

# Almanac of the Future

A STORY OF SUCCESS

Motivational experience No. 20



**In the Name of Progress or  
the Right to be taken  
into account**

# IN THE NAME OF PROGRESS or the right to be taken into account

***“We have never been against the construction of the urban railway, but not at the price of being expelled” says Margarita Monforte, president of the neighborhood association “Quinta Virgen del Quinto Patio”, the struggle of forty families in downtown Lima to exercise their rights in front of the megaproject of the electric train as part of a mass transportation system in the Peruvian capital.***



Train built where the neighborhood once was

## Quinta Virgen del Carmen

In Cercado, Lima's old center, there are slum areas, among which are the “Quintas”, located in the peripheral sector “Barrios Altos”. These are lands in public property, administered by the “Beneficencia”, an entity that currently depends on the municipality of Lima. The Quinta Virgen del Carmen was one of these lands (before the construction of the railway line), where about forty families lived in precarious houses, a product of self-construction, paying rent for the occupation of the land. Issues such as water and drainage had been solved in the best possible way by its occupants. Mrs. Zenobia, a member of the Neighborhood Association, shows photos of her old house: narrow rooms with the latent danger that the ceiling could fall at any moment. The houses, built wall-to-wall like pearls on a necklace, formed corridors, narrow streets that at certain points widened. These small squares, called patios; explain the name of the association Quinta Virgen del Carmen del Quinto Patio. La Quinta Virgen del Carmen bordered similar areas such as Quinta Francia, named after its former owners who were French. Next to the Quintas there are human settlements such as the Santa Ana Settlement, where families had built their houses in vacant lots, acquired or simply occupied.

## Increasing rent

Margarita Monforte, president of the neighborhood association says that the Beneficencia began to raise the monthly rent to lease the land to the families even though no investments were ever made to improve housing, since all improvements, starting with the construction of the houses themselves were made by the people. “Every month they came and increased the rent. We were asked to pay in dollars, we protested because we do not earn in dollars”. Seeking help to know their rights as

tenants they met CIDAP, an NGO that advises popular organizations in urban and environmental issues. With the Law of Tenancy in hand, the association finally reached an agreement with the Beneficencia, paying an acceptable rent to both parts, in national currency and with the possibility of an adjustment every three months according to the rate of inflation. This first conquest has been very important for the consolidation of the association. The contact and accompaniment from the CIDAP, partly supported by Misereor, began this way.

## The poor also belong to the center

The Peruvian state, as well as the city administration of Lima, are concentrating their efforts on residential and municipal consolidation in the peripheral zones of the metropolis by creating sports facilities, playgrounds and green spaces. Margarita Monforte, together with her neighbors, and thanks to countless petitions and alliances, was able to persuade the Housing Ministry to set up a funding program, called the “Mejorando mi Quinta” to improve the housing situation in the city center, benefiting poor families, living in tenement in downtown areas of the city. Thanks to this program the neighborhood Quinta Virgen del Carmen managed to build communal bathrooms and laundries, paint their facades and fix their precarious houses. The president of the Nation, Alan García, was present at the time of delivery of the works. Margarita Monforte and the association Virgen del Carmen del Quinto Patio used the situation in their favor, the dignitary promised to launch a project allowing the tenants to buy the land on which they had built their houses at a very favorable price (5% of the commercial price).

## A new threat

"With the prospect of being able to buy the land, we started to find out in the public offices how many floors could be built in the sector", remember the people who came to this afternoon's meeting to share their story. The

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### Fuimos Proyecto Piloto del Programa Mejorando Mi Quinta



houses in the Quinta Virgen del Carmen had only one floor. "In this way, we found out that the construction of the electric train would pass through our neighborhood", says Margarita and continues, "we have never been against the construction of the urban railway, but not at the price of being expelled." The association immediately took this attitude.

The Autonomous Authority of the Electric Train (abbreviated AATE), a public entity at the head of this public transportation megaproject in Lima, did not accept to enter in any negotiation with the neighborhood association since they were not owners. Only a compensation for the house improvements, prior to the eviction, was offered. The Beneficencia, as owner of the land showed no more interest in the sale of the land to the possessors and aspired to sell the land at a market price to the AATE. Although the association had requested to be taken into account to participate in the public hearing to address the issue, AATE did not respond to this request. Maria Dolores, a neighbor of the association says that they went to the place of the audience as a group and made so much noise that the audience could not take place. Smiling recalls: «One day we went as a group representing our association to the Congress of the Republic and the security staff said they came from the "Quinto Patio" and they were afraid of us». On that occasion, Margarita handed in a petition requesting support to the Congress, reminding the president's promise and claiming support in their situation as tenants.

## Dialogue and resistance

The construction company for the electric train attempted to intimidate the families of the Quinta Virgen del Carmen to force them to leave, but this made the association stronger and the families formed an alliance with the neighboring human settlement Santa Ana. There were also attempts to divide the association, some families, mainly accepted to receive the money as

compensation for the improvements made, and moved to the city outskirts. The association, however, remained firmly pulling out a resolution that said, "We do not want money, if they take us out of our houses, then we want somewhere else to live" explains Margarita: "We, under no circumstances wanted to move away from the neighborhood where we have lived all our lives. This is where we belong, where we have our jobs, where children go to school. It is the neighborhood of which we are part". The example of some neighbors who had agreed to negotiate individually, moving to live now on the outskirts of the city, two hours away by public transport, did reaffirm the association's position to resist and at the same time seek dialogue based on proposals: "From here we do not go out but to our new home". The AATE, at some point tempted Margarita, offering her the purchase of an apartment where she wanted. "I would like an apartment in a building in the Surco district, but they would have to buy the whole building because we go all together", recalls her response Margarita.

## Time is running out

The construction works for the line One of the electric train advanced approaching the neighborhood from both sides. The construction company, threatened by fines in case of a delayed delivery of the work, began to pressure the AATE to reach an agreement with the neighbors. In turn, the association had gained sufficient media attention and the risk of a forced eviction was no longer imminent. The time had come: the AATE, pressed for time, was forced to sit down and negotiate. "At first," Margarita recalls, "they wanted to differentiate between affected and indirectly affected, offering houses of 90 m<sup>2</sup> to some and land plots of 60 m<sup>2</sup> to others." The association analyzed this offer and decided a counter offer: "All equally with houses of 75 m<sup>2</sup>". Finally, the association's proposal was accepted. A large piece of land, in the vicinity of the area, which used to house a factory that was relocated because of the



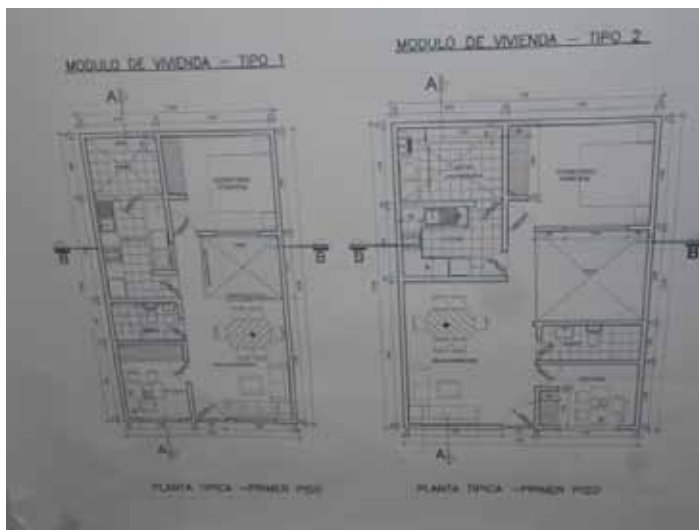
*"We do not want money, if they take us out of our houses, then we want somewhere else to live" explains Margarita: "We, under no circumstances wanted to move away from the neighborhood where we have lived all our lives. This is where we belong, where we have our jobs, where children go to school. It is the neighborhood of which we are part"*



construction of the train line was for sale. The association managed the AATE to buy the land. The association managed to participate in the architectural design of the houses and the condominium, formed by more than forty houses. "They accepted 80% of our proposals, we were present during all construction work," says Margarita. The families of the association, until the condominium was ready, were located for a year as a group in an urbanization, rented by the AATE.

## Condominium "Metro de Lima"

"In October, it is two years since we moved to our new houses here in the settlement", shared the participants at our meeting. The settlement comprises a total of 35 houses and 7 plots of land; The land plots for those families who had already received a compensation for their houses. "Now they must get a construction credit because they have already spent the compensation money for other things", says the group.



The settlement has a children's playground, parking spaces, green areas and a common room. The families are about to become owners of their houses and are currently waiting for the property papers. When asked about the name of the settlement "Condominio Metro de Lima" (which



translated means Lima's Subway Condominium"), Margarita explains that the AATE chose the name. "But that does not matter, our name is only a little longer: Quinta Virgen del Carmen del Quinto Patio del Condominio Metro de Lima".

## Fighting women

On a wall in the communal hall, the association has documented photos and photocopies of its history: the fight for a fair rent, the program "Mejorando mi Quinta" the visit of the president and his commitment to land access, the moments of the long process of resistance and negotiation with the AATE and of course, their houses in the condominium. More women are seen in the photos and to the question about the role of women in the whole process, Maria Dolores explains: "Men always supported, but we lived the process more emotionally". The association, instead of being weakened by the threat of a megaproject, was strengthened and, thanks to its persistence, alternating between proposal, resistance and dialogue they were heard and taken into account. The houses are the most palpable proof. And Margarita is right: progress and modernity are not bad; with the electric train I go to work daily in only 15 minutes.

## Messages to the future

- The Collective is strong, the association gain cohesion with every step of their seek for social justice, each of them alone could not have achieved what the collective did.
- Protest with proposal - the persistence and conviction of the associated families, led by the women, has been the decisive element. The alternation between protest and resistance, dialogue and alliances, negotiation with proposal, has given the appropriate answers to each situation.
- Knowing your rights and being heard - knowing the “points in favor” of the law allows you to be heard and engage in dialogue, build alliances and influence public opinion. Incidence works from the communication.

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The text, which is based on visits and discussions on site, was prepared by Jorge Krekeler (Misereor adviser), but initially made consensual with the interview partners. Special thanks go to Margarita Monforte, President of Asociación Quinta Virgen del Carmen, and Samuel Yañez and Katia Morales of the NGO CIDAP.

# Almanac to the Future

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