



JUNIOR SCIENTISTS TANDEMS FINAL REPORT

ATSAF Academy

To wander in the Municipality of El
Santuario in Caquetá



Junior Scientists Tandems Final Report

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Visit to a cocoa-producing farm in La Montañita. Despite the challenges of production and transportation, the family running the farm serves as a model in the municipality for their commitment to sustainable practices, not only in their crops but across the entire farm.

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1. Introduction

Living Labs (LLs) are an innovative approach to engaging local communities in the research and development of sustainable solutions. The Living Lab for People (LL4P) in La Montañita, Caquetá, Colombia, is a project coordinated by the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) and the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (Rietveld et al., 2023). This project focuses on key sectors such as livestock and cocoa, aiming to reduce emissions, strengthen rural economies, ensure food security, and contribute to peace in Caquetá, a region heavily affected by armed conflict. Additionally, it promotes social and gender inclusion, particularly by encouraging the participation of women and young people in the creation of sustainable innovations. It does so through multi-stakeholder platforms that integrate various actors, including producers, NGOs, and the government (Rietveld et al., 2023).

Between September 1, 2024, and February 28, 2025, I completed my internship at CIAT, contributing to the LL4P. During this time, I participated in data systematization, qualitative analysis, and support for community workshops, which allowed me to develop key skills in applied research, sustainability, and fieldwork. This report summarizes the tasks performed, the lessons learned, and the relevance of this experience within the LL4P framework.



The first image captures the Amazon landscape from the plane just before landing for fieldwork. The second image shows a group of young people in La Montañita working on sustainable composting alternatives through biofactories. On this day, a workshop was held to teach local farmers how to sustainably produce their own compost using organic waste.

2. The International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT)



On the way to one of the Agrosolidaria in La Montañita workshops we saw a local farmer taking sand from the river.

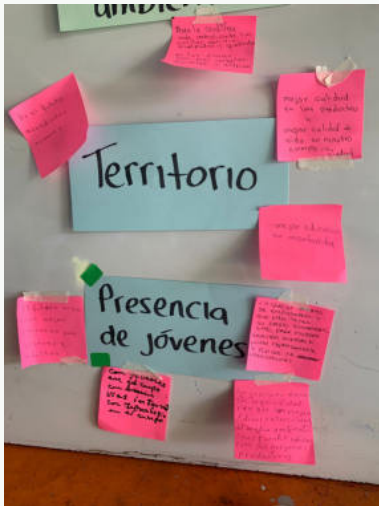
The International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), located in Cali, Colombia, is part of the Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centers (CGIAR). This organization is a global research partnership aimed at strengthening food security. The center focuses on four key areas: climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, and malnutrition (CIAT, n.d.). Within these areas of work, the Low-Emission Food Systems Initiative MITIGATE+ was developed. This project aims to drive socio-technical innovations that facilitate the transition toward more sustainable and resilient cocoa and livestock production systems, aligned with climate change mitigation goals (Rodríguez et al., 2024). Several sustainability strategies are coordinated under this project, as is the case with the LL4P project. An important partner in this project is the Faculty of Environmental and Rural Studies at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, which has been responsible for implementing various sustainability strategies in collaboration with CIAT. I specifically contributed to the Living Lab for People (LL4P) strategy, which has been developed since 2022 in the municipalities of La Montañita and Belén de los Andaquíes, located in the Colombian Amazon region.

3. Internships at CIAT and the master's degree in Peace and Conflict Studies

3.1 Reasons for choosing an internship and classification in the work context

The selection of this internship position is based on an interest in understanding and addressing the dynamics of the armed conflict in Colombia and its impact on the territory, particularly in the Caquetá region, where the relationship between violence, deforestation, and productive transformation has been significant (Molina-Orjuela et al., 2022). The implementation of the Peace Agreement Colombia has created new opportunities for the development of sustainable practices aimed at mitigating the effects of the conflict and generating economic alternatives for affected communities (Díaz Ramírez et al., 2023, p. 57). In this context, initiatives promoted in municipalities such as La Montañita and Belén de los Andaquíes, in collaboration with organizations like the farmers' organization Agrosolidaria and projects such as MITIGATE+, represent key spaces for the application of territorial peacebuilding approaches (Rodríguez et al., 2024). These strategies not only seek environmental sustainability but also strengthen social cohesion and local governance- fundamental aspects in peace and conflict studies. The classification of this internship within the professional framework of the master's program aligns with territorial peacebuilding and sustainable development. This is because the work in these initiatives involves the coordination of community, governmental, and international actors in processes such as the substitution of illicit crops, agroecological development, and climate change mitigation, which are essential elements in the consolidation of post-conflict scenarios.

3.2 Relationship of the internship to the Master's program in Conflict and Peace



The first two images refer to the “Visioning” workshop, which focused on the community's future prospects from different environmental, economic and social perspectives. In the second image we see one of the fruits unique to the Amazon region.

This internship aligns closely with the Master’s in Conflict and Peace Studies, addressing key topics such as the impact of armed conflict on territories, post-conflict dynamics, and peacebuilding through a territorial and sustainable approach. The case of Caquetá, particularly in La Montañita and Belén de los Andaquíes, offers a real-world application of governance, conflict resolution, and sustainable development concepts. Engagement with MITIGATE+ and Agrosolidaria facilitates the practical application of socio-environmental conflict analysis, illicit crop substitution strategies, and alternative economies, fostering community resilience. The intersection of rural development, climate change mitigation, and social fabric reconstruction underscores the interdisciplinary nature of peace studies. From a professional standpoint, the internship provides hands-on experience in academic research, international cooperation, community work, and public policy design, broadening career opportunities in research centers, multilateral organizations, and government institutions. Ultimately, this experience strengthens theoretical knowledge and professional skills, contributing to comprehensive peace solutions in Colombia through an integrated and interdisciplinary approach.

4. Tasks and experiences during the internship

During my internship, I specifically supported the fieldwork and analysis for the paper “Assessment of the Processes of Facilitating the Co-Creation of Food System Innovations in Caquetá, Colombia.” My tasks were part of Professor Thomas Falk’s [1] research on Living Labs for People (LL4P) in the municipality of La Montañita, Caquetá.

First, I worked on systematizing and analyzing data for the project report. This process included transcribing 10 interviews with farmers and 10 interviews with LL4P facilitators in the region from La Universidad Pontificia Javeriana. I then translated these interviews from Spanish into English for further processing and organized them into Excel tables, classifying both qualitative and quantitative information. The qualitative interviews were analyzed using semi-structured questions, while quantitative data was organized based on a Likert scale. For the coding of qualitative information, I developed a coding protocol based on existing literature. Along with another intern, I carried out the coding process to ensure objectivity in the analysis.

In addition to data systematization, I participated in the coordination and development of community workshops organized within the LL4P framework. I attended an initial workshop in Bogotá, which covered topics related to climate change, mitigation strategies, and sustainability. Later, I participated in the "Visioning" workshop in La Montañita, which aimed to build a collective vision of climate change and sustainability strategies in the Amazon region. I also took part in a workshop on community work and the history of the Agrosolidaria organization, which brings together various value chains in Caquetá.

[1] Dr. Falk is a Research Fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and an institutional economist specializing in natural resource governance in the Global South. His work focuses on the economics of natural resource management, multi-level governance in social-ecological systems, and behavioral change in system transformation processes (IFPRI, n.d.). IFPRI, established in 1975, is a research center of CGIAR, the world’s largest agricultural innovation network. The institute provides research-based policy solutions to reduce poverty and end hunger and malnutrition in developing countries. Through multisectoral research and collaboration with stakeholders, IFPRI informs policies, programs, and investments that contribute to sustainable, resilient, and equitable agriculture and food systems worldwide (IFPRI n.d. (a)).



Workshop in La Montañita, Caquetá, with Mario Bonilla, founder of Agrosolidaria. The session focused on the organization's history, its community initiatives, and the challenges it faces in strengthening its structure and impact.

This event featured the presence of the organization's founder. In each of these workshops, I was responsible for note-taking, moderation, and logistical support.

Finally, I conducted additional interviews to complement the data collected for Thomas Falk's research and gathered key information for my master's thesis, which focuses on analyzing the strategies used by the farmers' organization Agrosolidaria to promote sustainability and development in the region.

During this experience, I learned how field research is conducted, from data collection and systematization to in-depth analysis. I developed key skills in organization, coding, and qualitative interview analysis, gaining a deeper understanding of the research process within a climate change and sustainability project. Working collaboratively with another intern helped me enhance my cooperation and coordination skills in data management. Additionally, the community workshops provided me with firsthand insight into the strategies rural communities implement to address climate change, while the fieldwork allowed me to directly observe the social and environmental challenges in La Montañita, Caquetá. This experience gave me a comprehensive perspective on local dynamics and research processes applied to sustainability and climate change mitigation.

4 .1 My research proposal



Local produce from the farmers of Agrosolidaria at a farmers' market. The text reads: “Let food be thy medicine”.

Thanks to fieldwork and close engagement with the community, adjustments were made to the initial research idea, allowing for a more in-depth analysis. The collaboration with Agrosolidaria was key, as this farmers' organization serves as the host entity for the MITIGATE+ strategy within the Living Labs for People (LL4P) project. To better understand how this strategy operates, a case study was conducted on Agrosolidaria's role in the LL4P project. The new research focus aimed to analyze how this organization promotes sustainable food systems and integral development in La Montañita by examining its influence on the transition to agroecological practices, the local economy, social organization, and environmental conservation within the LL4P framework. In this context, the research question posed was: How has the farmers' organization Agrosolidaria contributed to the promotion of sustainable food systems and the integral development of the municipality of La Montañita, Caquetá?

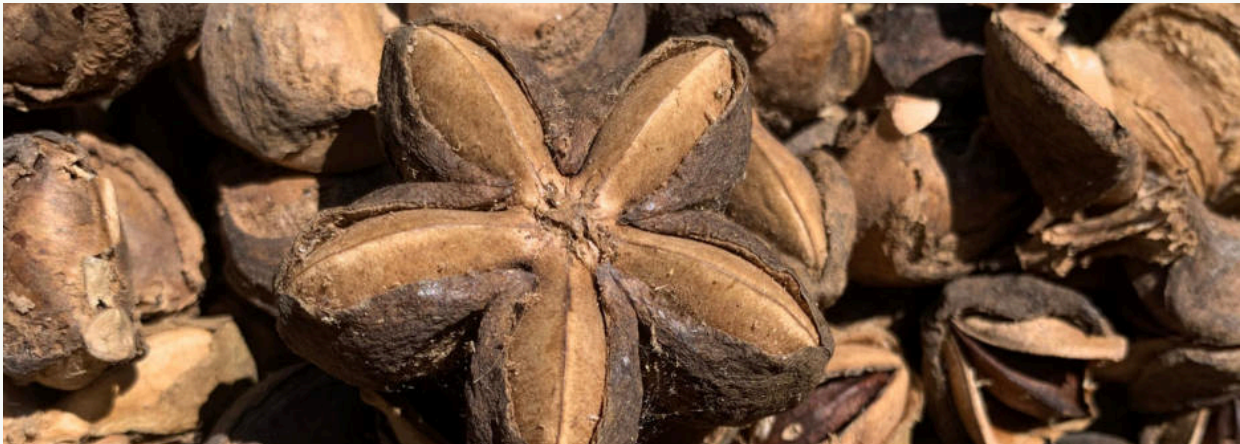
To address this question, a case study with an ethnographic approach was carried out, employing various data collection techniques. Three focus groups were conducted, along with participant observation recorded in a field diary during LL4P events, and nine semi-structured interviews. Two of these interviews were conducted with Agrosolidaria's founders and national directors, while the remaining ones targeted farmers involved in different value chains and members of the organization. The analysis was structured around three main categories: environmental, economic, and social sustainability. Currently, the collected data is being edited and adjusted for analysis.

One of the key lessons learned from this experience was the importance of conducting research in close collaboration with the community, ensuring that it responds to real needs within the territory. However, despite efforts to implement sustainable strategies, the community faces significant challenges, such as the persistence of armed conflict in a post-peace agreement context, lack of resources, displacement of young people due to forced recruitment, and limited technical and financial support from governmental institutions. Additionally, with the change in municipal administration, Agrosolidaria is at risk of losing the space it currently uses as a community collection center. Agrosolidaria's experience in La Montañita represents a key model for the transition towards more resilient, sustainable, and inclusive agriculture. In this regard, this research seeks not only to highlight its work but also to raise awareness of the current challenges faced by the campesino community in Caquetá, particularly in terms of sustainability, conflict, and community strengthening.



Enjoying ice cream made with Amazonian products after one of the workshops with the research team and the directors of Agrosolidaria de La Montañita. This ice cream business was started by one of the women farmers from Agrosolidaria. I am the person in the cap and white shirt.

5. Summary



This is Sacha Inchi, the main product of Agrosolidaria. Native to the Amazon, it is rich in Omega fatty acids and is known for its benefits in preventing cardiovascular diseases and reducing cholesterol, triglycerides, and body fat.

The internship carried out at CIAT, in collaboration with the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana and within the framework of the MITIGATE+ project in the Caquetá region (specifically in the municipalities of La Montañita and Belén de los Andaquíes), provided valuable experience in the implementation of sustainable development strategies, climate change mitigation, and peacebuilding in territories affected by armed conflict. This process integrated academic research with practical action, allowing the application of knowledge acquired in the Master's in Conflict and Peace Studies in a real-world context. The activities focused on productive transformation, environmental sustainability, and the resilience of communities, key elements in the peace consolidation process. The experience highlights the importance of collaboration among various actors, including international organizations, universities, and local communities, to achieve lasting territorial peace. Furthermore, it emphasizes the value of an interdisciplinary approach and applied research in addressing socio-environmental conflicts, which are essential for tackling the complex challenges of post-conflict in Colombia.

From a professional perspective, the internship allowed for the development of skills in both research and international cooperation project management. This opens job opportunities in sectors such as development cooperation, public policy, multilateral organizations, and civil society organizations. The experiences gained enrich the professional profile, especially in the fields of peacebuilding and sustainable development. Finally, it is recommended that future students interested in doing an internship with CIAT be prepared to interact with a multidisciplinary work environment committed to sustainability and peace.

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