actually is, and to define this nature it is important to take tangibility into account: is it a new method, a new practice, a new solution, or a tangible product? Newness must also be considered. This is relative, as newness specifically depends on the context it is applied in. Finally, what is its objective? This ranges from promoting the well-being of individuals and communities to solving and preventing social problems.

Process is another important aspect to analyze, as the way solutions are implemented must be taken into account when defining whether they really represent social innovation. It is therefore essential to consider the following criteria of the process: a) diversity of stakeholders, and b) active participation and empowerment of the users or beneficiaries.

With regards to the objectives of change, social innovations are undertaken and implemented to improve the well-being of people or communities. Their aim is to improve quality of life at both the individual and territorial level, as well as to increase productivity and well-being in the work environment.

The results of social innovation are often unclear, but what can be seen among the authors cited in this section is that the reason for social innovation is to create positive and lasting changes that are better than the other options available.

## Local development

There is some controversy about what constitutes “local.” In conducting this research, the following definition of Coraggio (2006) was used:

[...] by “local” we do not mean something tiny, parochial, and localistic, but rather the common condition of a population that shares a settlement history (often without knowing it) and face-to-face, day-to-day life—albeit more or less unequal, more or less conflictive or in solidarity—in a territory of varying size, whose problems are immediately interconnected, and from where it is linked to other localities or micro-regions and to its widest regional or national milieu. Furthermore, for a development to be considered “local,” its conception and realization must be led by the local stakeholders themselves (Coraggio, 2006, as cited in Carvajal, 2011, p. 58).

Although the definitions of local development vary, they concur in stating that it can be considered another form of development that stems from the potential existing in a specific community, and that it is primarily aimed at improving the population's quality of life. These elements are summarized by Carvajal (2011), who defines local development as “the process of improving living conditions in a specific territory, assumed and led by the local population” (p. 24).

## University-Company-State relationship

In 1968 Jorge Sábato and Natalio Botana presented, in a visionary manner for the Americas, the first model for orienting relationships between universities and their environment. This is now known as Sábato's Triangle and is touched on in other chapters of this book. The ideas of Sábato and Botana (1968), more than academic reflections, are political strategies that acknowledge the important role of scientific and technological research in transforming society. The basic proposition of these authors is to establish policies that allow Latin American countries to develop techno-scientific capabilities.

The University-Company-State triad is a pillar of economic development: the University, in terms of teaching and research; Companies, in terms of producing benefits and generating employment; and the State, as a regulator that protects common interests. Intervention from these three actors is required for different reasons, leading to relationships forming among them:

- Increased cost and complexity of technology and problems.
- Process improvement increasingly requiring deeper scientific knowledge.
- The reduction of state funding granted to research, forcing research centers to secure their own financing.
- Demographic tendencies in industrialized countries generating uncertainty towards slumps in enrollments.
- High living standards and the apathy of young people in industrialized countries towards scientific research and knowledge.

These new developments have created an infrastructure of relationships in terms of the overlapping institutional spheres of the University, Company, and State, where each one can take on the role of another, and hybrid organizations arise from the intersection points. Here, the University initiates actions, the Company uses applied research, and the State changes regulations and provides financing (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000). University-Company-State interaction is vital to improving the conditions of innovation in a knowledge-based society (Aldana, 2006).

## Results

### Social innovation in participative exercises in Cauca

The different participative exercises of territorial planning that have been undertaken in Cauca have always involved the general community and stakeholders from the University-Company-State triad; these have already been mentioned in Table 1.1 of Chapter 1 in this book. According to Figueroa et al. (2013, p. 47), the contributions of these exercises are reflected in the following areas:

- Foundation for building the Regional System of Science, Technology, and Innovation (SRCTI).
- Work culture in social knowledge networks.
- Focusing on and analyzing the diversity of productive activities.
- Integration into new world-class, innovation-based production dynamics.
- Coordination and social appropriation facilities for basic and deep knowledge to make social and production innovation more concrete.

Table 12.1 summarizes the participative exercises that most strongly advance the social innovation approach.

**Table 12.1** Participative exercises in territorial planning

Document	Purpose
(Cauca's Vision 2020: Our Path to the Future)	This will be a concerted process that will plan the region's future for the next 20 years, in a more humane, efficient, and generally more competitive context at regional, national, and international levels.
Cauca Agenda for Science, Technology, and Innovation (CaucaCyT)	Develop the Cauca Agenda for Science, Technology, and Innovation (CaucaCyT), creating conditions that support a new model of well-being underpinned by knowledge management and community knowledge.
Internal Agenda for Productivity and Competitiveness	This document promotes a shared vision of regional development that takes into account the department's ethnic and cultural richness, and biodiversity. Its purpose is to increase competitiveness in the region's highest-impact productive sectors through a process of differentiating native products and services.

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Document	Purpose
Regional Competitiveness Plan	This is conceived as a planning instrument for the department's productive sector that will help prioritize existing initiatives and incorporate new alternative products. The aim is for the region to have a vision for the future and strategic goals, as well as a road map for improving competitiveness and productivity.
Visión Cauca 2032: Hemos Comenzado (Cauca's Vision 2032: We Have Begun)	This is the space proposed by the region to achieve its own changes, define its guidelines, and organize its management, with an awareness that, more than creating policies, the challenge is to redefine the collective subject of active departmental construction, providing a meeting point for those shared concerns that give meaning to community links.
Strategic Departmental Plan for Science, Technology, and Innovation	This is a guiding instrument for implementing the department's own social and production model, supported by the generation, use, appropriation, and transfer of knowledge related to both the department's potential and its current situation. It focuses on adding value to products and services in production, social, economic, environmental, and cultural fields. It also aims to give rise to innovation for regional competitiveness and improved quality of life for the department's inhabitants.

Source: The authors.

For example, fish farming in the Cauca department began approximately 25 years ago. Processes of community organization and rural extension strategies conducted by different institutions over this time period have made it possible for fish farms to operate throughout the department, cultivating varied species, both native and introduced (CREPIC, 2010). This activity has found partnering to develop joint projects (see Table 12.2) with academia; in this sense the research will influence the carrying out of the activity. These projects focus on strengthening the stakeholders' ability to coordinate themselves, but also on searching for new ways that they can benefit through knowledge.

**Table 12.2** Joint projects in fish farming

Name of project	Year	Results
Comprehensive strengthening of the Fish Farming Network in the Silvia municipality, Cauca	2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Associativity and self-management</li> <li>• Social and business plan</li> <li>• Infrastructure for processes of production and processing</li> <li>• Environmental management practices</li> <li>• Trading strategies</li> </ul>
Fish farming alliance project to reactivate the economy of the Salvajina reservoir, Morales municipality	2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Associativity of small-scale rural producers</li> <li>• Improvement of production costs structure</li> <li>• Positioning product in a specific market</li> <li>• Environmental management</li> </ul>
Development of a pedagogical-productive proposal allowing young people to become involved in the region's economic development and improve living conditions for them and their environment	2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordination of pedagogical and productive components</li> <li>• Associativity</li> <li>• Micro-financing</li> <li>• Relationship with environment</li> </ul>
Program for cleaner production and environmental management in Cauca's fish farming sector	2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clean production</li> <li>• Environmental management for the fish farming sector</li> </ul>
Environmentally sustainable fish farming	2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development and adaptation of technology for treating fish farming effluent</li> <li>• Study, design, and evaluation of a fish-farming tank prototype</li> </ul>
Strengthening productivity in the primary link of Cauca's fish farming mini-chain	2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental production practices</li> <li>• Appropriating production technology to reduce costs and improve product quality</li> <li>• Creation and management of a project bank</li> </ul>
Improvement of production infrastructure for cultivating red tilapia in cages, for three associations of small producers in the Salvajina dam	2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintenance and repair of floating cages</li> <li>• Technical assistance in production</li> <li>• Systematizing the experience through a primer</li> </ul>
Obtaining extruded pellets on a pilot scale, as an alternative for utilizing fish farming by-products and strengthening the production capacity of fish farmers	2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a probiotic silage from fish farming by-products (pellet through probiotic extrusion)</li> <li>• Reduced production costs of food for fish and other animals</li> </ul>

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Name of project	Year	Results
Alternative uses of fish farming agro-industry by-products	2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Characterizing by-products of trout processing</li> <li>• Preparing fish silage</li> </ul>
Transactional communication for analyzing the relevance of social knowledge acquisition in open innovation for the Association of Small-Scale Rural Fish Producers (Apropesca)	2012 - 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transactional communication strategy that brings diverse views of accounts of social knowledge acquisition into play</li> <li>• Shared vision for developing the organization towards open innovation approaches</li> </ul>
Optimization of production and organizational processes for small aquacultural producers, implementing wireless sensor networks for critical indicators of water quality	2012 - 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Optimize the production process, orienting it towards the creation of products differentiated through cleaner production mechanisms</li> <li>• Mechanism for risk prevention and attention through the development of an early warning system</li> <li>• Organizational strategy for providing a timely response to events that alter optimal production conditions</li> </ul>

Source: Regional Competitiveness Models research group, adapted from Sánchez, 2009.

## Apropesca: An experience of social innovation in Cauca

*[...] innovativeness can no longer be seen as an individual competence, or even as the sum of a number of individual competencies: it must be seen as a social competence shared among social actors who are part of a number, perhaps a large number, of relevant practices.*

Engel, 1997, as cited in Cepal, 2008, p. 24.

Social innovation has as wide a range of meanings as it does fields of application; it is not limited to economics, but neither does it exclude it. These types of experiences have an impact on society because they satisfy the needs of social groups, solve problems that affect people's quality of life, and furthermore, they involve the whole society. This kind of innovation, according to Murray, Caulier, and Mulgan (2010), arises as a response to the most pressing issues of our times, such as poverty, exclusion, discrimination, and environmental problems, among others. These have not been attended to by the State, nor by private organizations, as the traditional tools of governmental politics, on one hand, and market solutions, on the other, have clearly shown to be inadequate.

Innovations in social issues often arise out of adverse conditions. Thus, the Cauca department—a region that is by no means immune to major social problems, with poverty affecting more than 46% of the population, and Unsatisfied Basic Needs (UBN) greater than 60% (DANE, 2011)—is not only a suitable breeding ground for social innovation, it is a territory where this innovation is urgently needed.

The different academic, business, and government stakeholders in the region are no strangers to this situation, and they are seeking solutions to the department's problems in a wide variety of settings. Many of the initiatives proposed have arisen from the participative creation of stakeholders, who are not only conscious of the critical social problems in the department, but also of the region's great potential. Furthermore, they are aware that being a multi-ethnic and multicultural region that is rich in knowledge makes it suitable for establishing its own local development strategy in the department. Thanks to these initiatives, Cauca is a space that is rich in community development experiences that have markedly improved the quality of life in the localities where they have been conducted.

In Cauca these experiences have helped resolve different social risk situations and, most importantly, have allowed the communities to participate in a liberating experience, as through these activities they undergo learning processes in which people feel that their self-esteem, confidence, and vision of the world are transformed. One of the most recognized experiences is that of the Association for the Production and Commercialization of Agricultural and Aquacultural Products in Silvia, Cauca (Apropesca). This is a productive association of 250 families from indigenous communities and the rural population, distributed among the Ambaló, Kizgó, Guambía, Quichaya, and Pitayó reservations, and three villages in the rural zone. The families are integrated across 45 active stations dedicated to consolidating fish farming as an option for improving living conditions.

Apropesca is an example of associativity in Cauca, and it is also one of the most relevant examples of what is achieved when the university, the State, the private sector, and the community work together. Since its inception, the organization has been supported by state entities such as the Municipal Unit of Technical-Agricultural Assistance (UMATA), the mayor's office, and indigenous councils in the Silvia municipality, and during its operation, it has had a close relationship with the universities, especially Universidad del Cauca and with research centers such as the Regional Center of Productivity and Innovation in Cauca (CREPIC). These institutions have been vital in strengthening Apropesca through projects financed by national bodies and international programs.

Furthermore, Apropesca is considered to be a social innovation experience in Cauca, because it meets the criteria that Cepal (2008) has established to define

an experience of this kind. According to this organization, the first criteria for a social innovation is that it “benefits a significant group of people, contributes to reducing poverty or to better quality of life for groups at social risk, and defends the right to a better environment” (Astorga, 2004, as cited in Cepal, 2008, p. 38).

Apropesca is made up of 250 indigenous and rural-dwelling families who benefit from the production and commercialization of trout, achieving better quality of life through this activity. Thanks to the establishment of the association, they have overcome crises such as that caused by the slump in fiqué sales, which many families who are now in Apropesca formerly depended on. Additionally, fish farming has given them an alternative to growing illegal crops such as poppies, which had already caused many social conflicts in the municipality.

Referring once again to the propositions put forward by Cepal, social innovation is genuine when it emerges from the interested parties themselves and their support organizations, in a verifiable process (Astorga, 2004, as cited in Cepal, 2008, p. 38).

Apropesca was formally established in 1999 with the assistance of entities such as UMATA, municipal councils, the municipal government, and the World Food Programme. But above all the initiative arose from the trout producers—they were the ones who identified the need to join together and found that this organization was the best way to grow, not only economically but also socially. In this sense, we are referring to an original experience whenever “it is not a repeated experience, but is not necessarily an invention” (Astorga, 2004, as cited in Cepal, 2008, p. 38).

The organizational form of Apropesca is its novel component, as the association has been able to organize its members and make them work together towards a common goal, despite their diverse ethnicities, some with conflicts due to land ownership, and different languages and customs. But through belonging to the association, they have managed to coexist, resolve their problems using dialogue, and keep the organization afloat. This is therefore an activity that is current; that is, recent and present (Astorga, 2004, as cited in Cepal, 2008, p. 38).

Apropesca is not a new experience; since its reopening in 2004, it has been operating for more than eight years, and it sees itself as an association that, in the long term, will seek to diversify its products and expand its market both domestically and internationally. It is therefore a consolidated experience, seeing as it has passed the experimentation phase (Astorga, 2004 as cited in Cepal, 2008, p. 38).

Apropesca began in 1999 and is an emblematic case in Cauca; nonetheless, it has had to overcome difficulties such as its closure between 2001 and 2003. This was mainly caused by factors such as lack of market and business knowledge, changes in the support conditions of government institutions, and the lack of working in partnership.

Since reopening in 2004, Apropesca has shown that the right decisions, training, and working in partnership are the keys to tackling the challenges that affect these types of companies in places like Colombia, where there is great ethnic, cultural, and also productive diversity. This leads us to the criterion of expansion, given that the experience could be reproduced in another place and/or on a larger scale (Astorga, 2004, as cited in Cepal, 2008, p. 38).

Apropesca's organizational model could feasibly be reproduced in another setting with similar conditions to this experience, where there are people grouped around a product who have the assistance of organizations that support them and, most importantly, where there is a will among the producers to form and maintain the organization.

This brings us to another criterion: transformation, given that it "has an impact with respect to social development variables such as costs, coverage, income, employment, participation, performance, culture, quality of life, management, and creation of new opportunities" (Astorga, 2004, as cited in Cepal, 2008, p. 38).

Beyond bringing together a group of trout producers to commercialize their product through associative strategies, the impact of Apropesca must be measured by the changes it has generated in its associates' quality of life. These changes are mainly reflected in the securing of a dignified source of income, but above all in the changed perception that the producers now have of themselves: they now value themselves as proactive individuals who work to provide a better life for themselves and their families. They are also a positive example for their region.

As a testimony to the transforming impact that Apropesca has had on the lives of its associates, the experience of Arsenio Hurtado Pechené, one of the founding members of the association, is presented below.

## Experience of Arsenio Hurtado, fish farmer in Silvia, Cauca, Colombia



Source: Nelson Fredy Osorio Andrade.

My name is Arsenio Hurtado Pechené, I am 52 years old, and I am my parents' third child. My parents are Eulogio Hurtado, who died when he was 39, and my mother Herminia Pechené, who is now 82. I'm the third child, my oldest brother is Julio Hurtado, he's followed by Marco Antonio Hurtado, I'm next, then after me comes another brother named Luis Carlos Hurtado, and, last, Jesús Hurtado, all of them still living. We were born here in the Silvia municipality in a village called Kizgó, which is a village and a reservation.

### What do you remember from your childhood?

Well, from my childhood I remember the example of my parents. They taught us that we had to work, that we had to be honest, that we had to work hard and think about our futures. I remember that we had to be extremely honest with things.

### And your adult life?

Until I was 20 years old I had a very tough life, but along the way I came across another opportunity that appeared before Apropesca. I fell in love with a Christian woman. I started to get to know her, I think we started to understand each other, and I went to her house and asked her parents for permission to marry her. She talked to me about God, about the Bible, and she invited me to the church and, very reluctantly, I started to go.

From there my life started to change. I stopped drinking, stopped lying, stopped hating. I didn't stop working, but, well, many things changed. I married her in a civil ceremony. We have three daughters, and we've been married for 22 years.

### What kind of work have you done, Arsenio?

I've been taught how to prepare the soil to plant corn and potatoes, how to burn coal, how to pull fique out of a shredder. The fique fiber that Empaques de Medellín, or Empaques del Cauca, or Hilanderías del Fonce used to buy from us, that was our work.

### And why did you decide to stop working with fique and move into fish farming?

Well, I think it's a nice story. Nice, because of the change of attitude in becoming a farmer. There was a big fique crisis. There were three companies, the ones from Medellín and Cauca and Hilanderías del Fonce, and the competition was very fierce. All the fique buyers in the municipality stored so much fique that in the end no one wanted to buy it and we had lots of problems. In Empaques de Cauca there were more than 200 producers, all with sacks of fique, and the same in Empaques de Medellín, the same in Hilanderías del Fonce, they had too much raw material. They didn't buy the product from us, and we couldn't use it either.

The Ministry of Agriculture was the one who gave us the idea that water wasn't only for washing fique. We could use it for productive projects, too. That was how a national project, a program called the WFP (World Food Programme), started here with fish farming and livestock projects, and the UMATAS in the Silvia municipality with the program of fish farming and technical assistance and training. I started getting involved in all this. I first understood it as us having the resources of soil and water, and the only thing I needed was to understand that this was a life project. When I understood that, it wasn't difficult. They didn't demand a high level of education; instead I received the training, the orientation, and I applied it just as they taught me, and we started seeing results.

### When did Apropesca start?

Apropesca started in 1994, when there was already enough trout here in Silvia. There were Guambianos, Kisgüeños, Jambalueños, and Pitagüeños here with jars of trout; there was trout everywhere. We started seeing prices where one person sold trout for 5,000 pesos and another for 4,000 and another for 3,000



and of course the one selling for 3,000 sold them quickest. So we realized that things had to change, because we were learning and we saw that we had to work together, organize ourselves. That's how we started meetings between the Jambalúeños, the Kisgüeños, the Pitagüeños, the Guambianos, and the country people. We started to meet and talk about an association just for fish farming, and we saw that if we were organized it could work well for us. We felt supported by the councils, we felt supported by the municipal government, because they said that if we were organized they would pay more attention to us, that our lives would be better, and that's how the organization started.

### **What is it like to belong to an organization where diverse cultures mix?**

Well, you have to live and put things behind you, like breaking down barriers. There were rules that said that a Nasa couldn't pass through here, or a Guambiano couldn't go there. I think we make these barriers ourselves, because we make rules and boundaries. I lived in a time like that, it was very serious. I mean, you would never see a Kisgüeño in a Pitayo reservation, or a Kisgüeño in a Guambia reservation, or a country person here in this reservation—it was impossible. I started to realize that we human beings put up the barriers that are sometimes hard to knock down, but we have to set ourselves the goal of doing it, we have to make ourselves aware and understand that we're all human beings and we put the barriers there ourselves. If I put a barrier up, I can also knock it down. And that's what we did in Apropesca. We said, we've had our problems, our difficulties, but we're going to knock down those barriers—that's why we formed this organization. Today we have country people, Nasas, Guambianos, speaking different languages, and we respect each other's clothes. We respect each other.

### **How has your life changed since becoming a member of Apropesca?**

A lot of it has to do with being able to train myself in this organization, first because I learned to live with people who aren't from the community and communicate with them, to have that trust. And for me, Apropesca was like finishing primary school, doing secondary school and, I'd say, doing a university degree, because I've met professionals there who I have learned a lot of things from, and it's been very interesting for me.

## How do you feel about your work and about belonging to Apropesca?

I feel very committed to my work. I know that with every step I take I'm being watched, so there I feel very committed. I know that I'm in this business and there are principles of people's word, honesty, sincerity, and it doesn't cost money, but it does take effort from us to, let's say, manage it, and maintain it... I feel very committed to that.

Almost 80% of the population in this municipality is indigenous, and there are outsiders who say, "Let's go to that municipality because there are indigenous people there." But they're not going to find poorly trained indigenous people; they're going to find people who are trained and have the ability to take on any challenge that comes up, and not just talk about it but do it.

## Conclusions

- Social innovation practices have become an important factor in promoting community processes in which the communities gain awareness of their own problems and unite to seek a collective solution. The empowerment and participation of the people directly affected by the problem are essential in these experiences; likewise, it is also essential to have the support of external institutions with the technical or financial capacity to initiate or strengthen initiatives that seek to generate social value for a group of people.
- Social innovation processes in Cauca are based on placing value on local knowledge, and defending and utilizing it. Although it is still a new topic in academic, public, and productive settings, the support that these sectors provide to promote and strengthen this type of innovation—so relevant in places like Cauca—is essential in order for it to become a viable means of generating local development, which is understood as well-being and equity for the entire population.

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