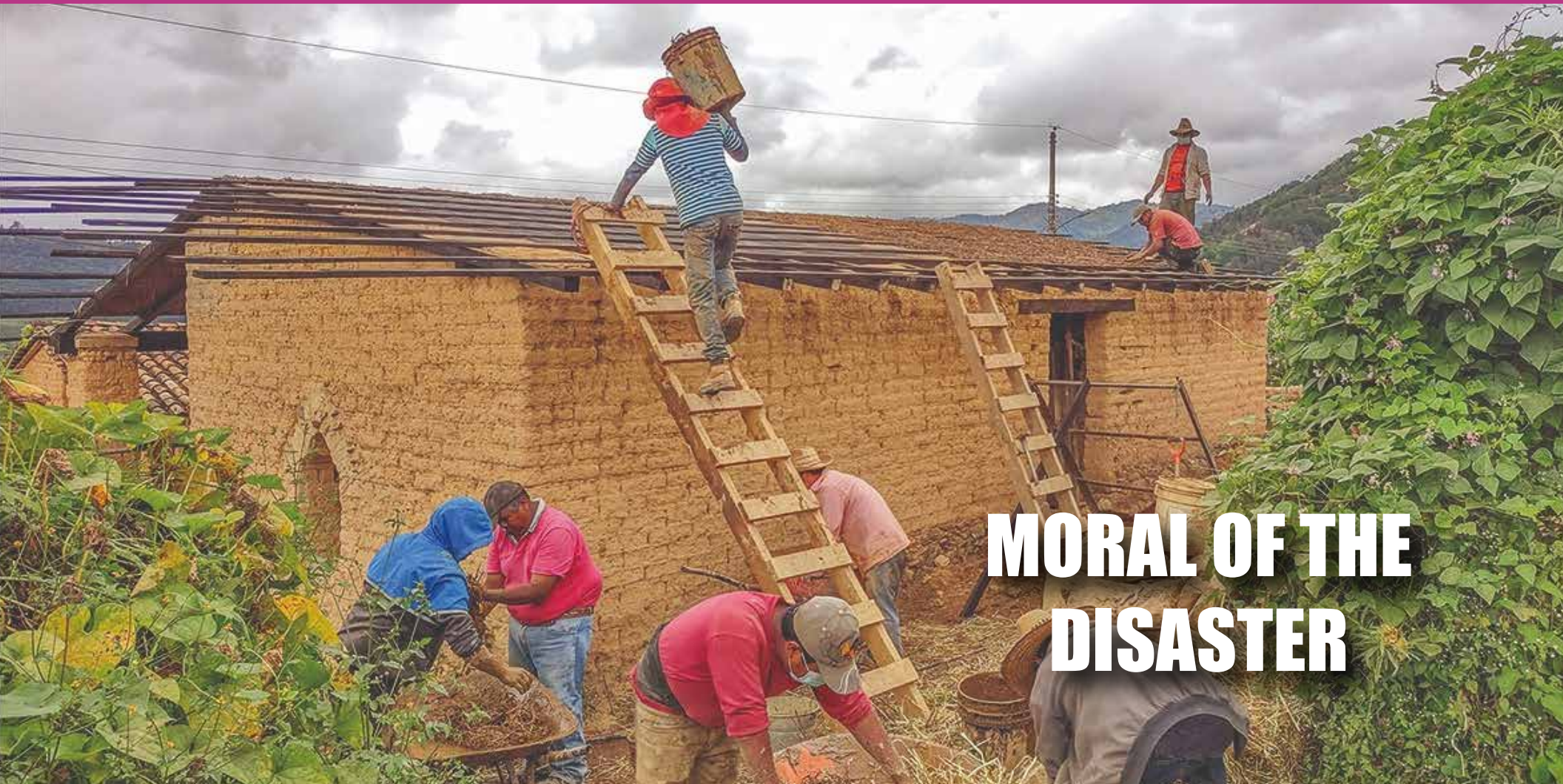


# Almanac of the Future

A STORY OF SUCCESS

Motivational Experience No. 51



**MORAL OF THE  
DISASTER**



*Hurricanes are tropical cyclones and consist of storms with extreme winds and deluge rains. We have all heard about these extreme climate events, increasingly frequent due to climate changes, undoubtedly caused by the impact of our species on the Earth in times of the Anthropocene. Community Cooperation, a Mexican non-governmental and non-profit organization, has developed and practices in full symmetry with indigenous-peasant communities paths towards the comprehensive reconstruction and social management of the habitat. Starting from diagnoses with people in the face of disasters, a methodology emerged that, instead of being trapped in the dead end of unsuitable short-term aid, revitalizes ancestral local knowledge, strengthening it through technological innovations based on understanding and respect for the wisdom of cultural and territorial identities. The result of this collective work speaks for itself: resilience capacities reduce the vulnerability of people in rural Mexico.*

## DISASTERS FROM DISASTER

Otis is the name of the hurricane that in October of last year (2023) devastated the famous Pacific resort of Acapulco with winds of three hundred kilometers per hour. So much for the news broadcast worldwide; not a word about the damage to the rural regions of the state of Guerrero, southwest of the capital; while the Mexican federal government launched a program to deal with the disaster in the hotel zone, government authorities in Guerrero even denied the damage caused by Otis in the countryside: an invisibility of the rural areas, which seems to be an endemic defect in Mexico.

Despite the high probability of severe seismic events and hurricanes such as Ingrid and Manuel in 2013, from the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean, joining and devastating entire rural areas of the state of Guerrero, the governments, both state and federal, lack accurate methodologies to guide their emergency and reconstruction pro-



grams. The rural construction culture in this region of Guerrero, and not only in this state, retains earth as the predominant building material. The approach of the governmental reconstruction programs ignores this olympically and blindly follows urban and business logics: instead of local construction materials, blocks and cement are used to build small houses with urban logics, instead of rural houses, suitable for the rural way of life, instead of allowing and encouraging self-production enters the management of the service provider, ignoring what can be ignored: rainy weather, festivities and mythology, participatory architecture. The results of this erroneous policy are not lacking: La



Lucerna, a patch of these little houses, built as part of a reconstruction program in the vicinity of La Soledad in Guerrero, visible from afar because of the colorfulness of its colors, has never been inhabited; the families, apparently benefited, have preferred to rebuild their adobe houses, using the little houses, in the best of cases as a warehouse or storehouse.

The clumsiness of public policies in Mexico due to their lack of interest in understanding cultures, local knowledge and the anthropology of rurality seems even more worrying if we take into account that the vulnerability of rural communities to socio-natural disasters is increasing, due to the gradual loss of traditional knowledge and skills.

## THE STRUGGLE AGAINST OBLIVION

"We do not present immediate responses to socio-natural disasters, but rather seek to contribute to comprehensive reconstruction", explains Diana Cortese, who organizes the leveraging of financial resources at Cooperación Comunitaria, and Jesús Álvarez adds: "Disasters are not natural, but socio-natural, since human beings - based on their economic systems - are implicated in the vulnerabilities existing in marginalized communities. Therefore, we refer to socio-natural disasters". The institution, established 12 years ago, but operating since 2008, is dedicated to the production and integral reconstruction and social management of the habitat. In its path it has counted on the accompaniment of the Habitat International Coalition - HIC; Enrique Ortiz, one of the most emblematic characters in relation to the habitat issue, belongs to the advisory council of Cooperación Comunitaria. He works in integral reconstruction, production and social management of habitat, training and advocacy and

more recently in climate justice. From four categories (territorial-environmental, socio-cultural, constructive and productive), participatory-training processes are being aimed at the collective self-management of organizations and groups. All work and processes follow a pedagogical sequence of community diagnosis, participatory design, search for financing, planning and organization, implementation, evaluation and use and maintenance. Misereor and Global Nature Fund, both from Germany, are two of the cooperating partners who support the work of this collective, which works in rural areas of several Mexican states (for the moment in Guerrero, Hidalgo, Oaxaca, Yucatan and Chiapas).

Gathered in La Soledad, Eloy Espíndola, a community member of this town shares with us: *"We know how to cut down trees but nobody plants them. Cooperación Comunitaria made us remember to select seeds and now we are planting trees again. It is important to involve the children so that oblivion does not win over us"*. Circumstances and factors really do not help in this



race against oblivion and there are many examples of the abandonment of traditional knowledge: the mixture of earth and manure or vegetable fibers to make adobe is being lost with the consequence that the resistance of the adobe brick is not as before; we no longer know how to read the bio-indicators that help in forecasting rainfall and climate due to the loss of symbolic acts that guarantee the intergenerational

transfer of this knowledge and the reading of these bio-indicators; State gifts of hybrid seeds generate the temptation to expand the cultivable area to the detriment of trees, vegetation cover and the milpa (crops of corn, beans and squash), causing erosion in mountain areas. The migration of men to work in the city or directly to the neighboring country (USA) means that women, who have to take care of their children, house and agriculture, do not have enough time for restorative work such as reforestation; and there are very few people who learned from their ancestors how to cut firewood from trees, preferably from the different species of oak that exist in the mountains, without cutting down the entire tree.

## IMPROVING ON WHAT ALREADY EXISTS

Jesús Álvarez coordinates the construction processes of Cooperación Comunitaria: *"We design with the people what we are going to build"*



*together: the house or a wood-saving stove, rescuing and respecting the construction culture".* Adobe continues to be the construction material with full social acceptance; as a roofing material, galvanized sheet metal has been replacing clay tiles. "We accept these changes and work from what already exists. Instead of insisting on the use of roof tiles, which are no longer produced in the area, we worked with an insulator made of straw and clay, placed underneath the sheets, thus keeping the inside of the house cool and dampening the noise when it rains". The energy-saving stoves are built according to the design of each family; the stoves help save up to half of the firewood and work like a chimney, taking the smoke out of the kitchen environment through a pipe. In the design of the houses, the mix of adobe bricks has been improved, the foundation and overlaying of the houses are made of stone glued with cement, lime and sand to prevent the walls from humidity. Enclosures or beams in the crown of the walls, made of reinforced concrete or wood, form, toge-

ther with the cross walls, stabilization buttresses that guarantee greater stabilization and anti-seismic protection. "We seek to analyze and understand the causes of disasters in order to mitigate vulnerabilities rather than address needs based on the consequences", explains Guillermo Andrade, head of the productive and environmental area of Cooperación Comunitaria.

Deforestation in mountain regions generates increasing erosion problems, reducing the infiltration capacity of rainfall into the soil and increasing the risk of landslides in the event of earthquakes and hurricanes. The felling of trees, primarily for firewood for cooking, but also to increase the cultivable area to produce milpa crops on a larger scale, aggravates this situation. The integral work carried out by the institution together with organized groups of indigenous-peasant families seeks to work on the causes, mitigating or preventing vulnerabilities.

Firewood-saving stoves help reduce the pressure on firewood trees, and at the same time, work is being done on tree nurseries for firewood, as well as on fruit trees and Creole coffee, with the objective of generating spaces free of agrochemicals in which food and coffee are produced under diverse shades, while conserving the pine-oak forest and the patches of cloud forest in the area. Consideration is being given to rescuing ancestral techniques for pruning trees and obtaining firewood. In the same line there are works oriented to generate small productive initiatives that start from the trilogy of the milpa (corn, beans and pumpkin) and coffee as a product of the zone for the market; in parallel there is a constant accompaniment to the authorities of the Agrarian Nucleus of Malinaltepec; these are traditional authorities, elected by the 34 communities that conform the agrarian territory, to administer all the aspects related to the natural goods (water, common lands, etc.). A visit to the commissariat of the agrarian nucleus shows the great need for this type of support

since there is a very weak environmental territorial management on the part of the delegates who do what they can, but do not have a more thematic advisory and expertise instance.

## PERMANENT IMPACT

Cooperación Comunitaria does not miss any opportunity to have an impact. At the Intercultural University of the State of Guerrero in La Ciénega, the institution has opened an environmental classroom, promoting the production and social management of the habitat (construction with adobe bricks and mud plaster, dry toilets or compost bins, allowing services during the dry season and lack of water) and agroforestry systems plots. The National Housing Commission - CONAVI, originally did not contemplate for its subsidy programs for popular or social housing the construction with local materials and the social production of housing.

Cooperación Comunitaria, together with other member organizations of HIC, achieved an acceptance of this federal public entity on the issues in question; but not all obstacles have been overcome: CONAVI and public housing development programs work with individual subsidies. Cooperación Comunitaria works in the channeling of these subsidies without losing its community focus, which is often a headache. Participatory

architecture is another advocacy path practiced by the institution to raise awareness in university curricula. The philosophy of habitat is one of the guiding lines of the research work carried out by Cooperación Comunitaria within its possibilities, making real juggling to achieve compatibility with public research programs and thus achieve synergy and raise some funds for this area. With the incursion into the issue of climate justice, another





line of work and advocacy has emerged, which is certainly very broad and challenging.

Cooperación Comunitaria, with all this seems like a bet for the reconstruction of traditional knowledge, to prevent threats and mitigate vulnerabilities and to build futures from the cultural and territorial identities of the communities. The good thing is that this bet seems highly contagious.



## MESSAGES TO THE FUTURE

- The recovery of traditional knowledge on land and habitat management contributes both to increase the resilience of structures and to mitigate vulnerability to natural hazards or socio-natural disasters.
- It seems audacious at the time of disasters to put the emphasis first and foremost on participatory diagnosis in order to identify the causes that generate these extreme events, instead of limiting oneself to emergency aid. But it is the only possible critical route to go beyond merely addressing the consequences of socio-natural hazards such as hurricanes and earthquakes and to promote the resilience of ecosystems and the resilience of populations.
- The participatory architecture and the institutional work model based on respect and understanding of cultural and territorial identities with their knowledge, myths, rites and anthropologies allow horizontality, empowerment and concrete steps towards sustainability and holistic friendliness.

# Almanac of the Future

The text was written based on a visit to the area of La Soledad, Cienega and Malinaltepec, head of the same municipality in the State of Guerrero, in southwestern Mexico, and conversations during a three-day stay with the Cooperación Comunitaria team by Jorge Krekeler (coordinator of the Almanac of the Future - facilitator of Misereor on behalf of Agiamondo). For the openness, interest and support of Cooperación Comunitaria, many thanks to Isadora Hastings and Diana Cortese, to Jesús Álvarez, Guillermo Andrade, Ebert Morón and the other members of this community. For the time dedicated, the reception and the trust given in the dialogues, an affectionate thanks to Eloy Espindola, Professor Erica and many other people in La Soledad, in the Intercultural University of the State of Guerrero in La Ciénega and to the representatives of the commissariat of the agrarian nucleus of Malinaltepec.

Authors: **Jorge Krekeler**  
jorge.krekeler@posteo.de

Design: **Ida Peñaranda - Gabriela Avendaño**  
Photographs: **Cooperación Comunitaria - Jorge Krekeler**  
Translation: **Olaf Niemtschik**

Contact details regarding the documented experience:

**Cooperación Comunitaria**  
www.cooperacioncomunitaria.org  
info@cooperacioncomunitaria.org  
Facebook: CooperacionComunitariaAC  
Twitter: CooperacionCom  
Instagram: Cooperacion\_Comunitaria

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