

Entry and Abandonment of Illicit Crops: Motivations and Change of Life¹

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This study examines the motivations of coca-growing families to enter and abandon illicit crops and remain lawful. It uses qualitative interviews with Alternative Development (AD) participants, complemented by quantitative data. Findings show entry is driven by economic survival, while staying legal seeks family and community well-being. This highlights the need to restructure anti-drug strategies to ensure livelihoods and strengthen social ties.

Keywords: illicit crops, alternative development, family motivations, economic decisions, community social capital

Entrada e abandono de culturas ilícitas: Motivações e mudança de vida Este estudo analisa as motivações das famílias produtoras de coca para entrar e abandonar culturas ilícitas e permanecer na legalidade. Realizou-se uma análise qualitativa de entrevistas com participantes do Desenvolvimento Alternativo (DA), complementada por dados quantitativos. Constatou-se que a entrada decorre da sobrevivência econômica, enquanto a permanência legal busca bem-estar familiar e comunitário, exigindo reestruturar a estratégia antidrogas para garantir meios de vida e fortalecer laços sociais.

Palavras-chave: cultivos ilícitos, desenvolvimento alternativo, motivações familiares, decisões econômicas, capital social comunitário

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the efforts and resources invested in the control of illicit crops for more than 70 years (GOOTENBERG, 2012), some countries could consider such efforts ineffective, such is the case of Colombia, where after almost four decades, illicit crops persist and have tripled in the number of hectares, extending to 20 of the 32 departments of the country², with the departments of Nariño, Putumayo and Norte de Santander being the ones with the most significant presence of illicit crops. Therefore, the war against illegal acts is lost, and a reorientation of this is necessary³ (BEDOYA, 2017; SANTOS, 2017; SPELLBERG; KAPLAN, 2010; ZULETA, 2017).

Over the years, the implementation of Alternative Development (AD) as the second component of the anti-drug policy has generated social, political, and economic shocks between the different actors involved around illicit crops (coca-growing families, public forces, and

illegal armed groups). Therefore, it can be inferred that the intervention of the DA, both in its previous processes (eradication of crops) and in the implementation (execution of projects), produced unwanted changes in the environment, affecting the environment, economic relations, productive of the territories and ecosystems of the regions, evidencing a disarticulation of the design and implementation of the strategy with the reality experienced in the territories (CORREA, 2009; DÁVALOS; BEJARANO; OJEDA, 2011; REBOLLEDO-CASTILLO, 2018).

However, given the persistence of illicit crops, evaluations of the effectiveness of the anti-drug strategy have been carried out from different approaches with which it is intended to respond to the factors that involve the problem of illicit drugs, such as the case of the effects on the bird and tree population, the contamination of water bodies and the impact on the amphibian population, as well as the effects due to the use of agrochemicals (ÁLVAREZ, 2002; BARRERA-RAMÍREZ; PRADO; SOLHEIM, 2019; BRAIN; SOLOMON, 2009; CHADID *et al.*, 2015; DÁVALOS; BEJARANO; CORREA, 2009; REBOLLEDO-CASTILLO; ALEGRÍA-CASTELLANOS; GÓMEZ FLÓREZ, 2024).

Additionally, there are analyses of the health effects of illicit growing families as an adverse effect of glyphosate fumigation showing an increase in medical consultations related to dermatological problems, respiratory diseases, and abortions (CAMACHO; MEJÍA, 2017; OJEDA, 2011). Also, some analyses reveal increases in violence rates (selective homicides, kidnappings, and displacements) (ABADIE *et al.*, 2015; ANGRIST; KUGLER, 2008; DELL, 2015; FRANZ, 2016; MEJÍA; RESTREPO, 2016; MIRON, 1999, 2001; QUINTERO; RESTREPO, 2009).

On the other hand, some studies address the reduction in the number of hectares of illicit crops, showing that the policy has not achieved satisfactory results in this matter (ABADIE *et al.*, 2015; ANDERSON, 2017; CAMACHO; MEJÍA, 2017; CARRIER; KLANTSCHNIG, 2016; DÁVALOS; BEJARANO; CORREA, 2009; DEFENSORÍA DEL PUEBLO, 2017; FRANZ, 2016; GIBSON; GODOY, 1993; GOOTENBERG, 2012; GRISAFFI; LEDEBUR, 2016; IBÁÑEZ; CARLSSON, 2010; KREUTZMANN, 2007; LU, 2017; MEJÍA; RESTREPO; ROZO, 2012; MEJÍA; RESTREPO, 2013; MEJÍA; RESTREPO, 2016; MIRÓN, 1999, 2001; RESTREPO PARRA; VALENCIA AGUDELO, 2021; ROUSE; ARCE, 2006; SPELLBERG; KAPLAN, 2010; TABARES; ROSALES, 2005), and when a reduction has occurred it has not been significant, instead it has caused a balloon effect that moves crops to new lands (ABADIE *et al.*, 2015; GRISAFFI; LEDEBUR, 2016; ROUSE; ARCE, 2006).

Some analyses evaluate the effects on the economy of households, regions, and the country: it has been found that prohibition and forced eradication generate more significant economic income for the cultivation and trafficking of drugs (CARRIER; KLANTSCHNIG, 2016; KREUTZMANN, 2007; MEJÍA; RESTREPO, 2013). At the same time, the DA represents a decrease in the income of growers (ANDERSON, 2017; BARRERA-RAMÍREZ; PRADO; SOLHEIM, 2019) due to the absence of productive lines that incorporate added value and more significant economic surpluses

(SPELLBERG; KAPLAN, 2010). Furthermore, the violence that arises from illicit crops generates limitations to the economic growth of the regions (FRANZ, 2016).

On the other hand, there is a group that evaluates the anti-drug policy from the perspective of the participants in the DA programs, valuing positive aspects: the status of citizens and not criminals, the possibility of accessing state financial resources and cooperation (OJEDA, 2011), strengthening of associativity, recovery of collaborative cultural practices, promotion of environmentally conservative practices (OJEDA, 2011; REBOLLEDO-CASTILLO, 2017). Negative aspects include planning productive activities without consultation with the community, the lack of sustainability of productive initiatives, and the absence of markets for commercialization (OJEDA, 2011; REBOLLEDO-CASTILLO, 2017).

Finally, an analysis of the motivations of families to enter illicit crops can be evidenced, showing that the effects on income (GARCIA-YI, 2014), poverty (IBAÑEZ; CARLSSON, 2010; OJEDA, 2011), and the stability of the illicit market (DÁVALOS; BEJARANO; CORREA, 2009) are the main motivations of families for their involvement in This activity. However, there are others, such as the type of land, more significant profits in illicit crops (GARCIA-YI, 2014), previous experiences in coca cultivation, religion, legitimacy of the authorities, moral values of the growers, and distance to the marketing centers (IBAÑEZ; CARLSSON, 2010). Also, it is identified that the community organization establishes barriers to the entry of illicit crops (social capital) (LOBO *et al.*, 2020; LOBO; VÉLEZ, 2022).

Given the above, this research aims to answer the question: *What are the motivations of coca-growing families for entering and subsequently abandoning illicit crops, as well as for remaining in lawful activity in Colombia?* To this end, the objective has been proposed to analyze the motivations of coca-growing families for entering and subsequently abandoning illicit crops and the motivations for remaining in the lawful activity.

The above, using the qualitative method (SANZ, 2013; SPENCER; RITCHIE; O'CONNOR, 2003) and based on the statement about Garcia-Yi (2014), is the difficulty of discovering factors that affect the decision to grow coca based on aggregate information. A semi-structured interview is designed as an instrument for collecting information (KATAYAMA OMURA, 2014; KVALE, 2011; SANZ, 2013; VERD; LOZARES, 2016), which is applied to 21 community leaders participating in different DA programs in the departments of Nariño, Putumayo, and Norte de Santander. Additionally, the process is complemented by the descriptive analysis of quantitative variables resulting from a survey of 186 participants from different DA programs from 2003 to 2021.

The qualitative method allows "...to reconstruct reality, as observed by the actors..." (HERNÁNDEZ *et al.*, 2010, p. 9). Additionally, it is considered that "the qualitative approach evaluates the natural development of events, that is, there is no manipulation or stimulation regard to reality" (CORBETTA, 2003 *apud* SAMPIERI HERNÁNDEZ *et al.*, 2010, p. 9). Giving

this analysis “...interpretive richness, contextualization of the environment or surroundings, details and unique experiences (SAMPIERI HERNÁNDEZ *et al.*, 2010, p. 17).” For all the above, this method offers significant advantages, compared to other types of analysis, in terms of the scope and depth that can be achieved of the topic under study, that is, the motivations of families for entering and abandoning the activity. It is implicit, as well as for permanence in legality. Also, a retrospective design is included (FLICK, 2007) since it seeks to know aspects of the past of the phenomenon studied (AD). Therefore, it consists of an analysis period of more than 18 years.

The result showed that entering illicit crops is a decision for the economic survival of families. At the same time, the connection to the DA occurs as a decision to seek family well-being, community security, and territorial peace, motivations that persist in the decision of families to remain in legal activities. These results would indicate the need to restructure the strategy to combat illicit crops and especially the DA, in terms of its scope and guarantees of livelihood for illicit-growing families, allowing them to have a better quality of life, in addition to strengthening community and family relationships, providing more excellent roots for families in lawful life.

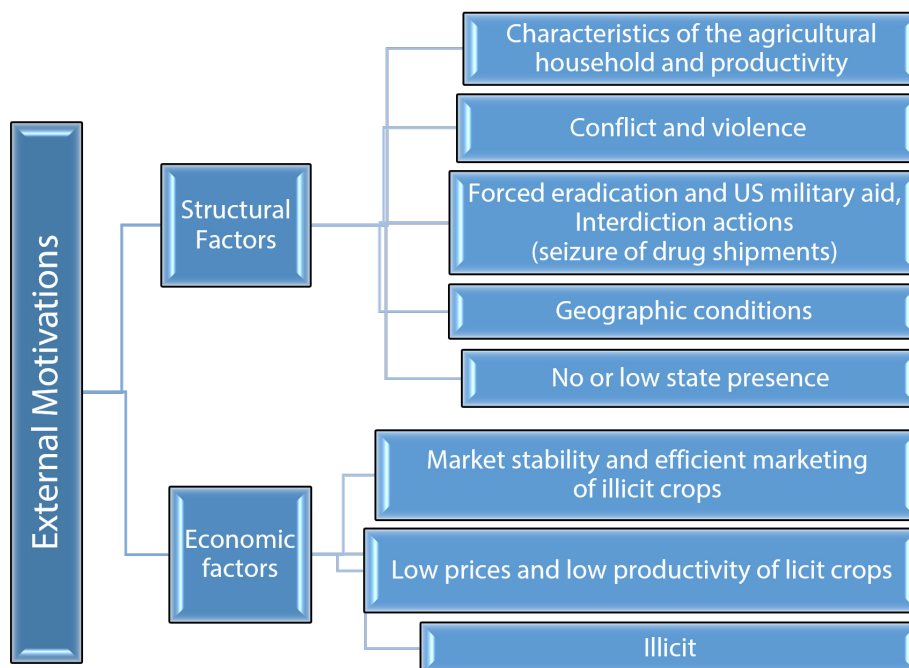
With this research, a contribution is made to the understanding of the phenomenon of illicit crops from the scope of analysis of the motivations that induce families to enter this activity, providing an approach that has not been explored until now: the motivations for joining the DA, and for maintaining a life of legality. This contribution is of great value when considering that “... few studies evaluate the individual motivations of farmers to grow coca...” (GARCIA-YI, 2014, p. 2) and that understanding these motivations allows us to know which factors should be addressed by the Colombian State both with the DA, as with its complementary programs, in such a way that its permanence in legal life can be guaranteed.

The rest of the chapter is organized as follows. Section (i) presents the Literature Review. Section (ii) presents the Research Methodology. Section (iii) reviews the main results of the qualitative analysis. Finally, section (iv) presents the main conclusions and recommendations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

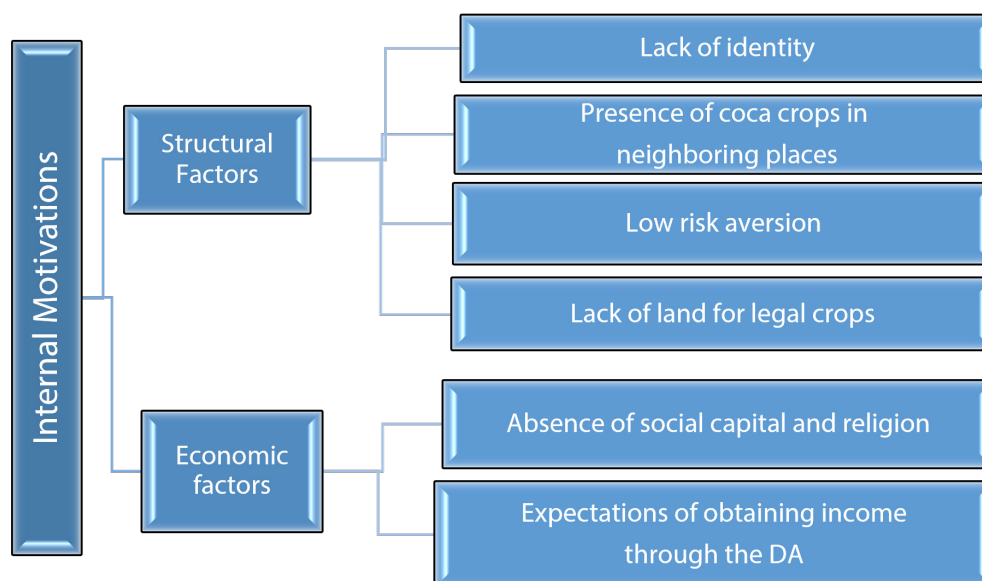
The motivations that have led families to cultivate illicit crops can be classified as external and internal: in the first are the aspects that the families do not control, and in the second group are the detailed elements associated with factors that could be controlled. By families or is closely linked to their life experiences. These motivations are subdivided into structural and economic factors (Figure 1 and Figure 2).

Figure 1 - External motivations of coca-growing families to engage in illicit crops



Source: Own elaboration, based on literature review

Figure 2 - Internal motivations of coca-growing families to engage in illicit crops



Source: Own elaboration, based on literature review

2.1 External structural factors that motivate entry into illicit crops

- Characteristics of the home and production: These include technology, productive and economic returns, production cost, and road infrastructure of illegal crops

(GARCIA-YI, 2014). In addition to the extent of coca cultivation, previous experience in cultivation, and the distance to marketing centers (IBAÑEZ; CARLSSON, 2010).

- Armed conflict and violence: illegal armed groups create an environment conducive to the expansion of illicit activities (DÍAZ ESCOBAR; SÁNCHEZ TORRES, 2004; TABARES; ROSALES, 2005).
- Forced eradication, US military aid, and interdiction actions: in the medium and long term, they become an incentive to expand illicit activity toward new territories. Persecution encourages searching for new drug production alternatives (balloon effect), extending crops to new territories (ROUSE; ARCE, 2006).
- Geographic conditions include climate, height above sea level, and access facilities for transportation and marketing typical of an illegal market: unguarded roads close to populated centers (IBAÑEZ; CARLSSON, 2010; RIPOLL; BERRÍO; RUBIANO, 2013).
- No or low state presence: it implies an absence of the state apparatus, institutions, and public forces, in addition to health, education, and other institutions (RIPOLL; BERRÍO; RUBIANO, 2013).

2.2 Economic factors that motivate entry into illicit crops

- Market stability and efficient commercialization of illicit crops: stability in the price of illegal crops is identified (DÁVALOS; BEJARANO; CORREA, 2009; OJEDA, 2011). Additionally, being able to market illicit production at any time of the year allows us to respond to unforeseen events: accidents, illnesses, celebrations, investments in legal crops, land acquisition, and payment of debts (GARCIA-YI, 2014; OJEDA, 2011).
- Low prices and low productivity of legal production: the need to comply with phytosanitary and quality standards requires investments in infrastructure, machinery, and land, which would not be within the reach of local producers (DÁVALOS; BEJARANO; CORREA, 2009).
- Demand for illicit crops: the existence of local buyers indirectly motivates the planting of illegal crops, which would have a secure purchase (RIPOLL; BERRÍO; RUBIANO, 2013).

2.3 Internal structural factors that motivate entry into illicit crops

- Absence of identity: it is related to the person's assessment of himself, added to his moral standards, which influence decision-making in social and economic situations.

Additionally, the pride of belonging to an ethnic group or any form of social organization could prevent the incursion of illicit crops (GARCIA-YI, 2014).

- The presence of coca crops in neighboring places: illicit crops in nearby places (municipalities, departments, countries) arouses interest in families (ROUSE; ARCE, 2006; TABARES; ROSALES, 2005). Even more so when considering the apparent well-being of those already involved in the illicit activity (coca bonanzas).
- Previous experience in coca crops includes aspects of technical knowledge in cultivation and socio-legal and security risks of the territory (IBAÑEZ; CARLSSON, 2010).
- Low-risk aversion considers the loss of fear of eradication, economic losses, or judicial problems, preventing desist from planting illicit crops and reducing the amount of land allocated for cultivation (IBAÑEZ; CARLSSON, 2010; TABARES; ROSALES, 2005).

2.4 Economic factors that motivate entry into illicit crops

- Religion and absence of social capital: the non-existence of solid social capital reduces the possibility of control mechanisms that would reduce territories' vulnerability to illicit crops (IBAÑEZ; CARLSSON, 2010; OJEDA, 2011). On the side of religion, coca cultivation has been associated with people of non-Protestant religious affiliation (IBAÑEZ; CARLSSON, 2010; IBAÑEZ; KLASSEN, 2017).
- Expectations of obtaining income through illicit crop substitution programs: the arrival of the DA creates expectations of obtaining economic and technical aid through the programs, making it attractive to maintain, increase, and venture into illicit crops (MEJÍA; VARGAS, 2019; TABARES; ROSALES, 2005).

3. METHODOLOGY

This research seeks to identify the motivations of coca-growing families in their decisions to enter and abandon illicit crops and their motivations for remaining legal. Which classifies it as descriptive (HERNÁNDEZ; FERNÁNDEZ; BAPTISTA, 2010; SANZ, 2013). Therefore, a qualitative empirical strategy was proposed, strengthened with the descriptive analysis of quantitative variables (VERD; LOZARES, 2016). In this way, although this research cannot be classified as mixed type, the characteristics and advantages of said method are taken advantage of and applied by combining qualitative analysis with the description of quantitative variables and having a multi-strategic vision of the study phenomenon (LOZARES; MARTÍN-ARTILES;

LÓPEZ-ROLDÁN, 1998; VANRELL, 2017). They integrate the results of the inferences from the qualitative and quantitative perspectives (CRESWELL; TASHAKKORI, 2007). This is how, with the construction of a mixed perspective, is expected to consider the object of study from different points of view and under different dimensions of analysis (BIDART; CACCIUTTOLO, 2013).

Primary information was used from the participants of the main DA programs in different regions of the country, meaning that this sample is not due to a random selection (FLICK, 2007). Because according to Corbetta (2007) qualitative analysis, it is not necessary for the sample to be representative or random since substantive and not statistical representativeness is sought⁴. This has also been established by Verd and Lozares (2016, p. 113), who points out that “...qualitative research is characterized by working with a small number of information units, which are never chosen by statistical sampling criteria...”.

This implies that, with the approach of this model, a statistical generalization is not intended, that is, the identification of “...the frequency with which a phenomenon or behavior occurs within a population...” based on the establishment of a degree of error and significance. Instead, what is sought is to achieve an “...analytical generalization, which refers to the possibility of improving the understanding and explanation of phenomena linked to how and why questions (VERD; LOZARES, 2016, p. 114)”. Due to this, we sought to have three fundamental principles of a qualitative research sample: **a)** variation of the sample, **b)** cases according to the intensity of the traits, processes, and experiences, and **c)** cases in which the experience and processes are more precise, (expert opinion) (FLICK, 2007).

For this reason, the community leaders who accompanied the implementation of DA programs were taken as the focus group. As participants in the programs, they exercised recognized leadership in their community. That is to say, we understand community leaders to be the legal representatives of the community councils, in the case of the Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizales, and Palenqueras (NARP) communities, and the presidents or directors of governing boards, community action boards, foundations, and associations, in the case of peasant communities. Therefore, this is a non-probabilistic or directed sample selection (HERNÁNDEZ; FERNÁNDEZ; BAPTISTA, 2010).

In other words, sampling is carried out for convenience in developing the research (FLICK, 2007, pp. 50-51; PATTON, 2002). However, we tried to have two key aspects: representativeness and variety (MILES; HUBERMAN, 1994, p. 28). The first is in terms of the participants' life stories, and the second is in the participation of families in DA programs. Likewise, we sought to have variety in terms of the regions with the highest coca production in the country (the departments of Nariño, Putumayo, and Norte de Santander). The interviews were carried out between June and October 2021.

These regions comprise a particular case and, at the same time, representative of the entire population of the country: as evidenced in the SIDCO database of the Colombian Drug Observatory⁵,

the money invested in DA projects and programs within the framework of the anti-drug policy totals more than \$378.560.573,571 millions of Colombian pesos, between 2003 and 2016, these investments represent 29.23% of the total investments made throughout the country during the period. On the other hand, the total number of families served by the DA in these departments amounted to 29.46% of the country's total. Finally, the departments represent a little less than half of the total number of hectares of coca leaf crops between 2003 and 2016, that is, 44.16%.

3.1 Information sources and data collection process

According to Garcia-Yi (2014, p. 2), "...aggregated information makes it difficult to discover the behavioral factors that affect the decision to grow coca...". For this reason, in this research, semi-directed interviews of a biographical nature were used by Katayama Omura (2014), Kvale (2011), Sanz (2013), Verd and Lozares (2016) as an instrument for collecting information, complemented with surveys. The two instruments are applied to DA program participants between 2003 and 2021 in the departments of Nariño, Putumayo, and Norte de Santander. Therefore, the sample selection is not formal (FLICK, 2007), but the combination of instruments allowed a statistical comparison.

However, the high rates of violence and homicides of social leaders⁶ made it not easy to encounter those who have participated in DA programs. For this reason, to achieve the establishment of a degree of trust that allows a frank dialogue in the case of interviews and the obtaining of truthful information in the case of surveys, contact with the respondents and interviewees needed to be done through trusted people (technicians who had carried out fieldwork in the DA and community council organizations of the Black Afro-Colombian Raizal Palenquera population (NARP).

From these two sources, a process of obtaining information using the snowball technique begins⁷; "...this sampling model is beneficial for the study of clandestine populations..." that is, "...social groups whose members, for ethical, legal, ideological or political reasons, tend to hide their identity..." (CORBETTA, 2007, p. 288).

The process allowed interviewing the leaders of the DA programs in the following municipalities: El Peñol, El Rosario, San José de Alban and Tumaco in the Department of Nariño, San Miguel and Puerto Asís in the Department of Putumayo, Sardinata in the Department of Norte de Santander. Achieving a saturation number, according to (SONEIRA, 2006), from 21 interviews with social leaders participating in the Forest Guard Family Programs (PFGB), the Comprehensive National Program for the Substitution of Illicit Crops (PNIS), and others such as Col/K53 (Table 1). On the survey side, a population of 186 DA participants was reached, and the same number of surveys were applied (Table 2). The interviews are used only for those who identify as social leaders during the DA, while the surveys are applied to the other participants.

Table 1. Interviews conducted with social leaders participating in the DA and identification codes used in the data

Interviewee Code	Gender	Range Age	Civil status	Department	Municipality	Education	PDA
01	M	40 - 50	Single	Nariño	Tumaco	Technical	PFGB
02	M	40 - 50	Single	Nariño	Tumaco	Technical	PFGB
03	M	60 - 70	Married	Nariño	Saint Joseph of Alban	Bachelor	PFGB
04	M	30 - 40	Free Union	Nariño	Tumaco	Bachelor	PNIS
05	M	40 - 50	Free Union	Nariño	Tumaco	Technical	PNIS
06	F	80 - 90	Widow	Nariño	Tumaco	Primary	PNIS
07	M	50 - 60	Married	Putumayo	San Miguel	Technical	PFGB
08	M	30 - 40	Married	Nariño	Tumaco	Primary	PNIS
09	M	30 - 40	Married	Putumayo	Puerto Asís	Technical	Others
10	M	60 - 70	Free Union	Nariño	Tumaco	Primary	PNIS
11	M	40 - 50	Free Union	Nariño	Tumaco	Professional	Others
12	M	40 - 50	Married	Nort of Santander	Sardinata	Bachelor	PFGB
13	M	50 - 60	Free Union	Nariño	Tumaco	Bachelor	PFGB
14	M	40 - 50	Free Union	Nariño	Tumaco	Primary	PNIS
15	M	50 - 60	Free Union	Nariño	Tumaco	Primary	PNIS
16	M	60 - 70	Married	Nariño	El Peñol	Primary	PFGB
17	M	40 - 50	Free Union	Nariño	Tumaco	Technical	PFGB
18	M	50 - 60	Free Union	Nariño	Tumaco	Primary	Col/K53
19	M	30 - 40	Free Union	Nariño	Tumaco	Technical	Others
20	M	60 - 70	Free Union	Nariño	Tumaco	Primary	PNIS
21	M	30 - 40	Free Union	Nariño	Tumaco	Bachelor	PNIS

Source: Own elaboration, based on interview data.

Table 2. Surveys of participants in DA programs and projects

Department	GIVES	Amount	%	Men	%	Women	%
Nariño	PFGB	23	12.9%	15	65.2%	8	34.7%
	PNIS	140	78.6%	77	55%	63	45%
	Col/K53	13	7.3%	6	46.1%	7	53.8%
	Others	5	2.8%	2	40%	3	60%
Total		178	100%	100	56.6%	81	45.5%
Putumayo	PFGB	3	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	PNIS	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	Col/K53	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	Others	5	100%	3	60%	2	40%
Total		5	100%	3	60%	2	40%
Nariño-Putumayo	PFGB	23	12.9%	15	65.2%	8	34.7%
	PNIS	140	78.6%	77	55%	63	45%
	Col/K53	13	7.3%	6	46.1%	7	53.8%
	Others	10	5.3%	5	50%	5	50%
Total		186	100%	103	53.3%	83	44.6%

Source: Own elaboration based on survey data.

3.2 Essential characteristics of the population and the sample

This is a population linked to illicit activity. Therefore, there is no record or characterization of this. However, in the different drug reports issued by UNODC, illicit coca crops in Colombia are established in various rural areas, covering natural park territories, community councils of the Black, Afro-Colombian Raizales and Palenqueras communities, indigenous councils, and areas with peasant populations (UNODC, 2005, 2008, 2017, 2019). These populations have idiosyncratic and cultural characteristics that are very different from each other. However, they have common sociodemographic factors, such as the low presence of State institutions, precarious provision of health services, homes without essential water and sewage services, and absence of communication routes. Regarding illicit crops, 100% of the population owns between one and ten hectares of coca crops (UNODC, 2019).

3.3 Information collection process

This process was carried out under exceptional circumstances adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic: social distancing and limitations on land travel in the first quarter of 2020. The social outbreak of protests and national strikes were added. September - October 2020 and April - May 2021. The interview process began by telephone in May 2021, and in September and October 2021, in-person interviews will be held in the municipality of Tumaco.

The semi-structured interviews comprised seven sections: **a)** Primary sociodemographic data (age, marital status, educational level, etc.). **b)** Origins, reasons for inclusion in DA programs, and history. **c)** Personal presentation and what you currently do. **d)** Problems related to pre-DA productive activity and post-DA productive activity. **e)** Professional situation (and technical-productive training) before participation in the DA. **f)** Relationship between the training path and entry into the DA (displacement to current productive activity). **g)** Provide a definition of the trajectory and the perception of families about their participation in DA projects.

3.4 Ethical aspects

The information from the interviews and surveys was collected in written form. However, as has already been mentioned, some of these were carried out by telephone call, which was recorded. In each of them, the content of the informed consent was read, disclosing the objectives of the research and procedures of the study, as well as the voluntariness of their participation. Likewise, it was made clear to the participants that names and direct identifiers would be anonymized and eliminated from the research report, as would all confidential information about the participants that would allow their individualization obtaining their authorization to collect their personal information and record their testimonies. Thus, the ethical standards for research with human subjects were met.

3.5 Analysis of the information

With the help of special software for qualitative studies, such as Atlas Ti (ninth version), the information collected in the 21 interviews was analyzed. Based on Holton (2008, pp. 81-87), Saldaña (2009), Soneira (2006, pp. 156-157) and Spencer *et al.* (2003, pp. 203-208), the coding process of the different fragments of the interviewees' response text was carried out, achieving 126 descriptive codes of information signaling, of which 44 were selected for the analysis of the objective of this research. Following the procedure established by Galeano Marín (2004, p. 54), Holton (2008, pp. 78-87), Navarrete (2011, p. 54) Saldaña (2009, pp. 9-12) and Spencer *et al.* (2003, pp. 201-203), the categories of analysis described in the literature review were considered, grouping the codes into three categories, the first two external and internal motivations for both entering illicit crops and abandoning them, and the third motivation to remain in the legal activity (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

4. RESULTS

When referring to the interviewees' testimonies, these will be mentioned in brackets and with the code described in Table 1, that is, values from [01 to 21]. Continuing with the categories identified in the literature review, the motivations for entering illicit crops are grouped into external and internal, which present structural and economic factors.

4.1 External motivations of coca-growing families for entering the cultivation of illicit crops

4.1.1 Structural factors

Poverty and economic marginality: Sometimes, it is attributed to government policies such as economic openness [16]. In a complementary manner, the lack of State support for the establishment of productive initiatives is mentioned [01, 02, 04, 05, 06, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20], an absence of comprehensive rural agrarian reform (RRI) [04, 18], and the absence of roads (roads to transport legal production) "...it was tough to unload a load of corn and it didn't work, it was tough" [07].

4.1.2 Economic factors

Arguments stand out that are related to the low prices of licit productions [05, 07, 21], the low productivity of licit crops [08], the lack of a market [07], plus the high prices of the coca leaf [05, 07, 11, 13], which made the promise of more significant income amid illicit crops a great attraction [12, 18] "...one who lacks resources, it was seen that coca was an advantage for one to study their children

and since there were no government presence and lack of policy for rural development...” [18] “... well, more than one person is sold the idea that they can earn a lot of money quickly...” [12].

4.2 Internal motivations of coca-growing families to start planting illicit crops

4.2.1 Economic factors

The motivations that are related to the generation of income for families, the lack of land for licit crops [4], the low productivity of traditional licit crops, and the high price of illicit crops compared to licit production [10] stand out, eleven]. Social capital is also added to this group, that is, relationships with the community, family, and friends [04, 11, 18]. Although the decision to enter illicit crops is not made in the community, the environment influences individual choices in the medium and long term, as mentioned by the interviewee [11], “for working with my brother who was interested in that activity.”

On the other hand, in the quantitative analysis of the motivations for entering illicit crops, it is identified that in a little more than 84%⁸, the motivations of the respondents are directly related to the economic factor: 31.1% poverty and economic marginality, followed by the lack of financial and productive support from the State, with 26.7%. In third and fourth place, the interviewees mention the excellent prices of illicit crops and, adversely, the low prices of legal products; the first with 16.3% and the second with 10.14%. Finally, 8.4% of those interviewed mention that their initial motivation for entering the crime is due to the previous involvement of their family and friends.

4.3 External motivations to abandon illicit crops and enter Alternative Development programs

4.3.1 Structural Factors

This group includes the different forms of organization in rural territories: community councils, in the case of the Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizales, and Palenqueras (NARP) communities. Government boards, community action boards, and associations, in the case of peasant communities. Each of these constituted a favorable scenario of socialization and motivation for the families to decide to enter the DA, regardless of whether they are convinced of the need to change productive activity or if they just do not want to interfere in the decisions made by the majority in the community [01, 02, 03, 05, 06, 08, 09, 10, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21].

On the other hand, the interviewees show that in their decisions there was a genuine interest in the well-being of their families “For the tranquility of my family and my safety” [18] as well as for the community and the future of their populations, “For the safety of my family and the community” [07 and 16], “There was a lot of crime, there were many deaths and violence” [16] seeking “... to demonstrate to the community itself and the new generations that it was possible to change to new legal technologies and crops.... We said because there is no coca in other parts and they live well” [07, 03].

Also, the mayors and governorates stand out for their role as articulators of the DA programs and dialogue with the central government, in addition to raising awareness among families to abandon illicit activity [03, 16]. Likewise, NGOs, decentralized State entities, companies, and other organizations have been partners of the national government at different times in implementing the DA, as is the case of UNODC and USAID, who have also directly carried out the execution. Of some programs within the DA. On the other hand, the appropriation of the coca leaf market by illegal armed groups has motivated the abandonment of illicit crops [18].

4.3.2 Economic factors

Included are the financial benefits and technical assistance that would be received from participation in DA programs; "...good benefits come, and if you have cocaine, you lose the aid" [04]. Also, part of this category is the economic losses in illicit crops due to aerial fumigation, which led families to eradicate and venture into AD voluntarily [05, 09, 13, 16, 17, 18]. Finally, there is social capital (Family and friends). "Because my neighbors abandoned illicit crops" [16], "Because my neighbors, family, and friends are in legal activities" [13], the participants state that they take the recommendations into account. And opinions of family and friends, who have been decisive in deciding to abandon illicit crops and enter the DA [04, 11, 12, 13, 18, 20].

4.4 Internal motivations of coca-growing families to join Alternative Development programs

4.4.1 Structural Factors

The particular interest in participating in the AD constitutes an internal motivation for abandoning illicit activities [04, 05, 12, 14, 15, 18, 21]; this denotes that the motivation processes that take place in the communities have an effect of interest fundamental real transformation of the lives of families who cultivate illicit crops.

4.4.2 Economic factors

The reduction of expectations of significant economic profits within illicit crops [04, 11, 12, 18], such is the case of the losses caused by forced eradication campaigns [05, 09, 13, 16, 17, 18], and the low price that illegal armed groups paid to produce illicit crops [18].

On the other hand, market expectations for licit productions constitute a motivation for abandoning illicit products and entering the DA [01, 03, 17]. This allows us to affirm that establishing marketing guarantees is crucially relevant to illegal crops. In a consistent relationship with the previous motivation, the interviewees relate their desire to continue with the traditional licit productions of the regions [08, 10], evidencing the interest of families in marking a distance from illicit crops.

4.5 Motivations of coca-growing families to remain in legal activities after Alternative Development programs

The family network is a predominant factor in all those interviewed, who asked why not take a step back and return to illicit crops. All the responses of those interviewed point to the unconditional support of their families to continue in the legal activity [01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21].

On the other hand, when asked: What does your family think about the possibility of you planting illicit crops again? The answers are very forceful regarding the rejection of that option [03, 09, 11, 12, 13]. Additionally, family and relationships with the community also constitute a determining factor for permanence in the territories and the desire to continue building a new life [07] in such a way that, even amid threats to their own lives, the interviewees refuse to leave their communities [03, 05, 08, 09, 11, 14], making the option of leaving the population inconceivable [11], and if they are forced to abandon their territories, carry out a quick return.

Threats to life and forced displacement constitute the only determinant of distancing themselves from their community social capital networks. However, suppose the individual who is forced to leave their territories feels that they have the support of their community network. In that case, the separation may not be profound and may also only be temporary. This causes people or their families to move between the rural and urban areas of the populations, maintaining permanent contact with their community; "... but it has not been the populations, but instead the place of residence changed from the countryside to the town center..." [12].

4.6 Perspectives of coca-growing families after their passage through the Alternative Development programs

In the quantitative analysis, respondents are asked about their expectations of DA and what they hope to achieve with their participation in the programs. The 186 respondents' opinions were in the same direction as the 21 leaders interviewed, only with slight variations related to social capital. However, it is identified that the DA's expectations are related to aspects mentioned, such as motivation for entering illicit crops: that is, that those motivations that led them to the crimes were not satisfied, and now the families seek to have them resolved or mitigated by the PDA (Table 3).

Table 3 - Expectations of families when joining Alternative Development (AD) programs

Expectation	Worth %	Relates to
Financial support from the State	33%	Aspects Economical Positives
Reasonable prices for legal products	11.6%	
New markets for the commercialization of products	11.16%	
Better income for their households	10.19%	
Aerial fumigations	10.43%	Aspects Economical Adverse
Loss of income for your household	3.88%	
Road improvement	3.88%,	Aspects of Infrastructure
Improvement of public services	3.64%	
Greater security in the territories	4.36%,	Security and Aspects of Affection to Well-being Familiar
More fabulous presence of public forces	1.69%	
Increase in homicides	1.21%	
Forced displacements	1.21%	
Intensification of the conflict	0.97%	
Pressure from armed groups	0.97%	
Kidnappings	0.97%	

Source: Own elaboration based on survey data.

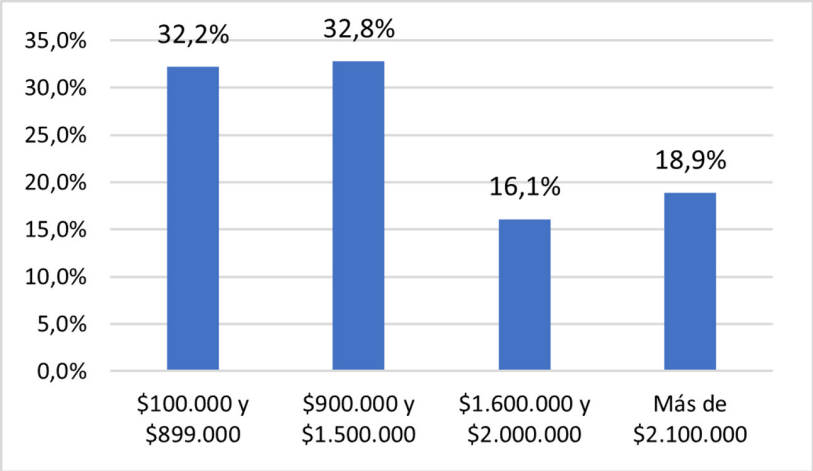
In general, families' expectations upon entering the DA are 65.9% related to economic aspects, a value close to that related to the motivations for entering illicit crops. It strikes elements that are the essence of the DA and are part of its service promise shallower low percentage values, such as improving public services and greater security, which represent percentage values less than 5%. From the above, it can be interpreted that the families participating in the DA do not trust that important or necessary changes will occur for territorial development.

Now, considering the importance given to economic factors for entering illicit crops and joining the DA, it is of great value to know what type of change the families presented in this factor after they participated in the DA and their continuity in lawful activities. In this sense, Graph 1 shows family income before the AD, Graph 2 reveals the income families expected to obtain with the AD, and Graph 3 indicates the income families achieved after the AD.

Graph 2, it can be seen that at all income levels there are expectations of family mobility compared to what they had before the AD (Graph 1); that is, with the AD, families are expected to increase their economic income to sustain their homes. However, when consulting about the actual factual situation after passing through the DA, it is found that this mobility did not occur and that, on the contrary, there was a deterioration of their economy vis-a-vis the State before their involvement. To the DA (Graph 3).

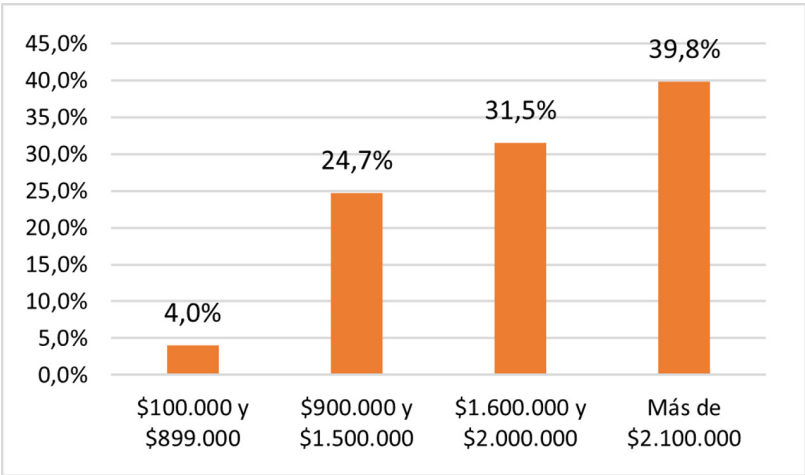
Given these results, it is inevitable to think about the motivations expressed for entering illicit activities, which were more than 80% related to economic aspects, motivations that would not have been satisfied with their connection to the DA either.

Graph 1 - Family Income Before DA



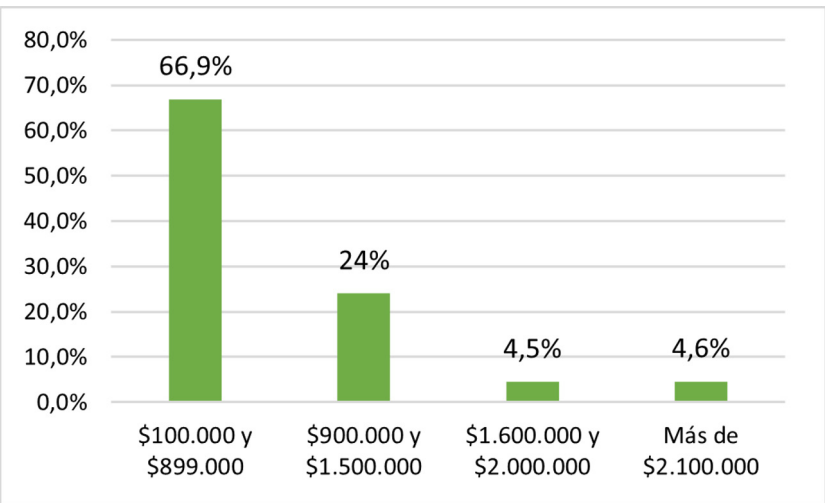
Source: Own elaboration based on survey data.

Graph 2 - Family Income Expectations with the DA



Source: Own elaboration based on survey data.

Graph 3 - Family Income After DA



Source: Own elaboration based on survey data.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The objective set for this analysis was to know the motivations of coca-growing families, both for entering illicit crops and abandoning them, in addition to being legal. Knowledge of the first group of motivations allows the formulators of anti-drug policy and the DA to envision the possible containment and prevention actions that need to be developed by the Colombian State from the DA, which may involve the creation of complementary policies and programs. Likewise, such is the case of the Comprehensive Rural Reform (RRI), since among the motivations for entering illicit crops, the interviewees relate to the lack of land [04].

The knowledge of the second motivation, that is, abandoning illicit crops, allows us to understand the expectations that the DA participants have, contributing to the realization of DA planning that can provide an effective solution to the needs of the families now. Of their connection to the program. Likewise, knowledge of the motivations to remain in legal activities allows strategies to strengthen said motivations to be created from the AD's design, making the return to legality permanent.

Regarding the fulfillment of the proposed objective, it is found that, both in the motivations for entering illicit crops, as well as for leaving them and their subsequent connection to the DA, there are motivations from structural problems of the State, as well as the local and family economy. (GARCIA-YI, 2014). In the case of the surveys, a little more than 84% of the responses refer to this reason, and in the testimonial analysis, it was revealed by many interviewees [01, 02, 04, 05, 06, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20].

In the combined analysis of the motivations for entering the DA, it is identified that these are not only corroborated with the two study techniques but are also very similar to the motivations for entering the illicit: the need for economic support from the State (RIPOLL; BERRÍO; RUBIANO, 2013), the management of good prices for legal products, the development of new markets for the commercialization of products (DÁVALOS; BEJARANO; CORREA, 2009), and in general the achievement of better income for their households (GARCIA-YI, 2014), which could mean that after all, illicit activity does not provide families with an improvement in their quality of life.

Therefore, these motivations are transferred to the link to the DA. However, in the responses to the survey on family income, it is evident that the AD does not provide solutions to these needs either; that is, it does not provide the economic stability that families expect to have. This means that, although, indeed, illegal activities do not solve the financial problems of families, it is also true that their participation in the DA represents their loss of income for family subsistence.

The above leaves open a dangerous door of return to illicit activities. However, only 11.89% of those surveyed recognize that they would take that option, and although this value is relatively low, it would mean large volumes of illicit production are done. Reality.

That is why the only motivation to remain in lawful activities and not return to illicit activities is represented by family support, community life, and the structure of their social capital. The latter is understood as the possibilities of compensation for low economic income from networks of exchange of goods and services in situations of unemployment or disability, as well as the need for accommodation emotional and moral support (HINTZE, 2004); these are acquired by the individual thanks to his membership in a community social network (JACKMAN; MILLER, 1998; TESTA, 2019; YUASA *et al.*, 2015).

5.2 Recommendations

All of this would be evidence of the need to rethink the DA programs, where consideration must be given to the environment of illicit growers in all dimensions (REBOLLEDO-CASTILLO, 2018), especially the strengthening of families as the axis of any society, which must be reflected in training and productive strengthening activities.

Furthermore, it implies that, in constructing new DA projects and programs, strengthening community relationships that make up social capital must be a structural objective of the policy and not left as something that arises randomly. Likewise, the creation of new social capital networks can be promoted if the effective establishment of markets for licit production is achieved. This will guarantee that families can sell their licit products and that, when adverse situations arise, they can find alternatives within the law (REBOLLEDO-CASTILLO, 2023).

Finally, the creation of new social capital can be regulated by the generation of opportunities within the existing networks in the community through the generation of trust, with the creation of institutionality, either with the improvement of different institutional services, medical centers, schools, roads, etc. (RIPOLL; BERRÍO; RUBIANO, 2013), which have been identified as success factors of the DA in countries such as Thailand (ANDERSON, 2017).

On the other hand, it is necessary to strengthen community participation mechanisms (community action boards, community councils of the NARP population, associations, and solidarity economy organizations), which have been recognized by those interviewed as the scenarios where families find the greatest motivation to establish a new life under lawful activities.

5.3 Limitations

At the point of methodology, the difficulties presented in collecting the information have been pointed out; these limited the possibility of creating a sample that includes a greater

proportionality of each of the programs in the interviews carried out, as well as a better distribution in number of municipalities by department, which coincided with the proportion of hectares of coca reported in each of the departments selected for the sample. Added to the above is the restriction to carry out 100% of the interviews in person and different sections so that broader and more detailed conversations could be established.

The above would have provided greater typological and analytical representativeness to the sample. However, given the care and detail in applying the qualitative methodology, these limitations have not implied a substantial variation in the results and conclusions of the research since, in the sampling of interviews, it is possible to exceed the necessary saturation number. As established, the conditions of (SONEIRA, 2006) interactivity and flexibility of sampling (RUBIN; RUBIN, 2011) are also met, and with the principles of qualitative samples established by (FLICK, 2007): **a)** variation, **b)** cases according to the intensity of traits, processes, and experiences, and **c)** expert opinion.

5.4 Future lines of research

In consideration of the findings revealed it would be of great value to conduct research that analyzes and considers the role of social capital in making decisions to enter and abandon illicit crops, as well as the possible effects that anti-drug policy and the DA can generate the existing social capital of families, which is identified in the literature as a motivation to avoid entering into illicit activities (JACKMAN; MILLER, 1998; TESTA, 2019; YUASA *et al.*, 2015). In this investigation, it is established as a factor of permanence in legal activities, which corroborates what was established in previous investigations. Likewise, it is necessary to advance the knowledge of the effects that may generate on families' territorial stability, such as forced displacement. Is because anti-drug policy and AD are applied in armed conflict environments that have been identified in the literature as motivations for entering illicit activities (DÍAZ ESCOBAR; SÁNCHEZ TORRES, 2004; TABARES; ROSALES, 2005), although they were not validated in this research.

Notas

¹ Special thanks to Department of Nariño-Colombia, for the creation of the fund “Strengthening regional capacities in research, technological development and innovation in the Department of Nariño” approved by the Collegiate Body of Administration and Decision -OCAD of the FCTel-SGR through Agreement No. 005 of July 19, 2013. Likewise, I thank the CEIBA foundation, administrator of the fund.

² According to reports Díaz Escobar and Sánchez Torres, (2004), in the nineties there were nearly 40,000 hectares of coca in Colombia, in municipalities of eight departments: Caquetá Meta, Guainía, Amazonas, Guaviare, Vichada, Vaupés and Putumayo, in the first three, there were between 1 and 1000 hectares, and in the remaining five between 1000 and 10000 hectares.

³ At the United Nations General Assembly on September 19, 2017, the president of Colombia, Juan Manuel Santos Calderón, stated that the fight against drugs has been fruitless. “The change must begin with the recognition of drugs as a social problem..., also considering that as long as there is demand for the illicit drug, there will be a supply of it.”

⁴ See chapter 9, pages 347-348.

⁵ See: <https://www.minjusticia.gov.co/programas-co/ODC/Paginas/SIDCO.aspx>. Accessed: 9 aug. 2026.

⁶ According to the report of the Investigation and Accusation Unit (UIA) of the Special Justice for Peace (JEP), between December 1, 2016, and the same month of 2020; “864 leaders were murdered. After contrasting and verifying the records provided by other institutions and organizations, the monitoring system identified 904 cases,” Cifuentes detailed. Available from: <https://www.dw.com/es/más-de-900-l%C3%Social-adherents-murdered-in-Colombia-since-2016/a-57257906>. Accessed: 2 jun. 2026.

⁷ This type of sampling uses an indirect form of contact; As they define it Verd and Lozares (2016, p. 139.), it occurs “when we access the subjects that interest us through the intermediation of a third person. This intermediary person could be a gatekeeper, but it could also be a person contacted previously from whom we ask for new references”.

⁸ It is important to note that in the question that inquiries about the reasons for entering illicit crops, the participants had the possibility of expressing various reasons why they entered this activity; for Therefore, the sum of these values is not equal to 100%.

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Declaração de disponibilidade de dados

Os conjuntos de dados relacionados a este artigo estarão disponíveis mediante solicitação aos autores correspondentes.

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