



THE MINING COMMUNITY IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF EL BAGRE

Antioquia, Colombia

El Bagre is one of six municipalities in the Bajo Cauca subregion of the department of Antioquia, located 284 kilometers from the city of Medellín. Approximately 49,500 people currently live in the municipality, but these numbers are quickly climbing¹. This phenomenon of population growth is due to the municipality's importance as an appealing place to work in mining since the 1990s.

The ethnic composition is characterized by a predominance of mestizos (77%), followed by Afro-Colombians, blacks, mulattos or Afro-descendants (21%), and in lowest percentage the indigenous groups (2%). The main economic activity carried out by the mestizos and Afro-descendants is mining. These groups have migrated to the municipality from neighboring departments such as Bolívar, Chocó, Córdoba, and Sucre. For indigenous groups, principally the Zenú tribe, their economy is based on mining, agriculture, and small animal husbandry².

1. Plan de desarrollo del municipio de La Llanada 2016-2019 –“Un Gobierno de Calidad, con Sentido Social”- y la información suministrada por el DANE 2015

2. Estudio de Perfil Productivo Rural y Urbano del Municipio de El Bagre MINISTERIO DEL TRABAJO - Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, 2013

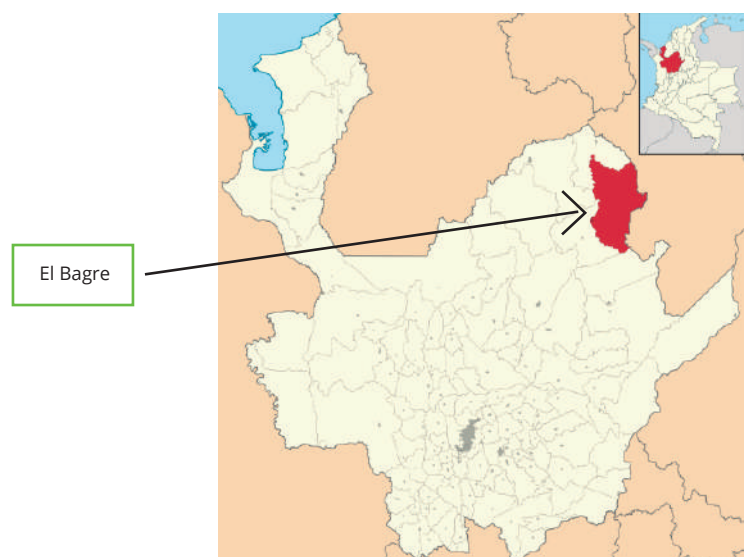
AN HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF ARMED CONFLICT

Bajo Cauca is one of the subregions of Antioquia that has experienced an elevated level of armed conflict, and the municipality of El Bagre is no exception.

One of the multiple consequences of the violence and disputes between illegal armed groups in Colombia has been population displacement. In the case of the Bajo Cauca subregion, the municipality of El Bagre has suffered displacement to a greater extent. Between 1997 and 2010, El Bagre had the largest displaced population in the subregion, with 18,147 displaced persons out of the total 55,306 population³.

Illegal armed groups have also made their presence known in the area for many years. They have been applying extortion against merchants and businesses in general, and some have also been illegally mining in areas of the municipality.

3. Estudio de Perfil Productivo Rural y Urbano del Municipio de El Bagre MINISTERIO DEL TRABAJO - Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, 2013



THE CENTRAL ROLE OF MINING

Gold mining is the predominant occupation in the municipality, and it is estimated to represent 80 to 85% of economic activity in El Bagre.

Mining takes place on alluviums in three large areas: in the western zone with the alluvial deposits of the Nechí and Tigüi rivers, in the central zone that corresponds to the batholith of Segovia, and in the eastern zone. El Bagre is the top gold producer of the department of Antioquia.

Mining is classified by the level of exploitation, from large-scale to medium, small, and subsistence mining.

Small-scale mining is characterized by the use of less advanced technology compared to large and medium-scale mining. In the Bajo Cauca region, small-scale mining is the second most common type and contributes approximately 50% of the production⁴.

In the municipality of El Bagre there is also subsistence mining, a sector that lacks any form of business organization. At this level are the individual gold panners, who wash the sands manually to separate its content of precious metals.

4. PBOT, 2009



ARM'S TERRITORIAL INTERVENTIONS

In 2016 the project Somos Tesoro (meaning We Are Treasure), which seeks to eliminate child labor in mining organizations in Colombia, was implemented in the municipalities of El Bagre and Zaragoza. The Alliance for Responsible Mining (ARM) is part of the project consortium and has been responsible for supporting the artisanal miners in developing good mining practices. Work began a year ago in the area, encompassing seven rural districts of the municipality of El Bagre, and it has provided training in the use of personal protective equipment and prevention in mercury use.

In addition to this intervention, another capacity-building project is being implemented that seeks to strengthen the management, leadership, monitoring, and evaluation skills of socio-economic projects in associations of women gold panners in the region.

Through these projects, ARM has achieved a trust-based relationship with miners in the municipality. For this reason, this same population has been chosen to be beneficiary of the project CAPAZ (the name an abbreviated form of "Chain of Peace" in Spanish) to improve its mining practices and obtain better market conditions.

In fact, CAPAZ is an opportunity to guarantee continuity in the assistance offered to the 701 gold panners, in El Bagre and Zaragoza who were identified and supported initially within the framework of the Somos Tesoro project. Having already adopted some changes in their mining practices, the miners are highly motivated to continue improving in such topics as partnership, management, and marketing practices, like eliminating the use of mercury.