

Colombian hip hoppers changing the world

Ayara Family Artistic and Social Foundation (Bogotá, Colombia)
Project description 2009



BOGOTA, 2004 | KATJA NOORDAM (excerpts)

Introduction

Ayara Artistic and Social Foundation (Bogotá, Colombia) is an organization of young mixed race and Afro-Colombians that carries out social, artistic, educational and income generation activities based on Hip Hop culture, with the aim of empowering and improving life opportunities for at risk girls, boys and young people, many of whom are from ethnic minorities.

There are four strands to the work of the Ayara Foundation:

Ayara Social - Ayara Foundation carries out a program of social integration workshops with young offenders, recovering drug addicts, teenage mothers and youth at risk of recruitment by gangs and illegal armed groups, as well as physically and mentally disabled adolescents.

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Ayara Fashion - Founded in Bogotá in 1996, Ayara has a small workshop for the design and production of its exclusive clothing line/collection for hip hoppers, providing learning-on-the-job opportunities for disadvantaged youth and their families.

Ayara Audiovisual/Ayara Artists has a music and a video studio for the production of CDs, video clips and documentaries of renowned Colombian Hip Hop artists as well as young new talents. In addition, this area works on the promotion of Hip Hop culture from a social angle through cultural events that have a national reach.

Ayara Political Participation – Through the strengthening of youth networks at a the local, national and international level, Ayara Foundation strives for the empowerment of young people to provide them with the skills and a united voice to intervene in the design, implementation and evaluation of public policies that have an impact on their rights and daily lives.

La Familia Ayara Foundation carries out activities in rehabilitation centers, institutions for young defenders and for children that have been abused or abandoned, and in community centers in more than 10 boroughs in Bogotá and its surrounding suburbs. In August 2008, Ayara established a Hip Hop Cultural Centre in the heart of Bogotá, where we organize artistic, social and training programs to young people from all over the city.

Ayara also reaches out to empower young people in other Colombian cities and rural areas affected by crime, poverty and the internal conflict, such as Cali, Medellín, Buenaventura, and the Afro Colombian Chocó region. Internationally, Ayara participates in several alliances to promote the empowerment of young people through art, culture and sports world wide, such as the DaRua Youth Network and the 'Safer Cities Program of UN Habitat, and is partner of the Cultural Agents Initiative of Harvard University.

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Our history



Ayara's founder Jeyffer Rentería a.k.a Don Popo in a recent interview explained the beginnings of the organization:

'Inspired by the New York Hip Hop movement of the 1980's, a group of youth from Bogotá left the streets to become artists. Our families were economic migrants from poor farming regions of the country who had come to the capital to find work. It was not easy. We grew up in poor neighborhoods in the era of the drug cartels, easy money and child prostitution, all of this within the violent context of the conflict that Colombia has suffered for the past 45 years.

There was little alternative to delinquency. For children in disadvantaged neighbor-hoods, there were two options: study during the best years of your life and then end up working as a taxi driver or be smart and make money young, even if you die young. The youth of Ayara decided to do Hip Hop.

In 1996, we set up the first small scale clothing production business in Colombia especially for hip hoppers. At that time, there was nothing similar. Until then, as young Colombian hip hoppers, to copy US Hip Hop fashion we had to buy extra large sizes in clothes to be able to dress how we wanted to. By taking out informal loans and with the help of our families, we created the Ayara Family organization and we began to design and produce Hip Hop clothes 'made in Colombia' based out of our homes.

Ayara Fashion was an instant success: our trousers and baggy T-shirts sold out so quickly that we opened up 17 shops throughout the country. Our objective was not, however, to make money; from the outset, the profits from the business were invested in developing artists and cultural initiatives to promote the growth of a constructive and socially committed Hip Hop movement.'

Our philosophy

For Ayara, Hip Hop culture has never been simply a copy of the US commercial *bling-bling* and *gangsta-rap* Hip Hop, with its accompanying culture of violence, consumerism and sexism. For Ayara, Hip Hop is a generator of change that works to eliminate racial, economic, social and gender inequalities.

Development of the movement and the organization

Between 1996 and 1999, we supported artists and groups working in street culture – rappers, break dancers, graffiti writers, roller bladers and skateboarders - through sponsorship, music production, concerts and cultural events. As the movement grew and the work of Ayara expanded, we saw the need to improve our business and teaching skills, in order to educate other young people from disadvantaged neighborhoods who, through Hip Hop culture, had found an opportunity to break out of the life that otherwise awaited them.

To address this need, we opened a cultural center in Bogotá in 1999, where we gave rap, break dance, graffiti and DJ workshops, funded through income from the clothing sales. In this same year, we produced our first compilation CD that included artists from all over the country who did not have the resources to record their music. The movement continued to grow and in 2000, Ayara held a three day event 'National Hip Hop Camp' close to Bogotá.

Unfortunately, unhealthy competition of illegally imported textiles and clothing and the pressure of paramilitaries and other illegal armed groups asking for protection money from our retail outlets affected the business' income. In 2001, Ayara was forced to close its main outlet in Bogotá, which led to the closure of other shops and the physical space of the cultural center. However, given the need to continue working with young people, Ayara gave workshops in alternative spaces, which led to the creation of neighborhood community centers for Hip Hop.





National and international support

Since 2003, primarily thanks to the support of Dutch funders, including Move Your World, CaraMundo, OLAA, Young in Prison (YIP), Wilde Ganzen-ICCO, Cordaid and CMC, the organization has been able to revive its former activities. More recently, due to the success of our social and cultural projects, Ayara has received increasing statutory funding from Colombia state entities (the Ministry of Culture, the District Institute for participation and community action, the District Department for Culture, Recreation and Sport, the Gilberto Alzate Avendaño Foundation, the Bogotá Philharmonic Orchestra, the Corporation Nuevo Arco Iris and protection and rehabilitation institutions in Bogotá (Hogares Claret, El Redentor, Cafami), who contract Ayara for the services provided.

Furthermore, since the end of the 1990's, Ayara has also been active in promoting social activities through Hip Hop in Holland. As a result of the success of these activities, Ayara Holland was founded and registered as a foundation in 2003.

Our mission

The mission of the Ayara Artistic and Social Foundation is to strengthen and develop Hip Hop as a constructive artistic movement that raises awareness of social problems and generates change, contributing to the elimination of social, racial and gender inequalities and to the construction of peace.

Through social, cultural and income generation activities with their roots in the Hip Hop culture, the Ayara Family educates and empowers at risk boys, girls and youth to break out of cycles of violence, drug addiction and social exclusion by improving their life options.

Where we stand for: organizational principles

Respect: We promote social equity regardless of ethnicity, culture, politics, creed or gender, with equal opportunities for all.

Non-violence: We are working towards building a peaceful future. We reject all types of violence, the sale and use of arms, as well as the sale and use of drugs.

Identity: Our identity is based on the Hip Hop culture through which we want to improve the quality of life of the beneficiaries.

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Honesty: We are committed to our social, cultural and business activities and to acting in an honest, responsible and transparent way as an organization and in all related activities.

Who do we work with?

The average annual number of beneficiaries of our social programs is around 1.500 young people, girls and boys. Their ages range from six to 24, although most are over 12 years of age. This figure does not take into account those who purchase clothing, viewers of the Da Beat television program and those who attend concerts and events organized by Ayara. We estimate the total number of beneficiaries being around 10.000 young people annually.

Given the methodology of the work of Ayara, which includes encouraging the involvement of the adults responsible for the welfare of the adolescents and youth beneficiaries and their wider communities in the projects implemented; the indirect beneficiaries of the projects amount to approximately 5.000.



The beneficiaries of our activities are girls and boys, young women and men whose lives have been affected by violence and poverty, including young offenders, recovering drug addicts, teenage mothers and youth at risk of recruitment by gangs and illegal armed groups, in addition to well-known bands and up and coming new artists. Furthermore, we have recently begun working with mentally and physically disabled young people. True to our mission of eliminating social barriers, we also encourage exchange of experiences and integration with young people who come from more favored backgrounds.

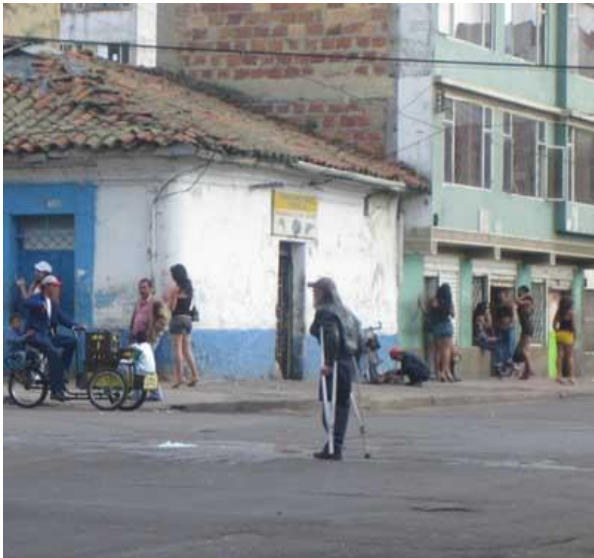
The context we work in

Poverty and lack of opportunities for young people – Young people in Colombia face many problems and the capital of Colombia is at the heart of some alarming statistics¹. The population of Bogotá is eight million, according to the last census, although other studies

¹ It should be borne in mind that there is considerable disparity between statistics. Furthermore, socio-economic tendencies in Colombia are often under-estimated in official documents.

taking into account the daily increase in the displaced population that arrives fleeing violence in their region, talk of up to 12 million. Under-18 year-olds account for a quarter of the population of Bogotá and more than half of them live in conditions of poverty, particularly in the southern part of the city. According to figures from the Mayor's office, 1.2 million people in Bogotá do not have sufficient income to cover their basic food needs².

Education and child labor – According to official figures³, the levels of attendance at primary schools is 87% and 82% of women and 72% of men complete school; these desertion figures are very high, especially in disadvantaged neighborhoods. In many cases, young people stop going to school because extreme poverty and pressure from their parents forces them into work. According to one of the largest Colombian trade unions, CUT⁴, almost 25% of the population between five and 17 years of age have some kind of work (more than 2.500.000 girls and boys); a third of them aged between six and 11 years of age⁵. In Bogotá, these young children work in the most dangerous and poorly paid sectors of the informal labor market, spending their days, and often, their nights on the streets and in workshops and factories.



Unemployment and underemployment

– In the capital, the unemployment levels of young people between the ages of 15 and 19 is 30.4% and for 20 to 24 year olds, 21%, which means that more than 50% of those unemployed in the city are young people⁶.

Street children and child prostitution –

Bogotá has the largest number of street children in Colombia, according to research carried out by the Colombian Family Welfare Institute⁷, there are at least 2000

² Sources of the data on poverty, unemployment and education; 'Youth – the challenge for the next mayor' Local development plan El Tiempo newspaper, Assessment of the situation of youth Mayor's Office Bogotá, 2007.

³ http://www.unicef.org/spanish/infobycountry/colombia_statistics.html

⁴ El vicepresidente de la (Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Colombia) CUT, Fabio Arias, dijo que con ocasión del Día Mundial contra el Trabajo Infantil <http://www.caracol.com.co/nota.aspx?id=612985>

⁵ UNICEF, 2006

⁶ Seguimiento a los Programas Bogotá Productiva y Capacidades y Oportunidades para la Generación de Ingresos y Empleo del

20062, concejodebogota.gov.co/prontus_cbogota/antialone.html?page=http://concejodebogota.gov.co/concejo/site/artic/20080512/pags/20080512171002.html

⁷ <http://www.caracol.com.co/nota.aspx?id=464214>

with nowhere to live and unable to attend school. This figure rises to almost 5000 in the major cities⁸.

A tragic consequence of this phenomenon is that many of these girls and boys turn to prostitution. According to UNICEF, sexual exploitation of minors tripled in the period from 2005-2007. Furthermore, the age at which young people begin to work in prostitution has fallen to below 10⁹.

Drug addiction – There is some evidence that children and young people in Bogotá begin taking drugs at an early age (between 10 and 15); marihuana, cocaine, glue and amphetamines being the drugs of choice. Although it occurs at all levels of society, the social impact is more obvious in the poorer neighborhoods in the city, where glue and petrol sniffing is rife and children and young people will do whatever it takes to fuel their habit, often turning to begging, prostitution and delinquency. There are currently 3.500 children and youth in rehabilitation centers in the capital. They represent the tip of the iceberg given that there are not enough places available in official institutions and a large number of young drug addicts are not being officially registered.¹⁰



Juvenile delinquency and homicides –

In the Colombian capital, an average of nine young people are arrested every day, accused of criminal activity. Most of them are accused of drug dealing and abuse, carrying arms and prostitution. Figures for gang membership vary: according to the Mayor, Samuel Moreno, there are around 20.000 young people that belong to 1.300 gangs in Bogotá. Four selective homicides are reported every day some sources speak of 15.000 members of 500 groups, others of 800 gangs in 19 of the 20 boroughs in the city.¹¹ The homicide rate in Bogotá is high and the main victims are young people.

⁸ 4547 children live in the streets of 16 Colombian cities, according to an EU and ICBF study, El Tiempo, August 10,2007

⁹ Figures published on the UNICEF website www.unicef.org

¹⁰ 'Young people consume psychotropic substances from the age of 10' May 9th, 2007 www.bogota.gov.co Light and shadow in drug addiction in Colombia. Jairo Téllez Mosquera, UN newspaper No. 76, June 12th 2005 Note: The real dimension of the use of psychotropic substances is not known because of a lack of recent and representative studies.

¹¹ Máximo Alberto Duque, Director of the Institute of Legal Medicine, quoted on Caracol News, December 3rd 2007.

District Attorney's Office and Judiciary Council on www.sequred.com February 5th-11th 2007; Gangs increase in Bogotá' Caracol News 1 de Marzo de 2005; 'Ex gang member in wheelchair recruits youth in Ciudad Bolívar to prevent them following his path' El Tiempo newspaper October 27th 2007

Child abuse and inter-family violence – According to figures from the Colombian Family Welfare Institute, the cases of child abuse in Colombia are on the increase and are at least 18% higher than in 2007. Furthermore, reports of child abuse increased by 18% between January and April 2008, compared with the same period in 2007, increasing from 20.000 to 23.000 reported cases. Sadly, Bogotá has the highest number of victims. In 2006, 3.000 cases were reported and most of them related girls between the ages of 10 and 14. The actual number of cases is thought to be considerably higher, given that many victims never report the abuse suffered for fear of reprisals or a lack of knowledge about their rights.

Adolescent mothers – The levels of teenage pregnancies in Colombia are among the highest in the world; nine of every 100 girls aged between 10 and 18 fall pregnant every year. This not only means that these young women have limited education and employment opportunities, but that the poverty cycle is perpetuated. According to Profamilia,¹² children of teenage mothers have the highest levels of morbidity, malnutrition and underdevelopment¹³.

Victims of the armed conflict – More than forty years of conflict in Colombia between the different armed groups – guerrilla, paramilitaries and the army – have left deep rooted scars. Forced displacement, forced recruitment, kidnapping, landmines, sexual violence and other war crimes and violations of International Humanitarian Law severely affect Colombian youth. According to official estimates, Bogotá received almost 40.000 victims of forced displacement in the first half of 2008, an increase of 71% compared to the same period in 2007.¹⁴ Of the three million internally displaced people in the country, 500.000 live in precarious conditions in Bogotá, more than half of which are under 18¹⁵, having been forced by the conflict to leave their homes in rural areas.

Forced recruitment – In spite of the alleged demobilization of the paramilitary groups, young people continue to be recruited by illegal armed groups. In the poor neighborhoods of Bogotá, the guerrilla and paramilitary groups still carry out recruitment campaigns;¹⁶ it is estimated that at least one in four irregular soldiers in Colombia is a minor. According to studies by Human Rights Watch, some 11.000 minors are linked to illegal armed groups throughout the country.

¹² Profamilia is a private, non-profit making organization that contributes to improving the sexual and reproductive health of adult women and men, young people and adolescents in Colombia. They also develop social programs for poor, vulnerable and marginalized populations.

¹³ Pre-school sex education generates debate, El Espectador weekly newspaper October 7-13, 2007

¹⁴ Boletín informativo de la Consultoría para los derechos humanos y el desplazamiento, número 74, CODHES, Bogotá, 24 de septiembre de 2008.

¹⁵ Sources: UNHCR, CICR and COHDES Annual reports 2007

¹⁶ Child soldiers Global Report 2008, London, Coalition to stop the use of Child Soldiers

Once they join the rank and file of the guerrilla and paramilitary forces, they often suffer physical ill treatment, sexual violence, forced abortion and serious psychological pressure. Even worse, national and international bodies have reported that in spite of an official banning of the practice, both the army and the police recruit children to carry out intelligence work. According to the Collective Action of Conscientious Objectors¹⁷, in Bogotá and especially in the neighborhoods in the south, the army and the police recruit minors, under 16 years of age as informers, sometimes they are even dressed in uniform; a practice that puts their lives in serious danger given the situation in these neighborhoods¹⁸.

The repressive actions of the police and the armed forces as a reaction to the violence of the illegal armed groups which carry out 'social cleansing' or arbitrary assassinations of 'undesirable' young people continues to take place in these neighborhoods. These actions only exacerbate the problem and do nothing to solve the root causes of this situation, which need to be tackled with social, educational, employment and cultural programs, alongside recruitment prevention campaigns.

The actions Ayara proposes in response to the problems young people face



“Construction of society through Hip Hop” program

Ayara takes advantage of the fact that many young people in disadvantaged neighborhoods in Bogotá identify with Hip Hop culture to reach out to them and offer an alternative to the difficult situation they face, demonstrated by these frightening statistics. The potential of this culture as a mechanism for changing lives and creating futures is far-reaching. The Ayara Family Foundation has developed projects and activities based on the ideology of constructive social integration through Hip Hop since its inception. Today, we constantly

¹⁷ www.objeccioncolombia.org

¹⁸ United Nations: 'Children and armed conflict', Report of the Secretary-General, 21 December 2007; Human Rights Watch, and other organizations quoted in: 'Dossier sobre el reclutamiento militar (por parte de todos los grupos armados) en Bogotá', Acción Colectiva de Objetores y Objektoras de Conciencia, 18 de noviembre de 2007; International Organization for Migration: 'Colombia: US\$20 million to combat conscription of minors into illegal armed groups', 15 Jan 2008.

receive requests to carry out workshops from institutions that work with young people at risk.

At the same time, a number of government bodies have seen the potential for political and social mobilization among young people in Bogotá through Hip Hop. Some of them, having recognized the reach of Ayara, have expressed interest in developing alliances, through Ayara, with young hip hoppers to develop public policies and train them as community leaders.

Hip Hop – the largest urban tribe in Bogotá

The capital of Colombia is divided into twenty boroughs. There are a significant number of young people who identify with and practice Hip Hop in each of the boroughs, including both those most affected by violence and poverty and the middle class areas. According to the District Secretariat for Culture and Tourism, Hip Hop culture 'is the largest urban tribe in Bogotá'. Furthermore, there are more than a million hip hoppers in Colombia, more than 300.000 of which live in the capital, that are able to access and use Hip Hop as an alternative to a life of crime, violence and drugs¹⁹.

Expressions of support for Hip Hop culture made by local government officials in Bogotá

Carolina Triviño, director of the Youth Program in the Bogotá Mayor's Office said: 'The strength of Hip Hop is that it is a comprehensive movement that includes artistic expressions like dance, art, fashion and a strong political element as well the music. This is what makes such an impact on young people.'

Victor Manuel Rodriguez, director of art, culture and heritage for the District Secretariat in Bogotá stated that Hip Hop: 'has been shown to be an effective vehicle to bring together young people who have experienced conflict... [it is]... a culture that generates a sense of belonging and identification between young people in Bogotá'²⁰. Hip Hop enthusiasts know that they are part of a worldwide movement that unites young people from all corners of the globe. They are members of the first popular global culture that, for some of the most marginalized members of society, has enabled the realization of their dreams of social, racial and economic emancipation.

¹⁹ El Espectador weekly newspaper, 7-13 October, 2007

²⁰ Taken from interviews in the El Espectador weekly newspaper, 7-13 October, 2007

Our organizational structure

The commercial arm of Ayara has been registered with the Bogotá Chamber of Commerce since May 1996. The Artistic and Social Foundation La Familia Ayara – Ayara Social – was formally registered in 2004, formalizing the social and cultural work carried out by our organization in the previous ten years (see organigram Annex 1).

The Ayara team There is currently a team of 20 people working in the organization: the director, the deputy director, the administration director, the communications officer, the fundraising manager, the psychosocial support manager, the gender coordinator, the social program coordinator, the network development coordinator, eight workshop facilitators (two each for rap, break dance, graffiti, one for clothing manufacture and one for ABC rap), administrative assistant, general assistant, salesperson for the clothes shop, the cultural centre coordinator and the cultural center program coordinator.

This team is made up of the founders of the organization and young people who have been trained within the organization whilst they finished their studies, as well as professionals who have joined the team more recently in institutional development, fundraising and psychosocial support roles. An accountant and messenger will be recruited next year.

In addition, there is a team of workshop facilitators, artists and volunteers that work on a project-by-project basis. Furthermore, there is a much wider group of 50 artists that have developed their talents within the organization that continue to work as volunteers with young people in their neighborhoods.

The offices, cultural center and the shop where Ayara sells and distributes the clothing are based in the center of Bogotá.





Monitoring and evaluation

Staff members meet once every two weeks to evaluate the activities carried out and to plan future activities. In addition, regular team and individual meetings are held with the director and deputy director.

The finance committee meets once a month to monitor and plan income and expenditure. The board of directors meets twice a year.

Where we work

Ayara carries out activities in rehabilitation centers, schools and cultural centers in more than 10 boroughs in Bogotá – Ciudad Bolívar, Usme, San Cristobal, Usaquén, Martires, Barrios Unidos, Suba, Chapinero, Engativá, Bosa, Kennedy and the town of Soacha. In August 2008, Ayara established a pilot Hip Hop Cultural Centre in Bogotá, where artistic, social and training programs will be open to young people from all over the city.

In addition, the cultural activities – concerts, fora and the 'Da Beat' television program - reach a much wider audience in Colombia.

Ayara also supports Hip Hop youth culture in rural areas, where we support artists in those areas most affected by the conflict. We have received requests to work with young people in the cities of Medellin and Cali, as well as the Chocó region and the Atlantic Coast.

Internationally, Ayara participates in the 'Safer Cities' program, sponsored by the UN Habitat office, with counterparts in Latin America, Canada, Africa and Europe. There is also a Memorandum of Understanding with the Remix Project in Toronto related to the strengthening of youth communities through art, culture and information technology, together with Baobab Connections in Holland. •

Algemene beschrijving Ayara Foundation gepubliceerd op de website www.ayara.com.co en als PDF verspreid onder subsidiegevers, beleidsmakers, sponsors en donoren.

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