If the construction of the road was the first step to ensure Colombian authority in the Putumayo, “facilitating the settlement of Colombian families” in the area to take advantage of those natural resources was the necessary second step. According to the Capuchins, before the missionaries started the construction of the road there were no means to set out an effective colonization of the Putumayo because the territory was disconnected from the rest of the country. Disconnection, the missionaries contended, discouraged potential settler-colonists from moving to the region because they saw no means to extract from the Putumayo their agricultural products. However, since the first portion of the road between Pasto and Mocoa was inaugurated by the Capuchins in 1912, more and more settler-colonists from the Nariño Department and beyond were coming to the Putumayo and new settlements were being founded. New settlements, the Capuchins argued, were fundamental for colonization because “one cannot lose sight of what a settlement means for these territories—a vital force, an incessant pole of attraction [for new settlers], and a hotbed for growing wealth and resources.”

Colonization was a fundamental component of the Capuchins’ strategy also because it was the means to put the local indigenous population in touch with white Colombians, considered by the missionaries to be the source of civilization. One of the goals the Capuchins pursued with the colonization projects was to boost an immigration flow that steadily increased the white population in Putumayo. The new settlements founded by the Capuchins were situated in strategic locations so that the “work habits” and “lifestyle” of white settler-colonists coming to the region would stimulate the indigenous peoples and “familiarize them with civilization.” Previous missionaries’ evangelization strategies planned the foundation of white settlements and indigenous towns apart and independent from each other because settler-colonists were considered to be a source of corruption for indigenous peoples. Fray Fidel de Montclar, the head of the Capuchin Mission in the Colombian Amazon, introduced a fundamental change in such a view as he argued that new settlements had to facilitate and promote the coexistence of whites next to indigenous peoples. The Capuchin Mission, in that new setting, would be in charge of regulating the social and economic relationships between indigenous peoples and white settlers.

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2 Las misiones católicas en Colombia. Informes años 1919, 1920, 1921, 13–14.
3 Las misiones católicas en Colombia. Informes años 1922 y 1923, 72.
4 For the Capuchins, being white did not imply racial purity; it was a synonymous of the “civilized” population.