

# THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP TO PEACE

By Denise Danielle Bourne  
Photos Milagro Castro

What do the glamorous start-ups of San Francisco, California have in common with the urban vegetable gardens of ex-guerrilla fighters in Colombia's Cauca department? Entrepreneurship! As well as being a growing tendency in business management, it opens the way to reinsertion and healing for victims and demobilized combatants of the Colombian conflict. Julián David Cortés, a professor at the Universidad del Rosario, is running a project to contribute to this type of initiative.

**W**hat would happen if a business enterprise, in addition to harvesting resources, also provided an opportunity for those previously brandishing a firearm, helping to heal and reintegrate them into the community? Professor Julián David Cortés of the School of Management and Business at the Universidad del Rosario, is trying to understand these cases better and bring help to those who dare to use entrepreneurship to weave social materials for peace.

Cortés is determined to go on gathering knowledge in different disciplines in order to gain greater comprehension of the world. Thanks to his drive, he has set about finding different ways to approach Colombia's present realities and forge a contribution from

academic abilities, and this is behind the project *Entrepreneurship, Institutions, and Peace Building*.

This project, based on civil and government programs that boost entrepreneurship as a reinsertion activity for ex-combatants and inclusion for victims of armed conflict, has won the backing of researchers from other universities. It also has the support of more than twelve students from the Universidad del Rosario now working as assistants, some of them even taking the subject as inspiration for their theses, thus leading to very fruitful outcomes.

## ENTREPRENEURSHIP, INSTITUTIONS, AND PEACE BUILDING

The three categories involved in this project have wide-ranging significance both as separate and interrelated areas, so it is important to understand from what angle they are important for the study. "Entrepreneurship is a subject of interest on the international agenda, so many countries are busy defining it," explains Cortés. Nevertheless, his study of en-



trepreneurship takes into account productive vocation, the creation of formal jobs, the generation and improvement of products and services, and the search for new markets. Cortés' own approach frames institutions as formal and informal rules that shape the social, political, and economic interactions in society. "The most important formal institution for a country is its constitution. Another minor example would be the behavioral guidelines laid down by companies," the professor points out. An example of informal rules might be the interrelation between two people who set up an exchange of favors.

Finally, but no less important, is peace building, a human phenomenon that, despite always being of great interest, is

today highlighted in the peace processes with the country's guerrillas. This concept is being stymied by the communications media, which are insisting that peace was achieved through the post-peace accords, but this does not provide guarantees at all levels. Peace is understood as the absence of physical and structural violence, the latter involving several aspects such as poverty, inequality, lack of opportunities, and even corruption. For this reason, it is important to understand how the state, industry, and the civil population are working to minimise these aspects.





### WEAVING THE SOCIAL FABRIC

Business initiatives, led both by the civil population and the state, seek to combat these different types of violence and offer vulnerable communities job opportunities and food security. A great example of this is found in urban agriculture projects set up around Colombia by different bodies.

One outstanding case is the urban vegetable gardens project run in the Cauca department by the Reincorporation and Normalization Agency. It takes place in a region that suffered heavily in the armed conflict, one that includes several indigenous communities and faces problems of poverty and inequality. The project got up and running last year and the achievements of this type of space around houses include ex-combatants from armed groups and victims finding a way to get back into remunerative work, and enjoying healing spaces. Professor Cortés, along with his colleague Sebastián Rubiano, a PhD candidate in Environmental Sciences at the University of California in Berkeley, decided to visit farms and community vegetable gardens in the San Francisco Bay area, USA, to gather knowledge that could be shared with

↑ The research of Julián David Cortés, professor of the School of Management and Business, is based on civil and government programs that promote entrepreneurship as a reinsertion activity for ex-combatants and inclusion for victims of armed conflict.

Colombian initiatives. He also visited national communities to nourish his own study. Importantly, this type of inclusive farm and vegetable plot used programs under which people in situations of poverty and food insecurity can work, acquire their own foods, and produce food for other people in similar conditions.

Although several proposals from academia and civil society are being linked up in the San Francisco Bay area to strengthen these kinds of initiatives, they have met with difficulties owing to the interests of big companies, which prefer to use productive land for urbanization and stop such plots being cultivable. Similarly, these firms set out to foment a corporative vocation in universities by incentivizing the development of research on genetically modified crops and on studies with an agroecological focus.

Another pertinent case is that highlighted by the work of Gina Chinchilla, PhD student at Germany's University of Bonn. Her study on the effects of historical memory building in a town in the department of Antioquia aims at improving the situation this community was plunged into during the armed conflict. She takes it back to a position similar to that it experienced before the war came and destroyed its infrastructure and economy. Above all, the target is the memory of inhabitants' daily lives and their willing to engage with others. Throughout this year, Cortés and Chinchilla are pushing on with a study of community entrepreneurship and resilience, thus linking up their two separate projects.

### HELP FROM THE PUBLIC SECTOR?

Professor Julián David Cortés believes it is important to use basic and intermediate level education to boost the skills needed for entrepreneurship, not only with the aim of developing tools for creating businesses but also so that students can acquire abilities in creative thought, something not often given much promotion by government institutions.

As part of Bogotá City Council's Sectorial Education Plan 2016, the management team outlined a program incorporating basic skills such as mathematics and reading comprehension, but also socioemotional skills such as empathy, communal living, and culture of citizenship. Along the same lines, the City Council showed its interest in boosting tools required for entrepreneurship and asked for help from the Universidad del Rosario and its Entrepreneurship Center to create materials for enhancing public policy.

Cortés coordinated the group of lecturers and researchers working on this project, who were selected for their skills in entrepreneurship, leadership, creative thought, and digital intelligence, all of these of great importance for other facets of current living.

The world is going through a learning crisis, one that embraces some of the basic skills needed for developing and strengthening the foundations of our economic and social growth. "Every year, the World Bank publishes a report on global development, and this year it was devoted to basic education. The conclusion was that despite education currently showing progress in coverage, there is no education of genuine quality to guarantee learning," claims Cortés. "If there is no strengthening of basic skills, it will not be possible to achieve any change," he concludes. ■

# PEACE THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Entrepreneurship, institutions, and peacebuilding



## FRONTLINE SKILLS FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP



### DIGITAL INTELLIGENCE

For intelligent and productive use and appropriation of ICT



### CREATIVE PROCESSING

For initiating the entrepreneurship process in a collective and ethical way



### LEADERSHIP

To associate ideas, resources, individuals, and reconfigure their meanings in order to create value

## SOCIAL FABRIC

### TRAINING

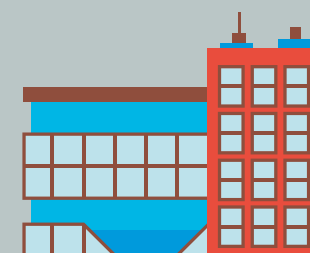
Skills required for entrepreneurship, not only with the aim of developing tools for company creation but also so that students can acquire creative thinking abilities



ACADEMIA

### ENTREPRENEURSHIP

A productive vocation, generation of formal employment, creation and improvement of products and services and the search for new markets



COMPANY

### INSTITUTIONS

Formal and informal rules that shape social, political, and economic interactions in society



GOVERNMENT

### PEACE

The absence of physical and structural violence, the latter involving several aspects such as poverty, injustice, lack of opportunities, and even corruption.



SOCIETY