

Others, not having anywhere to go, colonized the first refugee camp, ironically located next to the town cemetery due to its secure altitude. Municipal trucks, pickups, and even private cars carried out the evacuation. It lasted several days. Meanwhile, the health authorities, the police, and the Red Cross and Civil Defense set up their emergency headquarters.

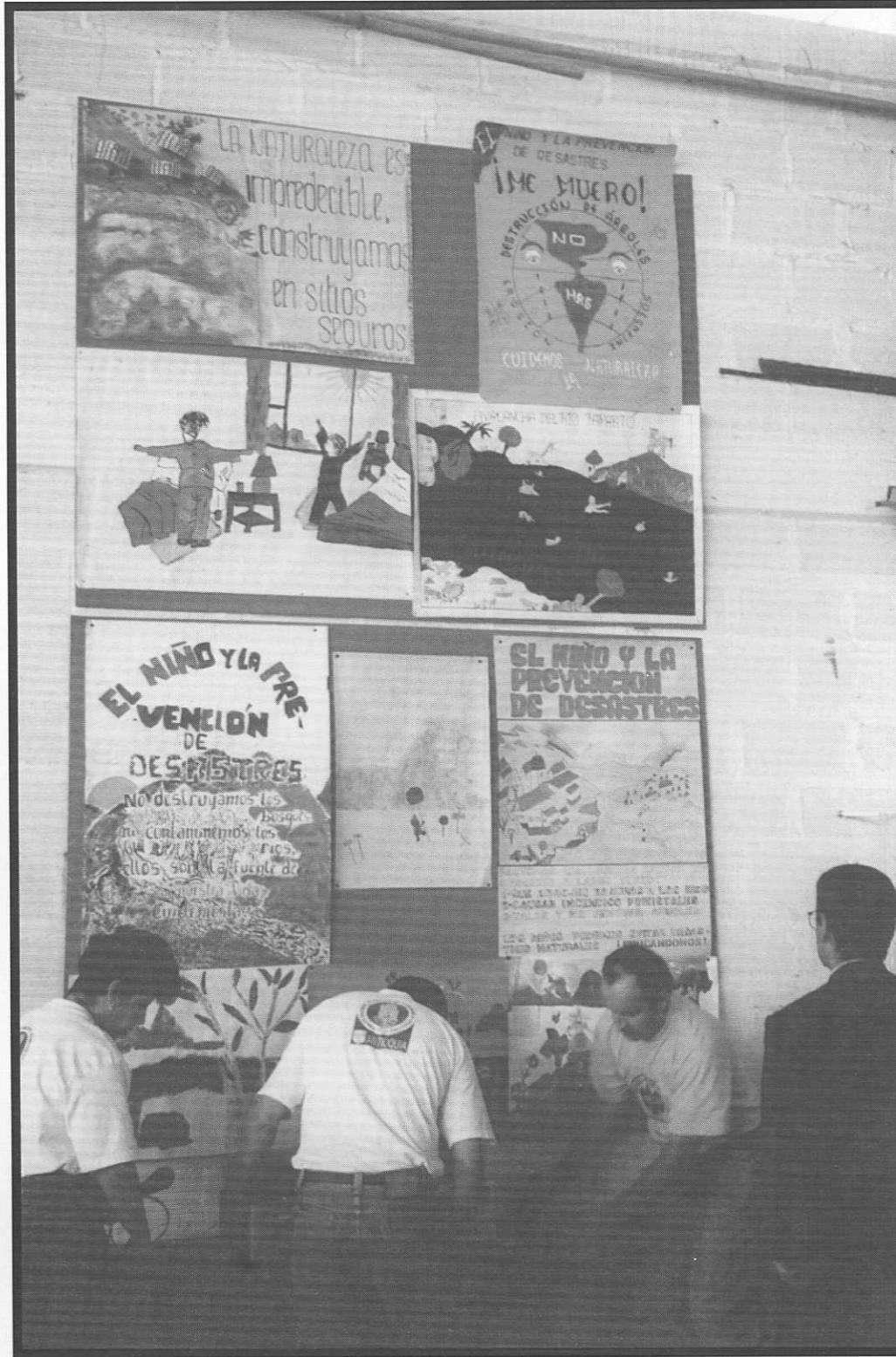
The first few days were difficult. Many were tempted to head back to their homes and let fate do what it would. The shelters could not be described as comfortable; no disaster prevention initiative can ever run as smoothly as one might wish. But the former inhabitants of San Cayetano refused to allow their spirits to sink. Gradually, commerce reappeared. Small restaurants were improvised in the tents. A hastily put-together bakery spread its delicious aromas around the camps. A childcare center was set up. Other municipalities, such as Villagómez, brought in supplies and temporary building materials in a reassuring show of solidarity.

Meanwhile, the people looked down on their doomed, uninhabited city as the mudflows, patiently but unrelentingly, tore apart the local stadium and other landmarks. Those who dared to visit the town testified to the increasingly wider fractures in the buildings and roads, the walls that had collapsed under the weight of soil and water. San Cayetano would soon be nothing more than a memory.

Together We Stand

Officials of the Cundinamarca state government visited the area and developed an Action Plan that involved the constant feedback and collaboration of engineers, architects, social workers, physicians, and psychologists. But it was the courage of the people of the area that allowed San Cayetano—as a community—not to disappear, but to rise out of its own ashes, like a mud-encrusted phoenix, in a new setting. New, more permanent homes went up, as well as communal kitchens and dining rooms. The school was built, and soon the students were able to continue with their education.

The National Disaster Prevention and Response Directorate declared a state of emergency, opening the gates to the inflow of new resources at the national level. The Cundinamarca state



government, through its Planning Administration Department, ordered surveys and other studies to be carried out, in order to make it possible to plan responsibly the building of the new San

Cayetano. A technical committee, serving as liaison between the national and state governments, played a key role.

A census was carried out. It used the latest technology, identifying the population's characteristics, standard of living, and type of housing previously enjoyed. Curiously enough, it also enabled the authorities to learn about social problems such as an unusually high proportion of people with hearing impairment or mental problems. A joint assessment with Ingeominas helped to identify the safest location for the new settlement, by specifying the various natural hazards in the area. A land use management plan for San Cayetano was developed, including an evaluation of its new urban design by the Colombian Association of Architects.

Concrete Actions: A Multisectoral Challenge

The State Ministry of Public Works assigned resources for restoring eight Km of the crucial Cogua-San Cayetano highway. The Ministry of Agriculture distributed "peasant peace dividends" that benefited 150 families. It also parceled out food security bonds to 100 women heads-of-household, and provided additional benefits to 231 other families. More than 300 San Cayetano farmers were provided with entrepreneurial training, post-harvest training, warehouses and other facilities. Providing 350 people with chickens, fruit tree striplings, and seeds encouraged subsistence farming. They also received training in animal nutrition, forage maintenance, and fish-farming techniques.

In partnership with the National University of Colombia's Faculty of Veterinarian Medicine, the State Ministry of Economic Development launched a feasibility study on the implementation of a cooperative micro-enterprise dedicated to milk processing and marketing in the San Cayetano municipality, including environmental, legal, hygienic, nutritional, quality control, financial, and genetic stock improvement issues.

The State Government has provided support to teachers and students. The temporary school facilities are among the finest in the shelter. One hundred primary school students and 120 secondary school students can enjoy a library and recreational areas. To recompense the teachers, the Education Ministry declared the municipality an "area of difficult access", giving teachers the right to an 8% monthly bonus.

Culture has not been neglected, either. The State Cultural Institute provides training in dance, music, and pictorial arts. Children are taught how to read a score, learn the characteristics of the various instruments, and play in a school band. They are taught how to obtain their drawing and painting materials from nature, including burnt tree roots that can be used to sketch in black and white. The parents take an active part in all these activities.

Soon, the Cultural Institute will inaugurate a library. It will only have 45 volumes at first, a small collection by practically any standard. But it is a start. The texts will include books on literature, mathematics, and the various sciences, and students are meant to use them. A new multi-sport center is also in the works.

In March 2000, the Institute provided San Cayetano with the first "ludoteque" in Cundinamarca. It is a collection of educational toys, games, and other materials that will enable children between the ages of three and six to improve their physical and mental dexterity through early stimulation. A school breakfast program is underway. So is a special care program for the handicapped, in association with the State Ministry of Health. Efforts have been made to raise the value of the social capital of the community by promoting the reconstruction of the social fabric, as well as the need to understand that the dislocations recently suffered should not stand in the way of social, educational and economic improvements. Life goes on.

A New Dawn in San Cayetano

On 30 January 2000, a local referendum chose the site of New San Cayetano, one of the safe locations that had been recommended by Ingeominas. The State Administration is now negotiating with the public and private sectors to build homes for close to 200 families.

New San Cayetano will be located high above the Villamizar River, northeast of the old town. It will be 2,775 m above sea level; its average temperature will be 12.5° Celsius. Forests in the area will protect the river basin from landslides, at the same time that they increase the fertility of the soils, promising greater productivity in farming and cattle production.

San Cayetano, a town that was forced to relocate in order to be spared the impact of natural disasters, can now take advantage of improved scientific and technical knowledge to relocate itself in a place that will be less exposed to hazards of every kind. Meanwhile, its far from ancient ruins have been declared of cultural interest, making them a potential attraction for tourists who want to know what mudslides and seismic activity can do to a town. It is a valuable lesson, which the inhabitants were lucky enough to learn without massive casualties and loss of property. It is one will bear in mind, as they focus their attention on the future. ■

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