

COMMUNITY AND RESPECT FOR LIFE (B): THE ROLE OF NESTLÉ COLOMBIA IN SOCIETY¹

The seriousness of the situation called for action, and Nestlé Colombia got to work, convinced that the issue needed to be approached from a different perspective. A working team was formed, led by the Head of Market, supported by the Vice- chairperson of the Americas Zone, and—most importantly—with the involvement of Human Resources, Labor Relations, Security, Corporate Affairs, Communications, and Legal. The team brought together individuals with different perspectives on the issue and what needed to be done, but there was agreement that it was time to go beyond what had been done up to that point. Two lines of action were established. Antonio emphasized *“the team’s deep commitment and motivation to find solutions.”*

In the first meetings, they began analyzing what kind of framework would make sense and where they could contribute. For example, it was clear to them that offering armored vehicles or bodyguard services—as the union had requested—was not the right approach, as that wasn’t the company’s responsibility. So then, what was? Two areas of focus began to take shape:

1. Committing to work with external organizations, starting with a human rights audit carried out with the Fundación Ideas para la Paz²² and joining the United Nations Global Compact program in Colombia.
2. Mapping external stakeholders, who were then contacted to proactively discuss the situation—presenting the company’s perspective and listening to the other side’s point of view.

Without abandoning the first option, they chose to focus on the second. They spoke with many different people—HR specialists and representatives from other companies—to learn what others had done, trying to understand the other side’s perspective and looking for opportunities to collaborate, until they found the expert they were looking for. The list included government officials, unions, academia, NGOs, and the United Nations.

¹ This is a Case of the Research Division of San Telmo Business School, Spain. It has been written by Professor Rocío Reina Paniagua Business School and is intended as a basis for class discussion only and not to illustrate any judgment on the effective or ineffective management of a specific situation.

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² The Fundación Ideas para la Paz (FIP) is an independent think-and-action tank founded in 1999 by Colombian business leaders. At the time, it was the country’s leading research center in the fields of peace and security.

They found the partner they needed at the nearby university, the Universidad del Valle del Cauca: Dr. Rodrigo Guerrero, a two-term mayor of Cali, internationally recognized as an expert in violence and in strategies to reduce crime. He headed the Cisalva Institute, which specialized in developing strategies to address the root causes of violence. Dr. Guerrero brought both deep experience and strong credibility from his time as mayor, during which he successfully reduced crime rates in the city of Cali. That was the thread—the path—they began to follow.

There was strong interest on both sides to move forward with the project in the municipalities of Bugalagrande, Andalucía, and Tuluá—home to most of the Nestlé workers from the Bugalagrande plant. Following the strategy proposed by Dr. Guerrero, it was decided to propose the creation of an observatory on the Causes of Violence to the municipal mayors. Dr. Guerrero's experience and credibility were key to accelerating implementation. That first step *"was crucial in breaking down resistance and building trust within the project team—everyone began to feel they were moving in the right direction."*

As a result of the conversations, a new initiative was launched in early 2019, shortly after another murder in February (see Exhibit 1 for a joint statement from the unions): Community and Respect for Life. The project began to take shape around four key pillars (see Exhibit 2 for a project infographic).

COMMUNITY AND RESPECT FOR LIFE

Strengthening Security Protocols

The most immediate step was to continue reinforcing Security and Human Rights training for all Nestlé personnel, with special attention given to union leaders.

Since the tragic murder in 2005, Nestlé Colombia had implemented a comprehensive set of action protocols, which included training all employees on security matters and, in the specific case of union leaders, providing support measures in situations of potential risk or threats. These measures included paid leave, expenses related to temporary relocation, and financial assistance to improve home security conditions, among others. In the context of Community and Respect for Life, these protocols were also thoroughly reviewed and updated.

Observatory on the Causes of Violence

The next step was to promote the Observatory on the Causes of Violence in collaboration with the municipalities of Bugalagrande, Andalucía, and Tuluá, providing financial support to help implement it at the local level.

The Observatory brought together individuals from various sectors—Police, Prosecutor's Office, Military, and Emergency Services, among others—who met to analyze objective data and incidents related to criminal activity, study their root causes, and develop proposals so that authorities could implement actions aimed at eliminating the sources of

violence. Violence was analyzed as if it were an epidemic. Rodrigo Guerrero, a medical doctor, advocated the idea that violence should be treated as an epidemic—and that epidemics must always be approached from a multifactorial perspective. There are always many causes; focusing on just one is never enough.

His method had several components, one of them fundamental—the starting point: creating an observatory on the causes of violence that would bring together everyone with relevant information on criminal activity—police, judges, mayors, and a broad range of others—at the same table to reach consensus on one essential issue: what was happening and when. They would create a map with dates, days, times, and locations, and analyze violent incidents to try to understand them. For example, they might examine why violence spiked at a particular street corner between 3:00 and 4:00 a.m. on Friday and Saturday nights. This approach aimed to break away from conventional thinking.

They didn't aim to end drug trafficking worldwide, but if the causes of deaths were influenced by alcohol or nighttime activity, there could be concrete measures —like closing bars at 1:00 a.m. instead of 5:00 a.m. or banning motorcycle passengers (since the killer would ride on the back and shoot from there). It was about taking very practical actions, grounded not in reality but rather in theory.

The second element was to build a broad alliance involving all stakeholders in the conversation—including those who had traditionally been the most critical of Nestlé's actions. As Antonio put it:

"What you absolutely shouldn't do is shy away from the critics. On the contrary, you must see it as a chance to open up a dialogue—really listen to where they're coming from and start building something together. It all starts with the belief that the only way to solve the problem is by working together—and that kind of collaboration begins with transparency and a willingness to engage, even with those who challenge you."

And the third pillar was rooted in the understanding that one of the underlying causes of violence is always tied to social inequality, economic disparity, and lack of opportunity. In that sense, they knew they had to leverage everything Nestlé was already doing around creating shared value. "Youth Initiative" was one of Nestlé Colombia's flagship programs aimed at promoting youth employment and improving young people's employability. As part of Community and Respect for Life, they decided to strengthen all Youth Initiative efforts that had a direct impact on the communities in Valle del Cauca. A Youth Leadership School was created, professional training programs for young people at the Bugalagrande plant were expanded, and Dual Technical Education programs were promoted. All of it was focused on giving young people real opportunities—opportunities that would steer them away from the risk of falling into crime.

Nestlé didn't want the observatory to be owned or controlled by the company. The goal was objectivity and long-term sustainability—it needed to be the local authorities who