

RENEWING UNION AND HOPE IN A COMMUNITY OF MOCOA, COLOMBIA

By Ximena Combariza Echeverri

Description of the Situation

On the night of March 31 and the dawn of April 1, 2017, a great natural disaster occurred in the city of Mocoa, capital of the Department of Putumayo, located in the Amazon region, in southern Colombia. Heavy rains caused the overflow of three rivers, generating landslides and mudflows and huge rocks in several sectors of the city. This avalanche destroyed numerous houses, bridges and other constructions, which dragged hundreds of people, animals and vehicles in their path. 17 of the 40 neighborhoods of the city were destroyed, some totally destroyed. Authorities reported at least 330 people died, more than 400 wounded, 69 missing and more than 20,000 homeless. However, many people in the community calculate the total number of deaths in about 1000 people.

The Intervention

In response to this disaster and with the purpose of establishing cooperation networks that would allow us to contribute with the communities affected by it, volunteers from GFSC in Colombia established an alliance with a Mocoa local NGO, the CORPORATION CASA AMAZONÍA. Thanks to this organization, we were able to carry out, among other activities to support the community, a training work-



shop for facilitators and community leaders, in the Psychosocial Recovery Post-Disaster and Crisis Model of GFSC, to which we refer in this story. This workshop was facilitated by Juan Ricardo Orduz G. and Ximena Combariza E., voluntary facilitators of GFSC, and was attended by 26 people, mostly women and several of them belonging to local indigenous communities. Many of the participants had lost members of their families and/or their homes or means of subsistence in this disaster.

Summary of Results

At the end of the workshop, all the people repeatedly expressed to the facilitators and the organizers their gratitude for having had the opportunity to participate in this activity, said they felt better about the losses they had lived and with new desires to work to move forward, through the projects groups that they designed, such as: "The Mocoa Resilient Network" and "The Family Integration Project".



The facilitators were able to observe, at the end of this activity, many expressions of joy, affection and mutual support among the participants. It was very touching to see them and listen to them singing in unison and with smiles on their faces various local songs referring to the love of their own land and to hope.

We also know that the CASA AMAZONIA work team has given support and follow-up to the aforementioned projects, as well as has helped these people in obtaining basic resources to restart their productive activities, all of which have contributed to the emotional and social recovery of these local leaders and their families.

Reflection of the Author

This experience allowed me to observe, once again, the great capacity of resilience that human beings have. Although in some people this capacity seems to be hidden or weakened, it reappears and is strengthened by having the opportunity to recognize it, in the midst of a safe emotional environment, such as a workshop of this type, in which people can feel accompanied, supported and identified with others who live similar situations.

I could also confirm that promoting the search for post-disaster recovery as a community and not individually is a powerful factor in healing and disposition to action in search of lost well-being.

The Author

I am Colombian, Psychologist of basic formation, with postgraduate studies in Clinical Psychology, Systemic Group Therapy and Human Management. I have had an extensive experience as a psychotherapist, university teacher and facilitator and organizational consultant, and I have worked in Colombia and several Latin American countries. I am a founding member of the Latin American Association of Facilitators - ALFA. I have been a Volunteer of Global Facilitators Serving Communities GFSC since 2011 and currently a Board member. I have had the opportunity to contribute to the process of psychosocial recovery of communities affected by natural disasters and other crises in several Latin American countries, so I am increasingly aware of the need for support for people affected by major crises. In addition, I have been a lucky witness of the resilience capacity that all human beings have.



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