

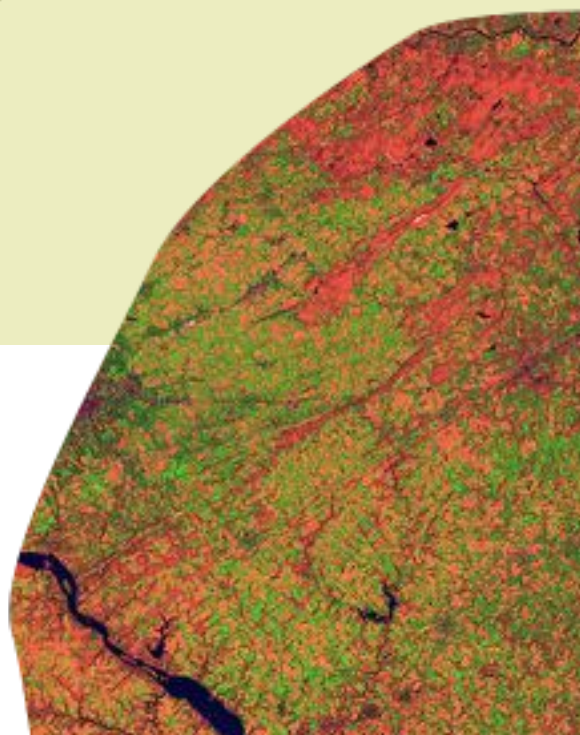
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**Occupy Climate
Change (OCC!)**
*Grassroots initiatives
entry*



FORMAS



“Guardians of the Hill”

By Gabriel Redín

Where is this grassroots initiative implemented?

On the Pacific Coast of South America, within the Ecuadorian city of Portoviejo, in the parish of San Pablo, the group "Guardianes de la Colina" was created. San Pablo is located next to the urban center of Portoviejo, extending towards the hills that surround the city. More precisely, the parish of San Pablo is made up of four sectors, of which the sectors known as "Cumbres, Cañonazos y Rocío" and "Los Ceibos" have been the most affected by landslides from the hills in times of heavy rains. It is precisely these sectors that present the greatest gaps in access to basic services and exercise of rights. Their inhabitants are the main integrants of the "Guardians of the Hill" organization. (See Image 1).

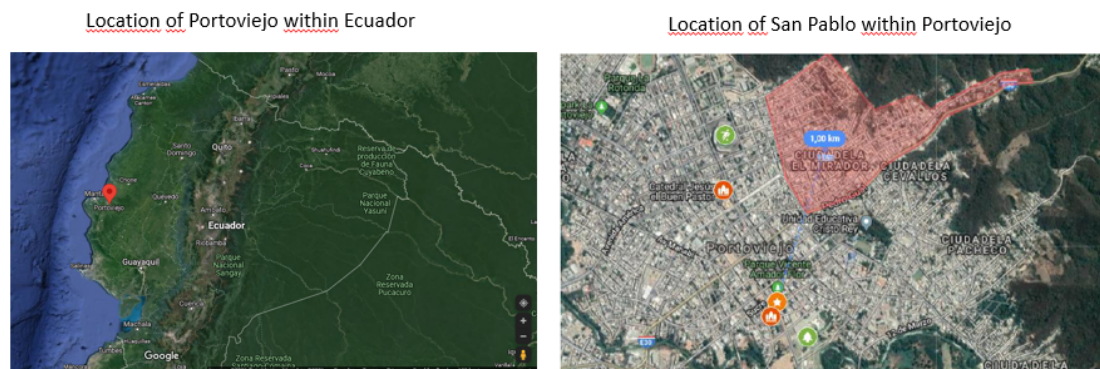


Image 1: Map of location (APGRE & GIZ 2021: 14)

What are the main objectives and values?

"Guardianes de la Colina" is a neighborhood organization that has been formed around the strengthening of local capacities and collaboration with external actors, for the protection and intervention of the hills of the parish, as a way to reduce the risk of landslides, recover public space, and improve the quality of life.

This has unfolded in a variety of interventions, in which a set of actors, mentioned below, have participated. Among them, we can highlight: the collaboration for the design of the Comic "Guardianes de la Colina", for informative purposes, to collect memory and highlight disaster preparedness (see Image 2); the inclusion of children in the processes

of caring for green areas and reforestation; the recovery of streams, waste management, and positioning of the relationship of caring for the environment with the right to inhabit safe areas; local capacity development processes such as "Sustainable Endogenous Development Managers"; among other actions. (APGRE & GIZ 2021).



Image 2: Comic Guardianes de la Colina (APGRE & GIZ 2021: 20)

Who are the promoters and beneficiaries?

Initially, in 2019 the group consisted of 10 members, going on to have up to 40 “guardians” from all sectors of the parish. The participation of women in the leadership and support of the group stands out. (See Image 3).

One element that characterizes these territorial interventions has been the ability to articulate capacities of different actors, both internal and external to the community. In particular, stands out the Ecuadorian Association of Professionals for Risk Management (APGRE) and the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ-Ecuador). Other key actors have participated in different interventions, such as the Autonomous Government of Portoviejo and several Universities.



Image 3: Miembros del grupo Guardianes de la Colina (APGRE & GIZ 2021: 18)

How does this initiative engage with climate?

In a broad sense, the social understanding of risk, as well as actions to reduce it, account for ways of adaptation and mitigation of the occurrence of extreme weather events. In San Pablo, along with a higher frequency of severe weather events during the last years, different actors responded from a greater willingness to address risks as a public matter. This means a comprehensive approach which involves understanding risk to disasters from both natural hazards and social construction of vulnerability.

Within this approach, Climate Change has meant a platform from which to engage with different actors, resources and initiatives. For example, many of the interventions in San Pablo have been possible from the "Urban Laboratory" of Portoviejo, on the theme of "Resilience, risk management and adaptation to climate change", promoted by GIZ-Ecuador. Several actors involved have found resonance and possibilities for financing and action in the field that has been generated around climate change. (GIZ & APGRE 2021)

What is the timeline? Are there already visible effects?

The first settlements of what would later become San Pablo occurred in the 1950s. An unplanned and disordered growth led the populations with greater social vulnerability to settle in the hills, which triggered, especially in the rainy season, different events of landslides, registered since the 80's. However, in the five years after the 2016 earthquake that shook the Ecuadorian provinces of Manabí and Esmeraldas, actors and political wills have begun to meet for risk reduction at the local level. The inhabitants of San Pablo began to get involved with the efforts to achieve better urban planning by the Municipality, with the support of civil society and international cooperation. These efforts allowed a more comprehensive approach, beyond the eviction of homes in risk areas, which had characterized previous periods.

Together with other instances of political government of the parish, the formation of the group "Guardianes de la Colina" expresses a form of local organization that raised as its own matter, while open to collaboration with other actors, the reduction of risk of landslides through mitigation actions, recovery of public space and, broadly, the exercise of rights.

Based on a sense of belonging to the territory, San Pablo has been able to modify an imaginary that reduced this parish to elements of danger, to position themselves as an organized community, with commitment to the public. One example is the recovery of spaces in the upper parts of the hills that have now been designed as viewpoints of the city, generating common public spaces, while protecting the protective areas against landslides.

Which limits does it encounter? Are any shortcomings or critical points visible?

What other problematic issues can arise from its implementation?

The interventions have involved the encounter of different actors, with their senses, sensitivities, interests and knowledges, not free of tensions inherent to their different positions. An important challenge can be found in the efforts of recognizing different types of knowledges, experts and non-experts, in understanding risk reduction. For example, misunderstandings can emerge when getting together academics and local dwellers in defining risk and interventions of a territory. Another relevant element has to

do with financial support, that allows the risk reduction efforts to continue, while promoting actions that enhance and install durable capacities for local management of the territory. Finally, as part of the organizational processes, we can mention the rotation of the actors and leaders of these initiatives, due to administrative or political changes, which restrict the continuity or scope of several actions.

Is this initiative conducive to broader changes?

Many of the actions in San Pablo have been linked to broader municipal policies that account for both a greater institutional framework for territorial risk management, and the political will of the latest administrations. This has been evidenced in a set of instruments, among which the Ordinance that regulates the Decentralized Cantonal Risk Management System (2019), as well as its management model, designed with the technical support of the APGRE, stand out. As a result, at the specific level of San Pablo, it can be mentioned how, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Neighborhood Risks and Emergencies Committees (CREB) functioned as key actors in the identification, management and response to reduce the risk of contagions at the local level.

How would it be potentially replicable in other settings?

The actions carried out in San Pablo, many of them with the leading role of the local group “Guardianes de la Colina”, may be replicated in other urban sectors exposed to disaster risks. It is important to highlight how, for example, GIZ-Ecuador has generated several disclosure documents that collect and systematize the actions, in order to identify good practices that can be replicable in other urban contexts. Of this, we can mention the concrete experience of a varied and diverse network of actors, both from the territory, municipalities, civil society, cooperation and academia. All this allows us to recognize the potential of collaborative efforts, as well as the rectifiable difficulties that emerge from these encounters. Precisely, it is important to highlight the coincidence of the actors to achieve both comprehensive understandings and responses, in which risk reduction is articulated with other areas of rights. This approach to rights, which includes living in safe areas, has made it possible to include concrete mechanisms on the public agenda and

institutions that emphasize risk reduction rather than response to post-disaster emergencies. (APGRE & GIZ 2021).

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