

# LAS PAVAS: AN APPROACH TO THE CURRENT SITUATION

*Social, economic and institutional aspects*

## EL PEÑON



FINCA LAS PAVAS, EL PEÑON

The Papayal Island is located in the southern Bolívar county in the Las Lobas region. It is constituted by the municipalities of El Peñón, Regidor y Río Viejo. The oil palm plantation of Las Pavas is located in the municipality of El Peñón.

The Papayal Island is located in the Magdalena river, the main river in Colombia. The region is a highly rich rainfall precipitation and delta-shaped prairie filled with channels and swamps which interlock up to the Magdalena river so the swamps constantly drain in or flow out in this flood zone.

## SOCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ASPECT OF EL PEÑON

The local institutions weakness and the low governmental investment on the rural areas of this region has been a mayor stopping on El peñon's social and economic development.

- Recently created administrative district (1995)
- 8.081 inhabitant, 60% of the population lives in rural areas
- District budget per year under US\$2.500.000
- Regional government priorities are investments for urban areas
- Lack of knowledge and implementation of the local development plan and the territory management scheme
- Poor infrastructure (roads, health centers, schools) due to the lack of governmental budget
- High index of Unsatisfied Basic Needs (UBN), which reach up to 79% in the rural zone (the average index in the county is 46.6%)
- Dispersed population all along the land working on subsistence agriculture, fishing and palm plantation
- Low job opportunities in the region generates migration
- Boost in delinquency statistics during the last few years, but still low compared with global county figures
- Guerrilla presence (FARC and ELN) in gold mine zones near El Peñon
- Gold mines closings in the region have begun a migratory process as well as contamination due to mercury
- Region traditionally use for livestock; 1 million hectares are used to extensive stockbreeding and only 200.000 hectares are used for agriculture

## THE CURRENT SOCIAL PICTURE:

**Food security:** The historical statistics shows high Unsatisfied Basic Needs on the region that are not a result of Las Pavas' economic activity. The low governmental investment on the region and the absence of local development plans had been a main stopping for its social development. The area has been visited by NGO's for food distribution as well as to offer health attention since late nineties, assuming the role that the state is not performing on the zone. This community's livelihood has been historically based on fishing and cultivating; with the palm industry new jobs have been created, offering new incomes to the community. Access to food still remains, mainly because of the fishing tradition of the region and local crops.

- **Land property and housing:** The Colombian weak state presence in the rural areas has historically generated deep problems on land ownership. This situation is reflected in Las Pavas, where all actors agree on the procedures faults committed by the national office in charge of land registration. This, in turn, has created an environment of uncertainty for both the Consortium and the community. Consortium Labrador has always used lawful actions and legal documents to prove their legal property of the land, and has not use threats or violent means towards the community. The eviction in Las Pavas was issued and accomplished by the official institutions in charge of the enforcement of civil rights and no complaint was registered by any of these authorities.

## PALM INDUSTRY CONTRIBUTION TO THE REGION

- Investment and job creation
- More than 400 jobs projected, equivalent to more than 15% of Municipality budget
- Local markets are more dynamic
- In association with the environment authority, building of a retaining wall to isolate the island from the flood
- Adjustment of the local roads
- More authorities presence and environments controls in the area

Consortium Labrador is aware of the fact that they operate in a region with lots of needs and weak state presence. They are also aware of the social responsibility they have with the region and the population.

The Consortium is committed to find a solution to the land property conflict, but always taking into account there will only be a good ending if all actors involved on this process feel in a win-win situation. This is why the Consortium is planning to start deeper analysis of the community needs and to generate more appropriate spaces of dialogue and mutual construction with local organizations.



He is one of the 22 children who live with their parents right next to Las Pavas.

His mother was one of the people who invaded Las Pavas in January 2009.

This child suffer an injury which compromised his two eyes. Nevertheless, after having surgery and thanks to the economical and logistic support of El Labrador, he was able to save one of his eyes and avoid the infection from spreading

Today, his father works in a palm plantat on of the region. This job gives him the opportunity to support his children, send them to school and complement their food security.