



Local leadership in practice: how crisis response works in Colombia

Lessons learnt on complementarity between local, national and international actors for local leadership in crisis response in Colombia

“When the crisis begins, we are already there; we activate the alerts, we know who has fled, who is still in hiding, and we remain there throughout the crisis”

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Contents

1. Executive summary.....	2
2. Methodology.....	6
3. Colombian national and local actors' perspectives and experiences of leading local crisis response.....	7
3.1 Diocese of Quibdó Social Ministry – Commission for Life, Justice and Peace (COVIJUPA)	10
3.2 National Secretariat of Social Ministries – Caritas Colombia.....	11
3.3 Centre for Research and Popular Education - Peace Programme – CINEP-PPP	12
3.4 Magdalena Medio Development and Peace Programme (PDPM).....	13
3.5. Corporation for the Support of Popular Communities - CODACOP	14
4. Good practices identified.....	14
Towards local leadership in crisis response: strengths to build on and challenges to address.....	16
5.....	16
5.1. Four strengths to build upon.....	17
5.2. Four challenges to be addressed.....	33
6. Recommendations	44
To donors	44
To UN agencies	46
To international NGOs	46
To national/local civil society actors	48
To the Colombian state	49
7. Glossary:.....	52

1. Executive summary

Against a backdrop of dramatic geopolitical, regional and global changes, as well as difficult internal political and conflict dynamics, the humanitarian situation in Colombia remains serious. There is a high risk of increasing humanitarian needs related to migrants, refugees and conflicts in Colombia, within a regional context of human insecurity where neighbouring countries such as Venezuela and Ecuador are experiencing changes and destabilising circumstances.

Cuts to global humanitarian aid – a trend affecting traditional donors, exacerbated by US funding cuts in 2025 and humanitarian crises in other parts of the world – are deepening the suffering of those affected by the crisis in Colombia, exacerbating poverty, humanitarian needs and instability. In this context, as funding for humanitarian assistance shrinks and international agencies reduce their presence or withdraw from the country, the central role of local actors in Colombia is gaining increasing recognition. It is time to radically rethink the situation.

In Colombia, as in other parts of the world, aid cuts are forcing international, national and local actors to move more urgently and decisively towards what the international humanitarian system has termed 'localisation'. Several international NGOs have invested in localisation initiatives, building on long-term partnerships to fund local interventions that bring together local actors, international NGOs and civil society movements.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has promoted innovation within the humanitarian system through community-centred coordination and localisation, in particular through its 'Flagship' initiative and the recently established Colombia Humanitarian Fund (pooled fund), designed to fund exclusively local humanitarian actors. However, it is apparent that some international organisations still envisage localisation more as a means of securing funding sources, rather than analysing and strengthening what already exists at national or local level and determining how to organise themselves to reinforce it.

For this reason, this report, and the research on which it is based, focuses on (national and regional) local actor perspectives: their good practices, their understanding of the factors that help and hinder local leadership in the response to crises, plus their recommendations on these issues. The analysis, conclusions and recommendations in this report are the result of a collaboration involving research, consultation and political dialogue between five national/local organisations: the Centre for Research and Popular Education (CINEP-PPP), the Diocese of Quibdó Social Ministry Commission for Life, Justice and Peace (COVIJUPA), the Magdalena Medio Development and Peace Programme (PDPMM), the National Secretariat for Social Social Ministries - Caritas Colombia, (SNPS-CC) and the Corporation for the Support of Popular Communities (CODACOP). The process has been supported by

CAFOD, an international NGO based in the United Kingdom, and a research team comprising Iván Camilo Vargas and José Luis Barreiro.

The research involved representatives from these five Local and National Actors (LNAs) and documented specific cases of locally led responses, including humanitarian aid, protection and human rights actions in contexts of armed conflict and natural disasters. The case studies were compiled, presented and discussed in a series of in-person and online workshops, through which feedback was gathered. Key conclusions and recommendations were drawn from this process. LNAs are taking the initiative and articulating their understanding of what constitutes an effective, locally led response to crises. The next phase of humanitarian system reform, both in Colombia and globally, should be centred on local leadership.

The key conclusions and recommendations emerging from this research include:

- 1. Focusing on local leadership and complementarity** as the cornerstone of the next steps towards localisation and the broader reform of the humanitarian system in Colombia. Cuts in global aid are affecting many agencies (the United Nations, INGOs) which have seen their capacities drastically reduced and even their institutional survival threatened. This situation could reinforce two broader trends that hinder transformative change: a technocratic approach to localisation and localisation driven by international agencies or networks of local actors seeking to position themselves in competition with others. Colombia is likely to face further rounds of aid cuts and worsening humanitarian needs, driven by regional geopolitical instability, internal political unrest and violence during the next parliamentary term in Colombia. Funding to respond will be insufficient and response capacity (local, national and international) will be overwhelmed. Therefore, now more than ever, each actor must recognise how they need others to mobilise support, and how they can support one another in a complementary manner, working in solidarity rather than competing. Donors and the Colombian government must also encourage and support this emphasis on local leadership, complementarity and solidarity in partnerships between international, national and local actors.
- 2. Recognise the role of networks and intermediary companion actors,¹** both in funding the local response and in providing technical support and building domestic support for humanitarian action. International, national and local networks and

¹ An intermediary companion organisation is an organisation that operates at regional or national level, without representing a single community and/or sector, whilst maintaining strong links with various regions and local actors. It combines the capacity for direct implementation on the ground with a coordinating and advocacy role that empowers smaller organisations, generating contextualised knowledge and influencing public policy. Unlike international intermediaries, in addition to channelling resources, they are structural actors within the 'triple nexus' – humanitarian, peace and development – ecosystem. They possess legitimacy, have a long-term and deep-rooted presence in the territories and their own agency. See more in: Wingender, Leslie and María Lucía Méndez. 2023. "What about the Middle? Thinking Systematically about Localization". *Negotiation Journal* Fall 2023: 507-529.

organisations that accompany other, more local actors can provide vital support for locally led humanitarian action in Colombia. Particular attention should be paid to strengthening national and local organisations and networks that play a coordinating and supporting role. As international aid to Colombia declines, the efforts of grassroots community groups and networks to collaborate with civil society at the national level – including faith-based organisations, human rights NGOs and others – will be fundamental to mobilising both public support and funding for communities affected by the crisis, as well as to addressing the root causes and factors driving vulnerability. International organisations must organise themselves to strengthen these groups, rather than competing with them. There are some good practices and long-term partnerships, based on solidarity, complementarity and subsidiarity, and on a genuine commitment to strengthening local leadership, which can serve as a foundation.

- 3. Addressing the bureaucratic and administrative barriers within the Colombian state that limit emergency response funding** for local actors and national accountability for attacks against human rights defenders and community leaders, as well as strengthening the rule of law and the protection of these actors through a triple nexus approach.

Developments in the political situation and the conflict, as well as the government's limited presence and/or capacity, combined with significant turnover of government staff in areas with high humanitarian needs, pose significant challenges to the effective support of humanitarian action in general and, in particular, that of local civil society. The research identifies three priority areas for follow-up action. Firstly, the government's funding mechanisms are governed by business-style procurement systems (for example, SECOP – the Electronic Public Procurement System) and involve co-financing requirements of between 25% and 50% of the total budget, which is suitable for larger private sector actors but not for local, community-based, smaller or grassroots actors. In many cases, non-profit organisations that manage to secure state contracts do not respond to the needs of communities, are not present in local areas or lack a human rights-based approach and are linked to political and clientelist networks. This undermines the ethical and practical significance of humanitarian action and jeopardises its legitimacy. For these reasons, the Colombian government should consider new funding mechanisms to better support local and grassroots actors, ensuring that the independence of local non-state actors underpins this relationship and that the relationship builds on a collaborative approach. A starting point could be to **invest in OCHA's Colombia Humanitarian Fund**, as a means of strengthening an existing innovative fund that reaches LNAs, is well-established, is based on humanitarian principles, and has a credible quality and accountability framework. Secondly, local actors and communities affected by the crisis face multiple threats, harassment and violence from various armed groups, and impunity

for violence against them is corrosive both to protection efforts in times of crisis and to long-term efforts to transition from war to peace. To better protect human rights defenders and community leaders in conflict-affected areas of the country, the Colombian state should **coordinate with LNAs to ensure an appropriate protection response** tailored to specific needs, as well as systematically integrate protection through a triple-nexus approach as part of the humanitarian response. Thirdly, the state must strengthen the **rule of law and ensure accountability** for crimes committed against human rights defenders and community leaders, recognising that the systematic impunity for these crimes – rigorously documented by organisations such as CINEP – erodes the legitimacy of institutions and undermines both the immediate humanitarian response and long-term peace processes. This requires the documentation of violations to be translated into effective judicial action, preventive protection mechanisms and public policies that guarantee the safe participation of local actors in the territories.

4. **Direct funding** through mechanisms, partnerships and consortia that demonstrate a systematic and innovative approach to equitable partnership, with governance models that ensure the transfer of skills and support for local leadership, moving beyond the grant model. Our research highlights the importance of a diverse ecosystem of funding channels, including both NGO-led partnerships and an OCHA pooled fund that has adopted the 'local actors only' principle. The Colombian Humanitarian Fund 'for local actors only', part of the OCHA Regional Fund, is recognised as a positive innovation, but could be at risk if OCHA's involvement in Colombia is further reduced. Beyond the OCHA mechanism, there are a number of funding mechanisms, consortia and partnerships led by local civil society that deserve support, such as the Start Network and its Colombia Start Ready project, the NEAR LAC Regional Fund, and locally led and locally managed funding mechanisms such as the Diocese of Quibdó Commission for Life, Justice and Peace (COVIJUPA) or the SNPS - Caritas Colombia National Emergency Service (SNE).

There are also networks working to protect specific groups, such as the Coalition Against the Involvement of Children and Adolescents (COALICO) or the Colombian Children's Alliance, as well as women's, Afro-Colombian and Indigenous human rights organisations. Furthermore, other successful mechanisms include the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Peacekeeping, the Norwegian Human Rights Fund, the Swedish Colombian Civil Society Support Fund, the emergency funds of the Civil Society Support Network, such as 'Safeguarding the Resistance' (run by the local organisation Humanas Colombia), and the Board for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders. Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities also have specific mechanisms, such as the Indigenous Fund for the Colombian Amazon, the Fund for Assistance to Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility (IPAF), the Pawanka Fund, and the Urgent Action Fund, amongst others. Many of these mechanisms lack sufficient

funding, whilst protection needs are increasing. National networks do not have a single large, centralised fund, but instead mobilise resources, invite proposals and provide technical support through partnerships. Although they are primarily funded through international cooperation, the Colombian state has scope to strengthen them.

5. Ensuring that **international intermediary organisations are accountable to the principles of equitable partnership** (for example, provision for overheads, risk-sharing, participation in decision-making and/or mutual accountability/feedback processes, capacity-building processes) and to harmonised and more proportionate approaches to due diligence, grant requirements and reporting. LNAs in Colombia face the same challenges as local actors in other contexts regarding the inconsistency or lack of provision for overheads, the lack of systematic or meaningful accountability regarding the principles of equitable partnership, and inconsistent approaches to understanding the risks they face and identifying ways to support them in managing and mitigating those risks. As in other contexts, both international NGOs and UN agencies still require LNAs to overcome an ever-increasing array of bureaucratic hurdles regarding due diligence, reporting, quality assurance and accountability, whilst lacking adaptations specific to the context. Harmonising and simplifying expectations of LNAs to make them more proportionate is essential to improving partnerships.
6. Strengthening **holistic approaches to funding, coordination and planning in humanitarian, development and peace initiatives**: local actors in Colombia tend to work holistically on these matters. The silos between these initiatives and the attachment some UN humanitarian funders and donors have to the jargon or technicalities of the international humanitarian sector have hindered the provision of support to local actors more deeply rooted in crisis-affected communities and prevented a more effective response to their protection and assistance needs. Our research also identified examples of good practice on which to build, such as former EU funding instruments (e.g. the EU Peace Labs, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) or the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund) and the support provided by Caritas partners to church, human rights, Indigenous and Afro-descendant groups and networks, which naturally combine humanitarian assistance, protection, social cohesion, peacebuilding and local development.

2. Methodology

This report draws on the experience of five national and regional civil society actors, with very different mandates and roots within Colombian civil society and community networks, to identify common key findings and recommendations. Between 2024 and 2026, a network of five LNAs accompanied by CAFOD, embarked upon a research process with the assistance of two consultants. The research process included interviews from which five case studies were produced, compiled with four of the LNA partners who participated in the process: (i) Centre for Research and Popular Education (CINEP-PPP), (ii) the Diocese of Quibdó Social Ministry Commission for Life, Justice and Peace (COVIJUPA), (iv) the Magdalena Medio Development and Peace Programme (PDPM) and (v) the National Secretariat for Social Ministries - Caritas Colombia (SNSP-CC). More recently, the Corporation for the Support of Popular Communities (CODACOP), which carries out important work on gender and differential ethnic approaches, also joined the process.

Based on the five case studies, four workshops were organised to present and discuss the preliminary findings. A draft synthesis report was circulated to gather online feedback, and a further online workshop was convened to gather final comments and contributions to the analysis and recommendations.

3. Colombian national and local actors' perspectives and experiences of leading local crisis response

In recent years, various initiatives aimed at 'localising the humanitarian response' have been carried out in Colombia, including the following:

- National dialogue on localisation in Colombia, held in 2021 in the context of the Grand Bargain and facilitated by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), OCHA, SDC and Caritas Colombia.
- Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe (DKH), a German humanitarian organisation working in Colombia with five local partners, combining organisational capacity-building, consortium work among its partner organisations, and certification under the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) for quality and accountability. In June 2025, for the first time in Latin America, several Colombian humanitarian organisations obtained this certification, representing not only a recognition of their technical capabilities but also a strategic step towards direct access to international funding.
- The Caritas Network has invested for decades in national and local church partners, and in broader networks of local and grassroots civil society, as well as in community

networks and social movements, including groups and networks of Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities.

As a member of the Caritas network, CAFOD applies local partner leadership in its work. Local partners are already present when a crisis strikes and will continue to be so. They are often partners of the Church and frequently support the work of social and civil society organisations. These partners, who have a long-term and deeply rooted presence in local communities, are best placed to assess needs, design the project together with future participants, and implement it, while CAFOD provides long-term technical support and capacity-building. In Colombia, for example, CAFOD does this by providing training to SNPS - Caritas Colombia and local dioceses across the country affected by humanitarian crisis in the development of emergency preparedness plans, or by supporting partners in the development and strengthening of their institutional policies, adapted to local contexts, including the technical requirements to meet donor criteria and enable access to funding. As a member of CHS, it ensures that commitments made in the implementation of CAFOD-funded projects are fulfilled. CAFOD's humanitarian policy recognises the value of ancestral and local knowledge, which in Colombia has meant including Indigenous medicine and other approaches in humanitarian crisis response. A key component of CAFOD's strategy in the Andes is to work through networks and international advocacy, seeking to connect project partners and participants with these spaces, whilst respecting the space Colombian partners occupy in advocacy spheres.

Caritas Germany participates in the ToGETHER consortium, funded by the German government, which brings together five local organisations in Colombia and includes an autonomous fund for small-scale humanitarian responses. In addition to the financial component, the project promotes a consortium approach that reinforces joint learning, territorial coordination and the capacity development of its partners.

Catholic Relief Services (from the United States), through the EMPOWER project, invests in the operational and organisational capacities of its partners, as well as in a policy advocacy agenda so that key actors can present their interests to US government bodies.

- The NEAR network has established a regional 'localisation laboratory' for Latin America and the Caribbean comprising twelve national organisations. NEAR has also supported the creation of a national reference group for the Grand Bargain in Colombia.
- OCHA has piloted its people-centred coordination Flagship Initiative in Colombia and is exploring how it might evolve and inform future approaches among UN agencies, international NGOs, national organisations and donors in the country. In this regard, OCHA's Humanitarian Fund in Colombia has identified around 200 local organisations as potential partners for the implementation of its funds, although only just over 20 have passed a minimum feasibility assessment. Several of these organisations do not define themselves exclusively or primarily as 'humanitarian',

and many are not part of local humanitarian actor consultation or coordination networks.

- The Colombian Humanitarian NGO Forum, comprising 40 organisations (10 of which are national), has a localisation group that facilitates structured dialogue between national and international organisations. This platform has helped raise awareness of local actors' concerns regarding issues such as funding, contractual relationships and representation in decision-making mechanisms. Although the forum does not have an exclusive mandate on localisation, its advocacy capacity and legitimacy amongst actors in the humanitarian system make it a strategic platform for promoting the principles of equity and mutual accountability.
- An emerging humanitarian network of national NGOs has been established, taking inspiration from a similar network model in Venezuela. Known as the National Humanitarian Action Platform (PAHNAL) and with OCHA support, it has identified 331 local and grassroots organisations as potential humanitarian and first-response actors; 31 of these have already obtained certification.
- Many international NGOs and United Nations agencies are developing their own localisation initiatives, which vary in their equity and depth. Some are limited to subcontracted models focused on project implementation, whilst others promote shared management and institutional development plans.

Nevertheless, the ambiguity with which localisation has been interpreted and appropriated in many humanitarian contexts has created a need to redefine this commitment. Throughout this collaborative process, we have set out to rethink the debate on localisation. In this report, we propose moving towards the idea of local leadership of the crisis response, understood as an approach that recognises several key elements:

- 'Local leadership' under the reframing of localisation from the perspective of local and national actors, understood as the capacity of organisations and communities in the area to participate effectively in defining priorities, decision-making, implementation and monitoring of the response before, during and after a crisis. This perspective seeks to deepen the commitments made in the Grand Bargain and the Charter for Change (C4C), recognising that we local actors are the ones who know the territory, are deeply rooted in it, are legitimate before the community, and play a central role in the response, even though we are often sidelined from the strategic decisions that guide it.
- The 'crisis response' is not limited to actions responding to an immediate emergency, but is linked to the defence of rights, recovery processes, peacebuilding and the promotion of local development. Speaking of local leadership therefore implies going beyond humanitarian action in the strict sense and considering

comprehensive approaches that integrate humanitarian, development and peacebuilding dimensions.

- Grassroots organisations (which are often those representing communities affected by crises, whilst also acting as first responders), and intermediary companion actors (such as those participating in this process), play complementary roles based on mutual accountability rather than competition. This relationship can be understood as a form of cascading local leadership, in which different levels of actors contribute in a coordinated manner to the crisis response.
- Faith-based organisations and human rights organisations, such as those that have participated in this process, are not exclusively humanitarian. This characteristic means that they are often sidelined in many debates on localisation. However, these organisations provide territorial legitimacy, a triple-nexus aligned comprehensive intervention approach, organisational reach, community trust and an uninterrupted presence in the territories, all in line with humanitarian principles. Their work typically includes human rights approaches together with these principles, meaning that humanitarian assistance coexists with practices of accompaniment, documentation and reporting of violations or abuses when communities request or require this for their protection. This approach does not compete with humanitarian principles, but rather places them in dialogue with rights protection frameworks, seeking to contribute to a response that not only addresses the consequences of the crisis, but also strengthens the protection of affected communities by building on their own capacities.

Five LNAs participated in the research, the preparation of case studies, consultation and analysis to produce this report:

3.1 Diocese of Quibdó Social Ministry – Commission for Life, Justice and Peace (COVIJUPA)

The Diocese of Quibdó Social Ministry and, more specifically, COVIJUPA are key players in crisis response in Chocó. Their contribution combines community legitimacy, a constant presence and an organisation that brings together parishes, grassroots organisations and ethnic-territorial authorities. In contexts of confinement, displacement and access restrictions, their work maintains reliable information channels, activates frontline support and coordinates with formal bodies (local coordination team, round-table discussions with public institutions and agencies) to ensure that aid is delivered in a culturally appropriate manner and with clear safeguards. Their local roots have enabled them to facilitate humanitarian access in high-risk areas, participate in humanitarian convoys and uphold ethnically appropriate protection measures.

The COVIJUPA case study depicts the response to a crisis that has persisted since the 2000s, resulting from the armed conflict that displaced Indigenous communities when armed groups established themselves on the outskirts of Quibdó. By mid-2025, this organisation had provided support to around 2,050 members of the Emberá people living across three settlements. The Association of Victims of the Indigenous Peoples of Chocó (ASOVPICH) brings together 12 Emberá communities comprising 1,200 people. The Association of Wounaan Victims of Quibdó (AVWOUNQ) represents three communities comprising 250 people. The Traditional Indigenous Association of Chocó (ATICH) brings together nine Emberá communities comprising 128 families, around 600 people, who have requested to be resettled in an urban area, in exercise of their autonomy.

The organisation's work goes beyond humanitarian response and includes development, peacebuilding, human rights advocacy and socio-legal promotion activities. The outcome was a response that was safer and better aligned to the daily lives of the ethnic communities, and an effective bridge between the local understanding of the communities and the operational decisions of external actors.

"When the displacement of communities prolongs and return is no longer possible, crisis response ceases to be merely humanitarian; in Quibdó, COVIJUPA has supported Indigenous communities through this complexity."

3.2 National Secretariat of Social Ministries – Caritas Colombia

"The National Emergency Service, using its own funds, enables us to reach any jurisdiction in a timely manner and with the flexibility to respond to each specific context, including in situations that are not visible across the country."

The National Secretariat of Social Ministries – Caritas Colombia (SNPS-CC) is a nationwide church-based organisation that coordinates diocesan social ministries and grassroots social organisations to respond to crises, protect communities and support short-, medium- and long-term processes.

Its operations not limited to the ecclesiastical sphere: it works in collaboration with and to complement the work of community networks, Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, peasant organisations and civic platforms, linking this territorial reach with resource management, safeguards and standards. In practice, its intervention model systematically integrates the components of the triple nexus: it combines assistance and protection with the restoration of livelihoods, social cohesion and peacebuilding, as well as return procedures, and training and technical support for the territory, which strengthen local leadership.

“In confinement contexts, people often cannot leave the village, but they manage to send a message to the parish or call the pastoral representative’s mobile phone. That’s when everything kicks into action.”

The systematised case of the **National Emergency Service (SNE)** shows how this fundamental role is carried out. The SNE organises the response at all three levels – community, diocesan and national – through shared protocols that govern activation, participatory assessment, community verification of lists, aid logistics and protection routes. At the national level, guidelines, resources and coordination with external actors are ensured; dioceses activate teams and coordinate on the ground; and local committees define priorities and facilitate safe access. This working model allows information generated within the community to drive operational decisions, ensures that aid is culturally relevant, and ensures intervention continuity beyond the immediate emergency phase, aligning response, recovery and peace within a single framework.

At the local level, for example, in the Diocese of Istmina-Tadó, the SNPS-CC has demonstrated a unique capacity to mobilise local solidarity in the face of emergencies of mass displacement. Through the leadership of the bishop and the diocesan team, the SNPS-CC has brought together various local actors, including municipal authorities, local businesses, river transport providers and host communities, creating solidarity networks that complement international humanitarian responses. Local traders have donated supplies, transport companies have provided free travel for displaced families, and medical professionals have volunteered their services. This mobilisation of local resources broadens the scope of humanitarian assistance, strengthening territorial social cohesion and demonstrating that crisis response can be based on community solidarity, rather than relying solely on external aid.

3.3 Centre for Research and Popular Education - Peace Programme – CINEP-PPP

CINEP-PPP is a centre for research and social action run by the Society of Jesus in Colombia, with a long history of social studies, community support, human rights advocacy and peacebuilding. Over the decades, it has developed methodologies for applied research, training and the systematisation of local experiences, linking rigorous evidence with public advocacy.

Among the documented cases, in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, CINEP-PPP supported the Wiwa people throughout the humanitarian crisis that began in October 2023, following armed clashes between the groups known as the Gaitanist Army of Colombia (EGC) and the Sierra Nevada Conquistador Self-Defence Forces (ACSN), which led to prolonged confinement and serious human rights violations. The situation worsened in February 2024, when more than 400 families were forced to flee to Riohacha after walking for over 48 hours

in extreme conditions. At least 14 communities remained under continuous confinement. In this context, CINEP-PPP supported Indigenous authorities and local organisations in the participatory documentation of events, community communication and the activation of protection alerts, connecting the territory with national and international networks.

“With CINEP, we didn’t feel that someone had come from outside simply to observe us; it was a partnership in which they walked alongside us, helped us make sense of what was happening and supported collective decision-making at times when doing so on our own was almost impossible.”

Additionally, the CINEP-PPP Human Rights and Political Violence Database transforms the recording and verification of events into inputs for analysis and reporting, and relies on partnerships with local actors, such as COVIJUPA, to record reliable information that guides decisions on protection and crisis response.

3.4 Magdalena Medio Development and Peace Programme (PDPMM)

The Magdalena Medio Development and Peace Programme (PDPMM) is a regional initiative that has worked continuously for three decades to bring together communities, social organisations, the church, local authorities and cooperation agencies to protect lives, promote rights and forge alternatives for development and peace in a territory historically affected by conflict. Its hallmark has been turning grievances into proposals: leadership training, organisational strengthening, knowledge management through the Network of Residents, and constant dialogue with institutions and organisations to ensure that decisions are grounded in the reality of the territory.

The documented case of La Ye de San Luquitas during the November 2023 crisis illustrates the PDPMM’s contribution in response to the humanitarian emergency. Between 20 and 21 November 2023, the EGC carried out a violent incursion in the area near La Ye, which included the torture of residents and clashes with the National Liberation Army (ELN) using improvised explosive devices. This confrontation led to the forced displacement of 1,400 people, equivalent to 556 families, from the municipalities of Santa Rosa del Sur, Arenal, Morales and Montecristo, who headed to La Ye de San Luquitas in search of refuge. The host community was forced to convert the San Luquitas School into a temporary shelter, which affected the right to education of all students in the area and created a humanitarian crisis that demanded an immediate response from multiple organisations.

In response to this crisis, the PDPMM deployed a coordinated response rooted in its permanent local presence and its capacity for inter-institutional coordination. It supported the activation of the Community Emergency Committee and its liaison with the Municipal Committee for Transitional Justice of Santa Rosa del Sur, standardised records of damage and needs in conjunction with the Ombudsman’s Office, OCHA and the Ministry of the Interior, supported the participatory assessment and logistics of the aid, and helped to identify spokespersons for dialogue with the authorities. This intervention facilitated

immediate humanitarian access in a context of severe restrictions on movement and laid the foundations for transferring capacities to the community, enabling the Community Action Board itself to subsequently lead the assembly for the right to a decent life on 12 March 2024, which brought together nearly a thousand people from multiple mining villages.

“The PDPMM did not respond from the outside; it was already part of the community. Its support enabled the community to keep the school open during the crisis, protect their children and strengthen local networks. Its ongoing presence made it possible to build a meaningful response, rooted in humanity and the community.”

This experience demonstrated to international organisations such as OCHA that the PDPMM had the capacity to carry out humanitarian responses that integrate a triple nexus approach, whilst coordinating and advocating within decision-making and coordination forums such as the Transitional Justice Committees for humanitarian response. This approach goes beyond mere aid provision by linking the emergency response with local governance and territorial peace processes, thereby maximising the impact of the aid.

3.5. Corporation for the Support of Popular Communities - CODACOP

CODACOP is an organisation that supports Indigenous, rural and urban grassroots communities and organisations in protecting, organising and defending their territory. Its work has focused on strengthening leadership, with a particular emphasis on women and young people, promoting participatory assessments and combining Indigenous knowledge with technical tools to document impacts, manage reliable information and engage in dialogue with institutions. Although it is not a ‘humanitarian’ actor in the strict sense, it has taken on a key role in crisis response: it activates community warning systems, supports mediation with the authorities, contributes to needs assessments and facilitates the delivery of culturally appropriate external support.

In recent years, CODACOP has developed initiatives that combine immediate protection with rights-based approaches, prevention and early recovery; one example is the support provided to women in the village of La Esmeralda in Acacías, Meta department, who, together with their families, are facing a severe crisis due to survival-threatening water shortages. It has supported Indigenous authorities and women’s organisations in implementing care and self-protection mechanisms, provided basic training in risk management and safe referral pathways, and coordinated local information with human rights networks and agencies to inform decision-making. This approach confirms its role as an intermediary companion actor contributing to the empowerment of ‘local communities’: it does not replace first responders, but supports them with tools, visibility and advocacy channels to ensure the response is more timely, safe and consistent with local dynamics.

4. Good practices identified

CINEP: Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and human rights database

- Humanitarian access guaranteed by legitimate local leadership: traditional authorities (*mamos* and *cabildos*) facilitated the delivery of aid to isolated communities, protecting both the affected communities and humanitarian actors thanks to their territorial legitimacy.
- Strategic engagement with human rights networks: CINEP strengthened the link between affected communities and national and international human rights platforms, facilitating reporting, protection and public visibility processes.
- Knowledge management for action and advocacy: through the Human Rights and Political Violence Database and territorial systematisation processes, CINEP has produced strategic information to trigger early warnings, support humanitarian interventions and strengthen evidence-based public advocacy.
- Integration of protection, justice and community sustainability: beyond the immediate response, CINEP supports organisational processes that defend the territory, strengthen community governance structures and link local agendas with restorative justice, rural development and peacebuilding.

PDPMM. La Ye de San Luquitas

- Humanitarian access guaranteed by local leadership: the community authority succeeded in establishing safe conditions for the arrival of organisations, even in high-risk contexts, demonstrating the level of social trust placed in local actors.
- Multi-stakeholder territorial coordination with a rights-based approach: the PDPMM facilitated agreements between communities, local governments and organisations to address the crisis, linking the humanitarian response with local development processes, social protection and peaceful coexistence.
- Strengthening community protection capacity: training and support processes were implemented for community leaders, teachers and young people, with the aim of strengthening organisational and social resilience as part of a long-term protection strategy.
- Territorial coordination among multiple actors with a rights-based approach and the triple nexus: the PDPMM promoted responses to the crisis that integrated humanitarian assistance, coexistence agreements and rural development strategies, based on a rights-based perspective that recognises the centrality of victims and the participation of social leaders.

Diocese of Quibdó Social Ministry – COVIJUPA.

- Integrated accompaniment with a triple nexus approach: it combined humanitarian action with psychosocial support, the defence of human rights, community strengthening and the construction of memory, consolidating a sustained and transformative presence in contexts of protracted crisis.
- Bridge between communities and international cooperation: its ethical and ecclesial legitimacy enabled it to connect marginalised areas with international agencies and humanitarian networks, facilitating access to resources and protection.
- Ethical and spiritual leadership as a foundation for social cohesion: the work of pastoral leaders strengthened community trust, the defence of life and non-violent resistance, based on a deeply rooted care ethic.

SNPS-CC (National Secretariat of Social Ministries – Caritas Colombia)

- Rapid activation of local church networks in emergency situations: the SNPS-CC's widespread presence throughout Colombia with its network enabled the rapid mobilisation of dioceses in response to crises, including in areas with no international humanitarian system presence.
- Use of own funds and crowdfunding for immediate response: through national campaigns and emergency funds, the SNPS-CC has been able to respond before international aid arrived, reinforcing the autonomy and sustainability of local response mechanisms.
- Engagement with the state and humanitarian coordination from a position of legitimacy: it actively participates in national humanitarian coordination forums, contributing a territorial perspective and credibility as an ethical actor.
- Humanitarian responses anchored in a holistic approach to human development: SNPS-CC's humanitarian action is linked to long-term processes, such as civic education, respect for and defence of human rights, youth participation, psychosocial support and organisational strengthening, which contribute to peacebuilding at the local level.

5. Towards local leadership in crisis response: strengths to build on and challenges to address

The LNAs that participated in this research produced five case studies, with the support of the research consultants. The results of these case studies were shared and presented to all partners involved. Through a process of face-to-face and online workshops, as well as feedback on the draft analysis prepared by the research consultants, the partners involved identified the following four priority strengths in locally led crisis response in Colombia and five priority challenges that must be addressed to facilitate a locally led approach.

5.1. Four strengths to build upon

5.1.1. Grounding the crisis response in community knowledge and grassroots community organisation

One of the key lessons from these experiences is the capacity for influence that local actors have managed to develop in relation to state institutions, international organisations and civil society networks. In contexts of recurring crises, this capacity is built upon historical trajectories, accumulated social legitimacy and the ability to speak on behalf of communities or to create the space for them to speak for themselves, confronting the effects of violence, inequality or state neglect.

In the case of the **National Secretariat of Social Ministries - Caritas Colombia (SNPS-CC)**, its role as a facilitator between dioceses, community organisations and international agencies has been decisive in bringing local voices to the fore in national forums for humanitarian coordination and peacebuilding. The Church's legitimacy, together with its territorial presence, has enabled communities to be heard in settings where their voices would otherwise have been sidelined. This capacity for influence is reflected not only in the formulation of projects, but also in the ability to open channels of dialogue with the state, with various armed actors, and to influence public policies aimed at reconciliation and the care of vulnerable populations. Similarly, the SNPS-CC has developed an international advocacy strategy through its network of Caritas Internationalis partners, known as the Working Group for Colombia, through which it has drawn up international advocacy agendas to promote the key interests of its main partners and the communities they support.

The Magdalena Medio Development and Peace Programme (PDPMM) is another example of how local organisations manage to influence key actors. Its long-term territorial approach means it has become a benchmark for international organisations and the Colombian state itself in matters of alternative development, violence prevention and peacebuilding. The PDPMM has demonstrated that when organised communities present concrete proposals sustained over time, they can become strategic partners who influence cooperation

agendas and resource allocation, whilst reinforcing the credibility of local leadership. Similarly, its coordination with the Network of Development and Peace Programmes (Redprodepaz) has provided it with an advocacy framework to promote key initiatives with other partners in other regions of the country.

For its part, **CINEP** has contributed to the field of participatory social research and the rigorous documentation of human rights violations, social conflicts and experiences of resistance. Thanks to this work, it has been able to influence national and international debates on human rights and peace, exerting influence on multilateral organisations and donors themselves. Its capacity to produce knowledge validated by social legitimacy has made CINEP a bridge between communities and decision-making forums, reinforcing the idea that evidence generated at the local level is a powerful advocacy tool.

In regions such as Chocó, the **Diocese of Quibdó** and the Commission for Life, Justice and Peace (COVIJUPA) have demonstrated that influence over key actors is built through reporting abuses, supporting victims and raising awareness of realities that are often marginalised on the national agenda. Their ability to amplify the voice of communities in contexts of structural violence has enabled them to engage with state institutions, United Nations bodies and international human rights platforms.

Similarly, the **Corporation for the Support of Popular Communities (CODACOP)** has succeeded in opening spaces for dialogue with state and cooperation bodies, thanks to its ability to accompany rights defence processes and support the work of grassroots organisations, particularly Indigenous organisations and movements, without replacing them in their own advocacy or autonomous representation processes.

In a context where international cooperation tends to favour large-scale intermediaries, the cases analysed show that local actors can become strategic points of reference for influencing high-level policies and decisions, provided they have sufficient social recognition and coordination to amplify their voice.

A key lesson from the experiences reviewed is that effective participation in decision-making cannot be limited to the presence of local organisations in coordination forums but must ensure that communities directly affected by crises play a real role in defining priorities, courses of action and monitoring mechanisms. In emergency contexts, decisions are often taken centrally and swiftly, creating tension between the need to act quickly and the right of communities to influence issues that directly affect their lives.

Effective participation in the crisis response is possible when the top-down logic of aid is dismantled to adopt shared decision-making mechanisms in which affected communities are not only heard but also have real power to influence the course of interventions.

In practice, organisations such as SNPS-CC have succeeded in creating spaces for consultation and community dialogue, even in emergency situations. Their psychosocial support and participatory planning methodologies enable communities to express their

perceptions of the risks, needs and opportunities, which are then fed into formal humanitarian settings. This not only legitimises interventions but also strengthens the community's trust in the response system. Similarly, actions that contribute to early recovery following a crisis are also decided jointly with the beneficiary communities.

Similarly, the PDPMM has demonstrated that effective participation is strengthened when communities are not viewed as recipients of aid, but as protagonists in developing solutions. Its processes include working groups with community leaders, farmers' organisations and youth groups that serve as liaison mechanisms to guide decisions on the type of projects, the allocation of resources and intervention priorities. This results in greater community ownership of the outcomes and more sustainable interventions.

Through its action research work, CINEP has encouraged participation using methodologies for the systematisation and collective analysis of crises, in which communities not only provide information but also jointly interpret the results and develop proposals for action. This type of process breaks with the extractive approach to information and ensures that the knowledge generated also serves as a tool for empowerment and decision-making for the communities. CINEP also involves communities in dialogue with decision-makers.

In the cases of the Diocese of Quibdó and COVIJUPA, as well as in the CINEP in the Sierra Nevada Santa Marta community, participation has been fundamental to response decisions, not only because victims are consulted on their immediate needs, but also because they themselves propose ways to assert their rights and help define advocacy strategies. In this case, decision-making is a collective exercise in which the community is not an external actor to the project, but the central voice guiding the steps to be taken.

Finally, CODACOP's experience reaffirms that ensuring participation involves creating safe, culturally relevant and sustainable spaces over time. In areas where Indigenous, Afro-descendant and rural communities come together, the organisation has encouraged each group to define their priorities and proposals, and ensure these are recognised in response plans. This means participation goes beyond 'consulting' communities to recognise them as political actors capable of deciding on measures that affect their territories and their future.

In a Spanish-speaking country such as Colombia, language itself can be a barrier, particularly when it comes to translating key documents and participating meaningfully in international forums. This poses a specific challenge for humanitarian workers from Colombian national and local organisations, who often struggle to clearly communicate to foreign audiences the realities on the ground and the approaches they employ in their responses.

This challenge is exacerbated by the extensive use of technical jargon and acronyms, as well as by an already complex humanitarian architecture. In Colombia, this architecture is structured around two parallel coordination systems: the humanitarian country team (led by OCHA) and the GIFMM (Inter-Agency Group on Mixed Migration Flows, led by UNHCR and IOM, respectively).

Lessons learned from community-rooted knowledge management

Knowledge management has been a cross-cutting feature of the processes led by LNAs, although each has developed it in its own way. Far from being a technical exercise detached from community life, in these contexts the production of knowledge is linked to the need to protect, denounce and sustain processes throughout crises. Documenting rights violations, systematising learning and sharing strategic information have become a form of resistance and a political resource that gives a voice to those who often remain invisible.

We have been documenting human rights violations and socio-political violence in CINEP's database for decades, combining methodological rigour with local information networks. It transforms these records into evidence for complaints and into tools for community protection, coordinating with grassroots organisations such as COVIJUPA in Chocó, who provides information on confinements and their impacts on Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities.

The PDPMM Residents' Network transforms everyday experience into collective proposals through training, regular meetings and participatory systematisation with CINEP and the Javeriana University. By making systematisation a routine practice, rather than linking it to specific projects, the PDPMM has accumulated knowledge that influences regional development programmes and state actors.

The SNPS-CC structures knowledge management through the National Emergency Service, using information flowing from communities to dioceses and at the national level to share it with agencies and donors. The experience in Istmina-Tadó demonstrated that community verification of disaster/impact lists and assessments ensures the relevance and legitimacy of aid among populations that distrust external institutions.

CODACOP integrates gender, differential and Indigenous perspectives by training women leaders and developing participatory assessments of the impacts of conflict and climate change in Cauca, which serve both as guidance for projects and as advocacy tools, directly linking knowledge management with the empowerment of women and young people.

Taken together, these cases show that knowledge management in terms of localisation is not merely a technical matter, but rather a political and community-based process. By documenting events, systematising learning and conducting assessments from within the territories, local organisations become reliable and legitimate sources of information. The gathering of experiences, such as the link between the CINEP database and the COVIJUPA networks, or the circulation of information among the dioceses of the SNPS-CC, reinforces the idea that knowledge is not concentrated at a single level, but circulates in networks ranging from the community to national and international levels. The challenge ahead is to ensure that this knowledge is considered systematically by the humanitarian system and state institutions, not relegated to occasional reports.

5.1.2. Intermediary companions and capacity building for local leadership

A common feature of the experiences analysed is that the organisations operate at an intermediate level within the humanitarian and social ecosystem. None of them act as international agencies; they are a local link that responds, reacts or coordinates with those who are the first responders to crises. Their role lies somewhere in between: supporting, accompanying and strengthening the most local partners, who are directly responsible for protection, the initial response and the defence of the territory. In this sense, their role is subsidiary and complementary, and there is mutual accountability; and when they speak of localisation, or local leadership as proposed in this report, they often do so not only on their own behalf, but also on behalf of the communities and grassroots organisations they support.

The SNPS-CC operates through a network structure with its local partners (diocesan social ministries, grassroots organisations) and target communities. Through the National Emergency Service, it has developed a system in which the national level supports and strengthens the dioceses, which, in turn, support local communities. This strengthening is not limited to the transfer of financial or material resources, but also includes training in emergency management, protection and safety protocols, risk assessment and evaluation methodologies, and communication channels with international organisations, as well as encouraging Local Civil Society Organisation (LCSO) participation. The SNPS-CC does not replace the dioceses in their territorial role but rather provides them with tools to act with greater autonomy, technical rigour and legitimacy. In turn, it develops projects aimed at promoting development and peacebuilding in areas severely affected by crises. Furthermore, it has developed initiatives that lead to the strengthening and transfer of capacities among its partners through other local leadership projects, such as EMPOWER or TOGETHER, which were initially aimed at the recipient organisation itself.

In Chocó, the experience of the Diocese of Quibdó Social Ministry and COVIJUPA demonstrates an intra-institutional strengthening that extends into the local area. COVIJUPA operates within the Social Ministry carries out ongoing monitoring with grassroots organisations to record events, prioritise responses and escalate efforts to the relevant authorities, and coordinates local teams who know the river routes and the spokespersons to approach to move about without putting communities at risk. The Diocese's Social Ministry provides institutional support and links with agencies and funders, whilst COVIJUPA ensures cultural relevance, community verification and daily contact with Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities. Both entities form part of the same ecclesial presence in the region and act in a coordinated manner. The result is a shared capacity-building process aimed at supporting local organisations and communities in developing their own capacities for protection, organisation and crisis response.

The PDPMM has carried out its work primarily through the Residents' Network, where capacity-building focuses on training leaders, promoting income-generating projects with a protective dimension, and creating spaces for dialogue with institutions. In particular, in La Ye de San Luquitas, this support resulted in the organisation and strengthening of local actors for immediate response, such as teachers and young people, the Community Action Boards and producers' organisations: support for the activation of a community emergency committee and its liaison with the Municipal Transitional Justice Committee, standardisation of damage and needs records, basic training in participatory assessment and aid logistics, and the appointment of spokespersons for dialogue with the authorities and agencies. More recently, OCHA enabled the inclusion of a component to strengthen the Transitional Justice Committees, linking the emergency response with local governance and peace processes.

Rather than a formal training programme, the PDPMM has promoted collective learning processes, in which residents not only receive training but also replicate it among their peers, creating a multiplier effect. This transfer of skills has enabled the network to sustain its work over time and become a legitimate interlocutor at regional and national levels.

For its part, CINEP has combined its tradition of research with a strong focus on supporting local communities. In the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, it has worked to train community communicators, implement participatory diagnostic methodologies and create spaces for dialogue with Indigenous authorities.

Furthermore, through the Database Network, CINEP has worked to transfer skills in documenting and verifying acts of violence to local organisations participating in the network, including COVIJUPA. This helps to build a network of trust and cooperation, in which knowledge is shared and circulates between different levels, rather than being concentrated in a single institution.

These experiences demonstrate that capacity building and transfer are not one-way processes. It is not merely a matter of intermediary actors teaching or providing resources to local actors, but rather of reciprocal relationships in which learning also takes place from the bottom up. In this sense, localisation is not limited to the transfer of functions but focuses on creating the conditions for communities to exercise their leadership more effectively, combining their knowledge with technical tools and advocacy channels that amplify their voice in broader contexts.

5.1.3. Strength of local actors in terms of holistic approaches to the 'nexus' between humanitarian aid, development and peace

A key challenge of localisation lies in how the humanitarian response is understood. 'Humanitarian' as a concept has been used in a restrictive manner. Beyond being understood as the direct response to save lives in contexts of natural or man-made

emergencies, the requirement for a strict interpretation of the principles of independence, neutrality and impartiality excludes local actors who, although they do not define themselves as strictly humanitarian, activate initial responses, manage protection and sustain territorial processes.

This restrictive filter can marginalise community, human rights, ethnic-territorial, grassroots and religious organisations. Even though they understand the context, guarantee territorial access, protect the civilian population and initiate initial crisis measures, they are often viewed as ‘non-neutral’ or ‘non-impartial’ due to their active work in defending human rights. In coordination forums, these organisations are often used instrumentally to obtain information or territorial access, but they are not recognised as equals because they do not ‘fit’ into humanitarian moulds and are frequently excluded from coordination forums and decision-making within the humanitarian sector.

A useful solution involves shifting the focus from ‘localisation of humanitarian aid’ to ‘local leadership of the crisis response’, understood as a continuum that links protection, humanitarian action, human rights, early recovery, prevention, anticipatory action and connections to peace and development. The ‘crisis response’, unlike the purely humanitarian response, recognises the continuity of events and their effects in reality: it combines assistance and protection with human rights approaches, early recovery, prevention and anticipatory action, whilst acknowledging that many crises are protracted, overlapping or structural.

This approach does not undermine humanitarian principles but rather reframes them as standards that encompass broader agendas and timeframes, in line with what we have documented: “the crisis goes beyond the immediate response” and requires innovation to engage with the nexus in practice, not merely as an add-on.

In Colombia, actors who facilitate access and protect lives also document rights violations, mediate in conflicts and support social cohesion. Local actors demonstrate that a localised response links emergency aid with community verification, advocacy and institutional continuity, linking humanitarianism with peace and development agendas. In practice, this is a ‘triple nexus’ that operates from the bottom up, with capacities that move between humanitarianism, peace, development and human rights, without the rigid barriers imposed by donors.

The triple nexus approach, which seeks coherent articulation and coordination between the humanitarian dimension and its architecture, alongside development and peacebuilding, has gained prominence in international debates on responses to protracted crises. In Colombia, this resonates strongly due to the persistent armed conflict, high exposure to disasters and the fact that local actors have historically worked simultaneously across these three dimensions even before the ‘triple nexus’ was institutionally adopted.

Despite this, there is no formal and coordinated implementation of the triple nexus within Colombia's humanitarian cooperation system. UN agencies, donors and international NGOs recognise the need to overcome sectoral fragmentation but continue to operate under parallel schemes with separate planning frameworks, budgets and languages for humanitarian, development and peace issues. This disconnect stems from the institutional logic of the global cooperation system, not from territorial needs.

Conversely, many local Colombian organisations apply the triple nexus de facto, not so much as a technical strategy, but rather as an operational, ethical and holistic necessity to protect and ensure the continued presence of communities in their territories. In places where violence persists, the state has a limited presence and livelihoods have been weakened local organisations cannot artificially segment their work. Humanitarian interventions providing food aid simultaneously strengthen community networks, educate young people about their rights, prevent armed recruitment and activate institutional defence mechanisms. In this case, the triple nexus is not a programmatic fad, but the only coherent way to respond to complex crises with sustainable solutions.

Organisations such as PDPMM, SNPS-Caritas Colombia and COVIJUPA carry out projects that integrate immediate humanitarian assistance, livelihood recovery and psychosocial and community support, including the strengthening of the social fabric, dialogue with the authorities and community leadership for peace. However, these comprehensive approaches are not fully recognised in donors' funding and evaluation frameworks, which demand results by sector, line or phase.

The main obstacle to the effective implementation of the triple nexus in Colombia is the rigidity of international funding mechanisms, which maintain separate lines for humanitarian, development and peacebuilding activities, with different requirements, formats and deadlines. This forces local organisations to artificially fragment their planning, submit multiple proposals and translate comprehensive interventions into external logics that do not reflect the actual work, leading to duplication, institutional burnout and limited access to funding for sustained transformative processes.

Furthermore, the 'peace' dimension remains the least understood and supported. Many local organisations work on violence prevention, peaceful conflict resolution, strengthening community leadership, fostering a culture of peace and protecting human rights defenders, but these actions are not always recognised or funded as 'peacebuilding'. Some face stigmatisation when armed actors or local elites view these processes as a threat.

For the triple nexus to be viable in Colombia, it must be rooted in the territories and practices of local organisations, rather than being imposed normatively and procedurally from outside. This requires recognising the accumulated knowledge of local actors, their capacity to integrate multiple dimensions within complex contexts, and their legitimacy as actors for peace and development, and not merely as implementers of humanitarian aid.

The triple nexus can be sustainable with flexible, long-term funding adapted to comprehensive processes, which requires donors to review plans, incorporate blended mechanisms and allow funded projects to move between the humanitarian and transformative dimensions without forcing artificial separations. Evaluation and accountability criteria must recognise social and community processes as valuable outcomes, even if they are not easily quantifiable.

Finally, the triple nexus in Colombia must include clear dimensions of territorial justice and the reconstruction of the social fabric: investing in local capacities, protecting community leadership and coordinating processes that strengthen dignity, autonomy and peace from the grassroots up. The triple nexus is not merely a technical tool, but also a political commitment to rebuild the country from the ground up.

Component	Key actions	Coordination with other components:	Example in Colombia
Humanitarian	Food and non-food aid. - Temporary shelter and hygiene kits - Immediate psychosocial support - Community protection and evacuation routes - Monitoring of human rights violations - Mechanisms for prevention and care regarding sexual abuse and violence in displacement and refugee contexts	Development - Linking with early recovery livelihood projects (e.g. community gardens) - Resilient basic infrastructure (water, sanitation) - Integration of risk reduction approaches into infrastructure projects Peacebuilding - Community dialogues to ensure safe humanitarian access - Spaces for post-crisis reconciliation - Recording of damage for transitional justice - Productive projects with ex-combatants and communities	Pastoral Social Care Quibdó /COVIJUPA: Assistance to displaced persons + legal support + dialogue forums with ethnic authorities
Development	- Strengthening sustainable livelihoods - Local governance and development plans - Technical training and employability - Access to basic services (health, education) - Resilient community infrastructure	Humanitarian: - Early warning systems linked to livelihoods - Rapid Emergency Response Mechanisms Peacebuilding: - Development plans with a territorial and peace-based approach - Victim participation in development decisions. - Strengthening of Transitional Justice Committees	PDPMM: Productive projects + strengthening of community action boards + support for humanitarian agreements

Peacebuilding	- Community dialogues and conflict resolution - Psychosocial support for reconciliation - Historical memory and truth - Strengthening of social leadership and human rights defenders - Promotion of peace and human rights policies	Humanitarian: - Protection and defence of human rights - Protection of leaders and defenders in high-risk contexts - Creating spaces for dialogue between armed groups, the state and communities - Community verification of agreements Development: - Development projects focused on territorial peace (e.g. PDET²) - Education for peace and coexistence	CINEP/PPP: Action research on territorial conflicts + leadership training + promotion of peace policies
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The effective implementation of the triple nexus approach (humanitarian-development-peace) in Colombia will not be viable without a profound transformation of international funding mechanisms. In practice, current instruments are still designed to operate according to sectoral logic, annual cycles and administrative criteria that prevent a comprehensive response to protracted and complex crises. This fragmentation limits not only the effectiveness of interventions, but also the ability of local organisations to develop sustained strategies with a territorial focus.

Lessons learnt from Colombia's Peace and Development Programmes (PDPs)

In Colombia, the history of the Peace and Development Programmes (PDPs) is an invaluable source of learning on how to articulate the three components of the nexus at the local level. The PDPs were promoted in the mid-1990s by civil society networks, with the support of European cooperation agencies (mainly from the European Union, Germany, the Netherlands and, to a lesser extent, Spain). These programmes were rolled out in areas of intense conflict, state absence and social vulnerability, and succeeded in combining aid, development and peacebuilding from a territorial, cumulative and transformative perspective. The table on the next page shows the main characteristics, funding amounts and results of five of the most representative PDPs:

² Territorially focused development programmes

Name of the PDP	Period	Investment (millions USD)	Department	Key impacts	Evidence of reduced violence
Magdalena Medio	1995–2015	45	Santander, Bolívar, Antioquia	Reduction in forced displacement, improved local governance, access to healthcare and education.	Central areas with the lowest rates of forced displacement between 2010 and 2020; a stable presence of social organisations.
Montes de María	1997–2012	30	Sucre, Bolívar	Voluntary return of more than 3,500 families, reconstruction of the social fabric, support for local governments.	Sustained reduction in massacres and homicides; communities leading return processes with institutional support.
Urabá	2000–2018	25	Antioquia, Córdoba	Community reconciliation processes, improvement of rural livelihoods, establishment of peace roundtables.	Reduction in armed clashes; strengthening of youth networks and leadership for peace.
Catatumbo	2003–2014	18	Norte de Santander	Community protection routes, agroecological projects, rural education.	Reduction in the presence of armed groups in the intervention areas; consolidation of peasant organisation processes.
Cauca and Valle	2004–2020	22	Cauca, Valle del Cauca	Rural women's networks, prevention of forced recruitment, productive partnerships.	Reduction in forced recruitment; coordination with local authorities on development plans focused on ethnic groups.

These programmes not only took an integrated approach to response but also generated verifiable positive impacts on territorial security and the reduction of violence. Although no region achieved the total eradication of armed dynamics, sustained improvements were observed in indicators of displacement, massacres, the presence of armed groups and forced recruitment, particularly in the core areas of intervention. Furthermore, community networks, social leadership and platforms for dialogue with local and national authorities

were consolidated, many of which today are still points of reference in their respective regions.

These results contrast with the more limited impact of many humanitarian or development programmes implemented using vertical and fragmented approaches. Instead of promoting territorial approaches with transformative potential, most current instruments continue to operate on short-term criteria, lacking continuity or coordination between sectors and with little flexibility to adapt to the country's institutional and political reality.

A complementary experience worth highlighting is the European Union's 'Uprooted' programme, which ran until the mid-2010s. This programme enabled a rights-based approach that combined humanitarian assistance, protection, early recovery and the strengthening of displaced communities. Many local organisations had direct access to these funds, which facilitated contextualised and sustained interventions with social and political impact.

In this context, the current absence of financial mechanisms designed to support triple nexus processes constitutes a critical gap. Neither multilateral humanitarian funds (such as those managed by OCHA), nor development funds (such as those from the EU or multilateral banks), nor peace instruments (such as those linked to the Havana Agreement) are designed to work together, nor do they allow local organisations to operate from an integrated approach.

This fragmentation is also reflected in the lack of programmatic coordination and shared vision among UN agencies, bilateral donors and international NGOs, leading to overlapping projects, gaps between phases and the inability to plan beyond 12 months. Furthermore, local organisations are rarely included in the strategic definition of funding priorities, which reinforces top-down relationships and excludes broader territorial perspectives.

Evidence gathered in Colombia demonstrates that it is possible to create instruments that facilitate the triple nexus based on a logic of partnerships, sustainability and territorial justice. However, this requires a profound change in the funding architecture of the humanitarian and international cooperation system.

The essential elements of this transformation would be:

- 1) Designing multi-year, integrated financial instruments that allow for the simultaneous funding of humanitarian, development and peace actions*
- 2) Ensuring direct or preferential access for local organisations, with proportionate accountability frameworks*
- 3) Establishing coordination mechanisms between agencies, sectors and levels of government to enable a shared strategic vision*
- 4) Drawing on and adapting the lessons from the PDPs and the Uprooted programme as references for new territorial funding windows*

Without these instruments, the triple nexus will remain a narrative lacking operational force. With them, however, the possibility to develop transformative responses emerges, led from the ground up and with real potential to promote peace with justice and dignity.

The European Union Trust Fund for Post-Conflict Colombia (EUTF Colombia): a valuable multilateral instrument, but disconnected from the humanitarian approach

The European Union Trust Fund for Peace in Colombia (EUTF Colombia) was established in 2016 as the European Union's direct response to the Final Peace Agreement signed between the Colombian Government and the FARC-EP. Its main objective was to support the swift implementation of the Agreement, particularly in the territories most affected by the armed conflict, through a strategy centred on comprehensive rural development, reintegration, local governance and reconciliation. Since its creation, the fund has mobilised nearly €148 million, becoming one of the most significant and structured financial instruments for post-war cooperation in Colombia. This funding came from the EU's general budget, but also from voluntary contributions from 21 Member States, including Germany, Spain, France, Ireland, Sweden and the Netherlands, as well as Chile and the United Kingdom, the latter with an estimated contribution of between €3 and €5 million, which gave it a seat on the fund's strategic committee.

During the period 2017–2024, the EUTF supported 34 programmes in more than 500 municipalities across 21 departments, prioritising the 170 municipalities covered by the territorially focused development programmes (PDET). These programmes were implemented by a combination of United Nations agencies, international NGOs, national operators and, to a lesser extent, community organisations, operating through inter-institutional consortia that promoted the participation of local actors. The fund's areas of intervention focused on the economic and social reintegration of former combatants, the strengthening of local governance, rural development, the promotion of transitional justice and reconciliation, as well as work with young people, women, ethnic groups and peace-oriented cultural processes.

The results achieved are significant. More than 170,000 people, many of whom were in extremely vulnerable situations, benefited directly. Collective and individual productive projects were funded, providing livelihoods to at least 10,500 former combatants, and support was provided for the creation of rural cooperatives, reintegration processes with a differentiated approach, and institutional innovation initiatives within local governments. Furthermore, support was provided to Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities for the formulation of life plans and territorial strengthening initiatives, confirming the fund's capacity to operate with a territorial and inclusive approach, adapting to the country's diversity.

However, despite this technical and territorial deployment, the participatory evaluation of the EUTF Colombia identifies a structural disconnect with the humanitarian sector, both in the design and implementation of the fund. Despite having worked in territories with a high concentration of active humanitarian crises (mass displacement, confinement, sexual violence, forced recruitment, food insecurity and state absence), the fund did not incorporate coordination mechanisms with the existing humanitarian response, nor did it establish operational relationships with the country humanitarian team, sectoral clusters or OCHA. In many areas, projects funded by the fund coexisted with urgent humanitarian responses, with no accompanying coordination or complementarity, and in some cases even competing for the same community or institutional resources.

This disconnect can be explained, in part, by the fund's institutional design. The EUTF was conceived and managed by the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships (INTPA) – that is, the EU's development arm – rather than by ECHO, its humanitarian aid arm. This institutional separation marked a conceptual and operational divide from the outset. No structured channels of dialogue were established with the national humanitarian architecture, which hindered mutual recognition of priorities, timelines and methodologies. Furthermore, local humanitarian NGOs (many of which had extensive experience in the priority areas) were not systematically included as implementing partners and, in very few cases, participated in the design or monitoring of the funded programmes. In practice, the fund functioned as a post-conflict development instrument, lacking mechanisms for immediate response, protection or risk prevention, which contrasts with the principles of the triple nexus approach.

Paradoxically, whilst the EUTF was implementing development and peace initiatives, unresolved humanitarian crises persisted in the very same municipalities, such as those related to new armed group control, intra-urban displacement, the closure of rural schools, and the confinement of Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities. However, these contexts were not addressed through a comprehensive approach that integrated assistance, protection, recovery and social transformation. Thus, although it was successful in terms of implementation, the fund failed to build an effective bridge between territorial peace and the humanitarian response. In this sense, it represents a missed opportunity to move towards a truly coordinated cooperation strategy, capable of operating under a triple nexus approach.

Nevertheless, the EUTF provided valuable lessons. It succeeded in mobilising resources rapidly in rural areas with limited state presence. It established innovative consortia that promoted dialogue between national and international actors. It introduced differentiated gender-, youth- and ethnicity-based approaches into its lines of intervention. And it strengthened local public management capacities in several municipalities within the PDET. These elements could be revived if the fund were reactivated or transformed into a new instrument within the NDICI-Global Europe architecture or in synergy with mechanisms such as Team Europe.

But for this to happen, any new instrument must incorporate explicit mechanisms for coordination with the humanitarian system, at both the strategic and operational levels. This involves including components for the care and protection of populations in emergency situations, creating spaces to foster intersectoral dialogue between humanitarian and development actors and, above all, opening funding channels for local NGOs working in protracted emergency contexts. Only then will it be possible to overcome the current fragmentation of the international cooperation system and build a coherent response to the multiple crises facing Colombia.

The EUTF demonstrated that multilateral funding can be territorial, participatory and transformative. But it also demonstrated that, without an explicit commitment to integration, even the best instruments risk becoming irrelevant in the face of the reality on the ground. Peace cannot be built without addressing the emergency, and development is not sustainable if it excludes the protection of those most affected. That is the key lesson the EUTF leaves for the future of the triple nexus in Colombia.

The links between humanitarian and human rights efforts to alleviate the effects of conflict on the civilian population

A cross-cutting lesson from the experiences analysed is that humanitarian action cannot be separated from the defence of human rights. In contexts such as Colombia's, where humanitarian crises stem largely from armed violence, structural exclusion and territorial dispossession, the most effective responses have been those that combine immediate assistance with the enforcement of rights, socio-legal support and the political visibility of violations affecting the civilian population.

The COVIJUPA of the Diocese of Quibdó has exemplified this link by supporting Indigenous communities subjected to confinement, threats and dispossession. Their work is not limited to the delivery of aid but also includes socio-legal advocacy: representation in court, public complaints and demands for guarantees from the state. In this way, the humanitarian component is integrated with the defence of rights, which reduces the risk of impunity and strengthens collective protection.

In the case of the PDPMM, the promotion of the Magdalena Medio Humanitarian Agreement reflects another way of integrating humanitarian action with human rights. Through this process, local communities and organisations reached a consensus on the minimum principles of respect for the civilian population, demanding that both armed groups and the state fulfil their obligations. This effort not only enabled the coordination of emergency responses but also established a rights framework as a mandatory reference for humanitarian action, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of communities in negotiating their own protection.

For its part, CINEP has demonstrated this link on two fronts. In the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, its support for Indigenous organisations has enabled community alerts and protection strategies to be brought to the attention of state and multilateral bodies, linking the humanitarian response with the assertion of collective rights over the territory. At the same time, its work with the Database Network has enabled rigorous documentation of human rights violations, information that not only underpins judicial and memory-building processes but also guides the prioritisation of humanitarian responses.

These experiences demonstrate that, in situations of prolonged conflict and crisis, the integration of humanitarian and legal-political efforts is essential to mitigate the impact on the civilian population. It is not merely a matter of providing assistance, but also of defending the lives and rights of communities as a prerequisite for ensuring genuine and sustainable protection.

5.1.4. Local leadership in negotiating humanitarian access

Humanitarian access in Colombia, including that of UN agencies and international NGOs, has depended largely on the legitimacy of local actors, particularly religious figures, who often play the leading role in negotiating access with armed groups and local community leaders. In areas where the state's presence is limited and international agencies face restrictions, it is community organisations that open the doors to the safe delivery of aid and support. However, humanitarian access is neither unconditional nor permanent.

The PDPMM, together with its local residents' network, for example, has meant the state and international aid organisations can reach communities in the Magdalena Medio region during critical periods of violence, thanks to the trust built up through its presence in these areas. Similarly, in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Indigenous authorities, accompanied by CINEP, have ensured that any external intervention complies with their own cultural and protection protocols, an essential condition for the assistance to be accepted and not to create further risks.

Added to this legitimacy is the ability to continue to operate in highly adverse contexts. The experience of the Diocese of Quibdó and COVIJUPA in Chocó reflects the key role of faith-based organisations. Their representatives have continued to accompany Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities amidst threats, stigmatisation and the presence of armed groups. This persistence is not a response to security manuals, but to an ethical and community-based commitment rooted in the pastoral choices that guide their work, which gives them the strength to remain when others are forced to withdraw. The added value of COVIJUPA has been to demonstrate that, even in high-risk scenarios, it is possible to maintain collective action, provided it is rooted in local legitimacy and supported by broader protection networks.

The SNPS-CC, together with its National Emergency Service, has institutionalised this learning. In the case of the SNPS-CC's coordination with Istmina-Tadó, the Social Ministry facilitated the delivery of aid in coordination with grassroots organisations such as ACADESAN, with whom dialogue took place to ensure access to the isolated communities. The combination of community legitimacy and institutional capacity made it possible to maintain aid delivery in an environment marked by restrictions on movement and the risk of armed clashes.

Additionally, CODACOP has demonstrated how the structures of Indigenous organisations and the leadership of Indigenous women function as a 'community shield' that enables action to be taken in high-risk conditions without losing cultural coherence or social legitimacy.

Taken together, these cases highlight that localisation is not merely a matter of resource transfer, but also a commitment to recognising that humanitarian access and the continuity of action in high-risk contexts depend, above all, on local actors. Their added value lies in their legitimacy to enter and remain, in their capacity to sustain action when conditions are adverse, and in the strength of their ethical and cultural frameworks. By coordinating with these leaders, intermediary companions not only ensure that aid reaches its destination, but also do so in a safe, respectful and sustainable manner.

5.2. Four challenges to be addressed

5.2.1. Access to funding

Access to funding is one of the most critical challenges for local organisations, in a context where international funds are increasingly limited and, at the same time, subject to requirements and reporting frameworks that favour international actors with more developed administrative infrastructure. Faced with this reality, experience shows that local actors have not remained passive but have deployed various strategies to ensure their financial sustainability, diversify their funding sources and gain legitimacy in the eyes of donors.

The lesson here is that, without direct, flexible and sustainable access to funding, local leadership is always constrained and runs the risk of being exploited. The cases analysed show that organisations have the capacity and legitimacy to manage resources efficiently and transparently and have been able to forge new paths in adverse contexts. The challenge, then, is not to demonstrate their capabilities, but for the international cooperation system to recognise them and adjust its rules so that resources effectively reach those on the front line of the response.

The SNPS-CC and the PDPMM are examples of how established organisations have managed to access resources from the Colombia Humanitarian Fund, reinforcing their position as reliable partners within the humanitarian system. In both cases, this capacity is not explained solely by compliance with technical requirements, but also by the territorial legitimacy conferred by their direct links with communities and their track record.

The PDPMM has also complemented this approach through partnerships with regional private companies which, although they do not always represent large sums, offer flexible resources and foster mutual accountability with local economic actors.

The Diocese of Quibdó, historically supported by church networks and traditional donors, demonstrated its capacity to innovate in funding mechanisms and to access the Start Fund through CAFOD, enabling it to diversify its sources and respond more rapidly to

emergencies. Similarly, the Diocese of Istmina-Tadó has fostered partnerships with the local private sector, demonstrating that, even in contexts of limited international cooperation, it is possible to mobilise local resources and foster a sense of mutual accountability within the region.

A key point is that both the SNPS-CC and the Diocese of Quibdó have their own fundraising mechanisms, enabling them to sustain some of their activities even during periods of reduced international funding. The SNPS-CC leads the Christian Stewardship Campaign, a crowdfunding initiative aligned with the Church's liturgical calendar that mobilises solidarity-based resources amongst Catholic communities. The main objective of this campaign is to strengthen the SNE's emergency response, but it also contributes to the management of coordination spaces amongst the dioceses as local partners.

For its part, the Diocese of Quibdó receives support from individuals who manage private international donations which, although limited, constitute a vital source of funding for protection initiatives aimed at people in situations of extreme risk. These mechanisms reinforce its autonomy and credibility and demonstrate that sustainability can also be based on the mobilisation of its own resources and on the trust of solidarity networks.

These experiences confirm that local organisations have sought new forms of funding that go beyond traditional channels. However, they also highlight structural limitations: international mechanisms remain rigid, fragmented and ill-suited to the holistic approach of local interventions. Although attempts have been made to advocate for greater flexibility in the use of funds, progress has been slow and the pressure to demonstrate immediate results continues to reduce the scope for innovation. This is reflected in that the target set under the commitment to localisation – achieving 25% direct funding for local organisations – is still far from the intended goal.

Lessons learnt by United Nations agencies

One of the most striking features in the Colombian context is the variation in UN agency approaches, procedures and criteria for working with local partners. This places a disproportionate administrative burden on national and community organisations. Although the system has a joint 'One UN' platform, which is supposed to integrate all the system's projects and partners, in practice each agency has its own set of rules, formats and evaluation criteria, which are rarely harmonised with one another.

*Firstly, **each agency has its own criteria** for selecting and evaluating partners. It is common for the same local organisation to be considered eligible by one agency (for example, the IOM or the FAO), but not by another (for example, UNICEF or the UNHCR), with no transparent mechanisms to understand these differences or appeal these decisions. This lack of common criteria creates a perception of arbitrariness and opacity and limits the scope for expansion of many organisations that have demonstrated their capacity but do not meet the specific requirements of certain agencies.*

Secondly, the **procedures for submitting proposals vary** significantly between agencies. Project formats, budgets, results-based approaches and technical requirements vary, even for similar interventions in the same territories. This means that a local organisation wishing to work with more than one UN agency must adapt to a highly technical and fragmented environment, without clear institutional support and with the constant risk of being disqualified for failing to meet a formal criterion.

Thirdly, **technical and financial reports must be submitted in different formats** for each agency, leading to duplication of effort, hidden costs and institutional fatigue for organisations already operating with limited human and financial resources. Furthermore, the lack of interoperability between digital platforms and the absence of a single repository of institutional information for local organisations mean that review, registration and validation processes must be repeated for each new collaboration, with no system of mutual recognition between agencies.

Fourthly, **administrative rules and financial control systems also vary**, forcing local organisations to carry out separate due diligence processes, open accounts, apply specific accounting systems and provide ad hoc reporting. This is not only costly in terms of time and technical staff but also creates a barrier to entry for community-based or medium-sized organisations that could develop their capacities if unified and proportionate criteria were in place.

Taken together, the internal fragmentation of the United Nations system undermines its own intentions to support localisation. Although efforts have recently been made to move towards coherence, such as the sharing of certain tools (for example, Humanitarian Programme Cycles (HPCs) or risk-sharing templates), the reality remains that each agency operates as an autonomous institution, with institutional processes that respond to its own mandate, management logic and organisational culture.

Furthermore, this lack of operational coherence contrasts with the discourse of unity and collaboration the UN promotes. The One UN platform exists, but it has failed to become a practical tool that simplifies processes, standardises requirements or facilitates collaboration between agencies and local partners. For Colombian organisations, this situation creates an unsustainable institutional burden, which often forces them to opt for maintaining relations with a single agency, foregoing opportunities because they lack the capacity to manage multiple programmes simultaneously.

The consequence of this fragmentation is clear: localisation becomes more difficult, not due to a lack of local capacity, but because of the international system's lack of coherence and flexibility. Instead of facilitating access to funds and responsibilities, the system multiplies technical barriers, demands redundant processes and sends contradictory messages about what is expected of a 'reliable local partner'.

Added to this is the fact that, in some cases, relations with local organisations continue to follow a subcontracting logic, with no real transfer of power or mutual accountability in decision-making. Although some agencies have developed policies to strengthen institutions and promote local participation, these do not always translate into concrete operational practices. In Colombia, it is still rare for a United Nations agency, or the UN, to

delegate the management of an entire project component to a local organisation, granting it autonomy in its decisions and strategies.

Ultimately, if the United Nations system wishes to play a role consistent with the principles of localisation it promotes globally, it must move towards a genuine harmonisation of processes, criteria and platforms that allows local organisations to operate on an equal footing and without disproportionate administrative burdens. This requires not only technical changes, but also a cultural shift within agencies, recognising that localisation is not an optional strategy, but a structural necessity to ensure the legitimacy, relevance and sustainability of humanitarian action.

5.2.2. Gaps and challenges arising from the Colombian Government's policy and practice

Colombia is considered by multilateral organisations such as the OECD and the World Bank to be an upper-middle-income country, with a gross domestic product per capita exceeding \$6,000 and well-established institutions across various sectors. However, this categorisation contrasts with the profound territorial inequalities, persistent internal armed conflicts and recurring humanitarian crises affecting millions of people. In this context, civil society organisations, particularly humanitarian ones, should occupy a strategic position as first responders, community coordinators and trusted operators throughout the country. However, in practice, the relationship between the Colombian state and local humanitarian organisations is governed by a legal and administrative framework that severely limits access to public funds in emergency contexts.

One of the main barriers is of a contractual nature. In Colombia, the relationship between the state and social organisations is typically governed by business procurement systems, using tools such as SECOP (the Electronic Public Procurement System). This system requires non-profit organisations to compete on equal terms with private companies, subjecting them to technical, financial and legal requirements that are often beyond the reach of community-based organisations. Furthermore, in arrangements such as cooperation or partnership contracts, the state imposes co-financing requirements amounting to 30% of the total value, which excludes most organisations without backing capital or access to other donors. This situation creates a double void: on the one hand, the state does not channel its humanitarian response through those with a real presence on the ground; on the other, local organisations miss opportunities to consolidate, become more professional and sustain their work over time.

Added to this exclusionary structure is a structural problem of trust: suspicion of corruption in the use of public funds is widespread, which has generated mistrust among humanitarian actors, international donors and the public itself. In many cases, non-profit organisations contracted by the state do not operate on community or rights-based principles, but are linked to political networks that turn them into patronage-based operators. This undermines

the ethical and technical significance of humanitarian action and jeopardises the legitimacy of the emergency response ecosystem.

In light of this situation, a viable and transformative alternative would be for the Colombian state to allocate its resources to autonomous humanitarian funding mechanisms, such as the Colombia Humanitarian Fund. A fund of this kind, with governance shared between the United Nations, national and international NGOs, and state observers, could guarantee transparency, efficiency and territorial relevance, whilst avoiding the risks of politicisation and fragmentation. An initial allocation of between \$10 and \$20 million by the Colombian government would represent a small percentage of national social spending but would have a profound structural impact on the response capacity of local actors. This initiative would also enable the state to fulfil its obligation to protect its population in crisis without having its role replaced by that of international agencies and would strengthen links between institutions and social networks of trust.

To move towards this scenario, it will be necessary to amend both the regulatory framework and procurement procedures, establishing a special regime for humanitarian action and collaboration with non-profit organisations. It will also be essential for oversight bodies and organised civil society to promote monitoring and accountability mechanisms that strengthen institutional trust and ensure the proper use of resources. In this regard, autonomy, transparency and the recognition of local knowledge must be the pillars of a new relationship between the Colombian state and its humanitarian organisations.

5.2.3. Lack of recognition of intermediary companions

A key lesson drawn from the documented experiences regarding local leadership is that civil society actors can no longer be regarded solely as recipients of aid, but also as active agents in the humanitarian response and peacebuilding. The role of **intermediary companion organisations**, which act as a bridge between international cooperation and the most local community actors, is particularly relevant in this regard. Thanks to their technical capacity, social legitimacy and territorial presence, these organisations not only implement projects but also empower other actors to lead response and protection processes.

The SNPS-CC is an excellent example of this function; through the network of diocesan social ministries and food banks, it provides management, planning and coordination support to ensure agile and culturally relevant responses. Furthermore, the SNPS-CC has channelled resources to social organisations in different regions using funds linked to localised humanitarian response: in La Mojana, through the *ToGETHER* project; in Providencia, with EMPOWER from Catholic Relief Services; in Guaviare, through the Colombia Humanitarian Fund; and in Nevado del Ruiz, with funds from CAFOD. These examples illustrate how the SNPS-CC acts as an intermediary that does not centralise power but rather strengthens capacities and delivers resources to its most local partners.

For its part, the PDPMM has strengthened its residents' network in the Magdalena Medio region over many years. Rather than acting as a direct implementer, its value lies in empowering rural, urban and Afro-descendant communities to lead development and humanitarian response processes. In contexts where institutional access is weak, this network becomes the true backbone of local action, reinforcing the role of the PDPMM as a bridging organisation that supports, coordinates and empowers local actors.

CINEP combines its research capacity with a strong commitment to supporting social organisations. In the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, it has supported community processes seeking to link humanitarian response with the defence of the territory from a local community perspective. Its work with women's, youth and human rights committees reflects how community structures are being strengthened to enable a better response. Similarly, it has strengthened the Database Network, comprising human rights organisations with strong social foundations who document violations which can then be fed into national and international protection mechanisms. Thus, CINEP not only produces knowledge, but also provides organisations with tools and legitimacy to influence decisions on rights and protection.

COVIJUPA, part of the Diocese of Quibdó Social Ministry, has carried out sustained work with Afro-descendant, Indigenous and rural communities in the Pacific region, coordinating a network of social actors with an ethnic-territorial approach to defending settlements and collective rights. Its work strengthens community leadership which, otherwise, would have less access to decision-making forums or protection mechanisms.

Finally, CODACOP has played a key role in supporting ethnic organisations, assisting with training, systematisation and representation in policy advocacy settings. In doing so, it does not replace the leadership of these communities, but rather helps to strengthen it, ensuring that their demands and proposals are heard at regional and national levels.

These experiences demonstrate that the empowerment of civil society is achieved when intermediary companion organisations do not merely implement projects in accordance with donor requirements but instead build capacity and redistribute resources to those closest to the communities. This approach broadens the scope of the response and also strengthens local leadership as a principle of sustainability and legitimacy.

In several of the documented cases, the relationship between intermediary companion organisations and community first responders can be seen to constitute added value for the crisis response. Community organisations do not identify themselves as 'humanitarian actors', but in practice they play a decisive role in the early stages of a crisis. They are the ones who identify needs, activate protection mechanisms, open and safeguard secure access to affected areas, and guide the delivery of external aid in accordance with their local knowledge, priorities and capacities.

When this work is coordinated with organisations with greater institutional experience, a combination that brings out the best in each level is achieved: the legitimacy and local knowledge of first responders, coupled with the management and coordination capacity of intermediary companion organisations.

The PDPMM Residents' Network demonstrates how a community platform can become a strategic partner for intermediary companion organisations. Amidst the armed conflict, its members managed to organise themselves to respond collectively to displacement and aggression, whilst developing proposals for development and peace. Although the PDPMM acted as a liaison with international and state bodies, it was the residents' network that lent legitimacy and sustainability to the processes. The balance between the intermediary and community levels ensured that aid was embedded in longer-term social processes, not reduced to isolated projects.

A similar example can be found in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, where CINEP's support helped to raise the profile of the work carried out by Indigenous authorities, who were the first to respond to situations of confinement, violence and dispossession. Although these community authorities do not define themselves as humanitarian, their role has been decisive in designing community alerts, organising inter-ethnic protection networks and mediating with armed and state actors. In this case, the relationship with the intermediary companion organisation did not imply subordination, but rather an effort to recognise and validate the Indigenous peoples' own capacities. This experience demonstrates that effective localisation requires recognising first responders as political and social actors with legitimate knowledge, and not merely as implementers of actions designed from outside.

National intermediary companions and sub-national coordination

National and local 'intermediary bodies' also play a key role in coordinating humanitarian responses at sub-national and national levels. Although formal mechanisms exist, such as the country humanitarian team, local coordination teams or state bodies such as Territorial Risk Management Committees, Territorial Peace Councils or Transitional Justice Committees, practice shows that many local actors are excluded from these forums because they are not purely humanitarian, and therefore their capacity for coordinated response is not considered. Conversely, these actors also promote their own territorial coordination structures that respond to the dynamics and urgent needs of each territory.

Territorial coordination of humanitarian actions is not limited to formal coordination forums, to which these intermediaries are sometimes denied full and permanent access. These organisations are often the ones that facilitate access to humanitarian aid, produce the information that guides decisions, and maintain legitimacy within communities. Their ability to coordinate with formal bodies (country humanitarian teams, local coordination teams, thematic groups, risk management committees, territorial peace councils, transitional justice and transition committees) and to create their own spaces, such as

humanitarian convoys or local agreements, demonstrates that, without these actors, the system simply does not function.

The SNPS-CC, for example, has managed to bridge the gap between local dioceses and formal humanitarian mechanisms, bringing the voices and concerns of communities into the decision-making spaces of the international system and providing communities with information and tools so that they can influence these settings. Its participation in some humanitarian clusters or local coordination teams and in the thematic coordination of the country humanitarian team has made it possible to link humanitarian issues with development and peace agendas.

In the case of the Magdalena Medio Development and Peace Programme (PDPMM), experience reveals both the potential and the tensions of territorial coordination. Although historically it has not been recognised as a full member of the Magdalena Medio Local Coordination Team, its presence in the territory and its capacity to coordinate community networks have made it an indispensable point of reference for numerous cooperation actors and humanitarian agencies. This formal exclusion contrasts with the fact that, in practice, it is constantly called upon for critical tasks such as information management, the assessment of humanitarian situations and the facilitation of safe access to affected communities.

At the same time, the PDPMM's leadership in promoting the Magdalena Medio Humanitarian Agreement served as a coordination mechanism between various actors: communities, social organisations, the Church, international agencies and the state itself. Through this process, the PDPMM raised awareness of the humanitarian crisis, demanded guarantees at the same as succeeding to articulate common agendas that served to protect the population and open channels of dialogue. This type of leadership demonstrates that territorial coordination goes beyond technical working groups and can also be expressed through political and social platforms that strengthen the humanitarian response at the local level.

In the case of CINEP, its role has been key in coordinating actions across different levels of response, combining the production of rigorous records with advocacy in decision-making forums. Its research and early warnings have served as a basis for state bodies, cooperation agencies and even embassies to refocus their humanitarian action in critical areas. At the same time, this capacity to document and raise awareness of crises has strengthened CINEP's legitimacy as a stakeholder, enabling it to open doors and build bridges between communities and institutional actors who, otherwise, are unlikely to have come together in shared spaces.

This role has also been evident in the way CINEP has supported communities in their participation in bodies such as the transitional justice commissions, ensuring that their voices are not only heard but also translated into decisions on contingency plans, measures for the protection of human rights and channels for assistance. It has also been reflected in its ability to coordinate actions with other actors in the humanitarian response, protection and the defence of human rights.

In the Pacific region, the Diocese of Quibdó and its Commission for Life, Justice and Peace have played a decisive role in the territorial coordination of the humanitarian response. In a context where state presence is weak and armed conflict dynamics persist, this commission brings together and coordinates different actors, from communities to international agencies, to organise humanitarian convoys, design protection routes and raise awareness of the crises faced by Afro-descendant, Indigenous and rural communities. Its leadership has ensured that humanitarian action goes beyond fragmented responses to develop collective protection strategies with local legitimacy.

Furthermore, the Commission coordinates with other dioceses in the region, such as Istmina-Tadó and Apartadó, to participate in the local coordination team and other formal humanitarian coordination forums. This capacity for joint work is also evident in the organisation of humanitarian missions in which various actors (international NGOs, United Nations agencies and state bodies) rely on the Church's leadership to ensure humanitarian access and security in the territory. In this way, territorial coordination is strengthened both in formal forums and in practical actions to ensure the effective protection of communities.

In conclusion, territorial coordination should not be understood solely as the participation of local actors in mechanisms established by the humanitarian system or the state, but also as the capacity to generate new coordination platforms led from within the territory. These practices demonstrate that the most effective coordination occurs when local actors not only integrate into existing structures, but also possess the legitimacy and initiative to convene, propose and lead joint responses.

The role of 'intermediary' companion actors, in collaboration with local civil society and community networks, is also vital for building a solid, proactive and strategic relationship with Colombian civil society as a whole. This dimension of social legitimacy is key not only to strengthening their internal support base, but also to building a shared narrative on the humanitarian crisis in the country and mobilising solidarity, understanding and support at the national level. Currently, many of these organisations operate with territorial legitimacy, but with little visibility outside their contexts of action, which limits their capacity for advocacy and sustainability.

Establishing a close relationship with society requires a continuous proactive public communication strategy that is not limited to specific emergencies or mobilisations. This strategy should inform the public about the structural causes and humanitarian consequences of the armed conflict, displacement, widespread violence and other forms of exclusion experienced in many regions of the country. By highlighting these realities from a humanitarian and respect-for-rights perspective, organisations will be able to generate greater social empathy and reduce the distance that often exists between political and administrative centres and the affected territories.

In the future, a closer relationship between humanitarian organisations and society could become a channel for internal solidarity, through which individuals, communities, businesses and private actors can voluntarily contribute to responses, generating new forms of funding and sustainable support. Similarly, this public support could strengthen the organisations' position vis-à-vis the state and international donors, granting them greater legitimacy in negotiation and planning forums.

Religious organisations have a distinctive quality in this regard that must be harnessed: their capacity to mobilise universal values such as compassion, human dignity, justice and solidarity, which transcend ideological or partisan affiliations. This ethical stance can be key to avoiding perceptions of political exploitation and to building bridges between the different sectors of Colombian society. To this end, it is essential that all local organisations working in the humanitarian field adhere clearly and consistently to the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.

However, this also involves an exercise in strategic self-restraint. Whenever local organisations introduce not-strictly humanitarian agendas into their work (for example, political, ethnic-territorial, specific rights or structural defence claims), they run the risk of being perceived as ideological or partisan actors, which could limit their acceptability among broad sectors of society. Therefore, reinforcing their humanitarian identity, communicating based on universal principles and consolidating an inclusive discourse will be essential to broadening their social base, strengthening their autonomy and maintaining their impact over time.

5.2.4. Lack of accountability among international intermediaries in terms of equitable partnership and bureaucratic burden

Among international agencies, many localisation initiatives operate in parallel, with little effective coordination between them. Furthermore, the participation of community organisations, particularly those in rural, Indigenous or Afro-descendant areas, remains marginal in national decision-making spaces. Added to this is the lack of a common measurement framework that would allow for rigorous monitoring of the progress of localisation in Colombia and highlight concrete practices of mutual accountability, power transfer or direct funding.

Localisation efforts in Colombia are characterised by a diversity of ongoing initiatives, networks and practices, reflecting the growing interest of local actors in moving towards a fairer and more sustainable model of humanitarian action. However, this dynamic remains constrained by international cooperation frameworks that are not always aligned with the priorities of local organisations.

At present, there is no consolidated information system or reporting standards that would allow for a comprehensive mapping of the types of partnerships between international and

local NGOs. However, the experiences gathered by various local organisations enable us to identify recurring patterns in the structure of this relationship.

At one end of the spectrum are partnership models in which the international organisation assumes a secondary role, serving a strategy led by its local partners. In these cases, the international organisation does not act as the main implementer or supervisory body, but rather as a provider of technical services on demand, based on the needs identified by its partners. This type of relationship breaks with the ‘capacity development’ paradigm, understood as a one-way flow, and is based instead on the recognition of existing capacities. A notable example of this approach is Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, whose relationship with its five partner organisations in Colombia is geared towards autonomy, the transfer of flexible funds and the provision of technical support on terms defined by the local organisations.

A more traditional model is that of ‘implementing partners’, in which the international organisation manages donor funds and subcontracts local organisations to carry out specific activities. Although these relationships are often framed in terms of partnership, they often reproduce hierarchical dynamics. However, there are nuances to this model. Some international NGOs have made explicit efforts to build more equitable relationships, by selecting partners with whom to develop sustained processes of institutional strengthening, territorial presence and joint strategy-building.

In other cases, the establishment of relationships with local actors is more a response to requirements imposed by donors, who demand a minimum localisation quota in the implementation of funds. For example, ECHO’s Humanitarian Implementation Plan (HIP) 2025 stipulates that between 20% and 25% of operations must be implemented by local organisations. This has forced many international NGOs receiving ECHO funding to establish partnerships with national actors, not necessarily out of strategic conviction, but rather to comply with regulations. Although this type of relationship creates opportunities, it does not always result in equitable partnerships or a genuine transfer of power or visibility.

One of the areas where this inequality is most evident is in the distribution of administrative and institutional support costs. Whilst some international NGOs and UN agencies transfer a proportional share of indirect costs (overheads) to their local partners, recognising that they too need to cover administrative, accounting and monitoring structures, others do not include administrative costs in contracts or restrict the use of funds to strictly operational expenses. This practice perpetuates a logic of unequal subcontracting, which compromises the sustainability of local actors and fails to uphold subsidiarity or institutional mutual accountability.

The absence of clear and consistent rules for administrative cost transfer creates uncertainty and tension in relationships. Whilst some international organisations negotiate these conditions on a case-by-case basis, others impose unilateral conditions with no mechanisms for horizontal dialogue. This situation highlights the urgent need to move towards common standards on equitable partnerships that go beyond declarative principles and include clear

operational criteria on funding, joint decision-making, access to information, visibility and institutional recognition.

In this context, localisation in Colombia depends not only on direct access to funds, but also on the quality and nature of the relationships between local and international actors. Experience shows that not all partnerships are equal: some reproduce vertical structures, whilst others open genuine spaces for collaboration. This is fundamentally about transforming the relationship between those who fund, those who support and those who implement, with a view to building a fairer and mutually accountable system, adapted to local realities.

To this end, donors must not limit themselves to demanding localisation quotas; they must also establish minimum guidelines for partnerships and consortia, including the proportional transfer of indirect costs, the inclusion of local partners in design and evaluation processes, and the promotion of shared visibility and a co-governance model in project implementation. Similarly, international NGOs must take a more proactive role in the redistribution of institutional power, recognising that strengthening local capacities is not achieved solely through workshops, but also through the transfer of trust, voice and resources.

6.Recommendations

Based on the lessons learnt and findings from this dialogue and research process with local, national and international organisations, we present a series of recommendations aimed at various actors within the humanitarian and cooperation system in Colombia below. These recommendations aim to help strengthen local leadership in crisis response based on the commitments of the Grand Bargain and the Charter for Change, improve access to funding for national and grassroots organisations, and move towards more equitable partnership models that integrate humanitarian action, development, peacebuilding and the defence of human rights.

To donors

- 1. Set clear and measurable targets to advance the localisation of aid, with compliance mechanisms.**
 - a. Set a minimum threshold of 30% of Colombia's humanitarian portfolio to be channelled directly through local and national actors within 24 months, with monitoring via 6-monthly reports.
 - b. Require all international intermediary agencies receiving funds to publicly report on their budget structure, including within this structure the percentage of overhead costs allocated to local partners, the participation of local partners in programme design decisions, and risk-sharing agreements.

- c. Establish a mechanism of sanctions and incentives for localisation: reduce funding by 10% for intermediaries that fail to meet the benchmarks; increase the funding to be allocated by 10% for those that exceed them.

2. Create flexible and targeted funding streams for national agencies.

- a. Establish a multi-year fund (3 to 5 years) of between \$5 and \$10 million, specifically for *intermediary companion organisations*, combining core operational costs, grants to grassroots partners and the development of fundraising capacity at the national level.
- b. Include funding for these agencies to participate in international advocacy forums and donor policy dialogues (travel, staff time, translation).
- c. Allow between 15% and 20% of grants allocated to these intermediary companion actors to be unrestricted for organisational strengthening.
- d. Design flexible funding mechanisms lasting 3 to 5 years (minimum \$2 million per mechanism) that allow local actors to move funds between the categories of humanitarian aid, development and peace.
- e. Accept the terminology and frameworks used by local organisations in proposals and reports, rather than insisting on international humanitarian jargon (for example, accept 'territorial accompaniment' rather than insisting on 'protection integration').
- f. Fund joint humanitarian, development and peace planning exercises, led by local actors (budget: \$200,000–\$500,000 per region), which produce integrated multi-year territorial strategies.

3. Support the reform of the Colombian government's emergency funding through technical assistance and co-financing.

- a. Provide technical support and co-financing (matched funding) to the Colombian government to reduce the co-financing requirement for non-profit organisations from 25% to 0–5% in emergency situations and to create simplified SECOP (public procurement) procedures for humanitarian emergencies involving contracts under \$100,000.
- b. Fund a study and pilot programme (12–18 months) to establish a government-funded common humanitarian fund (initially \$10–20 million per year), modelled on the OCHA Colombia Humanitarian Fund.

4. Harmonise due diligence and reporting among donor agencies.

- a. Convene a working group on donor harmonisation in Colombia (quarterly meetings) to develop a common due diligence framework acceptable to all major donors, standardised templates for grant proposals and reporting, and shared risk assessment tools.
- b. Test mutual recognition agreements whereby due diligence carried out by one donor is accepted by the others, which would reduce the administrative burden on local partners by 40–60 per cent.
- c. Set maximum reporting requirements: no more than 10 pages for narrative reports, quarterly (not monthly) financial reports for grants under \$300,000.

To UN agencies

- 1. Leverage the OCHA Colombia Humanitarian Fund through specific operational improvements.**
 - a. Expand eligibility criteria for local actors to include organisations without formal humanitarian mandates but with a proven capacity to respond to crises (development and peace organisations).
 - b. Reduce the minimum grant amount from current levels to between \$50,000 and \$100,000 so that smaller grassroots organisations can access funding.
 - c. Establish a fast-track approval process (maximum 15 working days) for emergency allocations of less than \$200,000.
 - d. Create a capacity-building fund (10% of the total Colombia Humanitarian Fund budget) specifically designed to support local organisations with the application process, financial management and compliance.
- 2. Harmonise partnership requirements and procurement processes across UN agencies.**
 - a. Convene quarterly inter-agency meetings with UNHCR, IOM, FAO, UNICEF, WFP and OCHA to develop unified partnership criteria, eliminating the current situation where the same local organisation is considered eligible by one agency but not by another.
 - b. Create a shared database of UN partners that recognises due diligence, organisational assessments and capacity evaluations across all agencies, and eliminates duplicate processes.
 - c. Standardise budget formats, narrative reporting templates and financial reporting schedules across all UN agencies operating in Colombia.
 - d. Pilot a 'Single UN Partnership Agreement' in two or three departments, whereby a single contract with a local organisation covers activities funded by several UN agencies.
- 3. Establish formal coordination mechanisms between the UN-led system and platforms led by local actors.**
 - a. Designate liaison posts within OCHA Colombia specifically for coordination with the Grand Bargain Colombia National Reference Group (NRG), the PAHNAL network and the Humanitarian NGO Forum, with quarterly joint planning meetings.
 - b. Establish a 6-monthly consultation process in which networks of local actors formally review and provide feedback on the priorities of the Humanitarian Response Plan, cluster strategies and funding allocation decisions prior to their finalisation.

To international NGOs

1. Transition from implementation to providing support and solidarity-based partnerships.

- a. For international NGOs that have been operating in Colombia for more than 10 years, develop explicit 3- to 5-year transition plans that shift from direct implementation to supporting local partners through: unrestricted core funding (at least 30% of grants to partners), joint fundraising in which local partners are co-applicants with veto power over proposals, and specific advocacy support budgets (10–15% of the partnership value) to enable local partners to participate in national and international policy forums.
- b. Establish shared decision-making structures in which local partners have an equal say in the development of the country strategy, and not just in the implementation of projects.

2. Support national intermediary companion organisations.

- a. Establish collaboration agreements with national organisations that already have national reach and local legitimacy.
- b. Provide multi-year grants for institutional strengthening (between \$500,000 and \$2 million over a period of 3–5 years) that include: organisational development, financial management systems, fundraising capacity and advocacy skills.
- c. Jointly develop capacity-building plans with these intermediary companions, rather than imposing external frameworks for assessing capacity.

3. Promote reforms in the Colombian government through coordinated advocacy.

- a. Establish an advocacy working group of international NGOs (within the Humanitarian NGO Forum framework) specifically focused on engaging the Colombian government on: (a) the removal of the 25% co-financing requirement for non-profit organisations in emergency situations, (b) the creation of simplified procurement procedures within the SECOP framework for humanitarian contracts under \$100,000, and (c) the strengthening of protection mechanisms for human rights defenders.
- b. Commit resources (time dedicated by advocacy staff, legal expertise and a budget for evidence-gathering) to support local partners in documenting cases and presenting evidence to government bodies.
- c. Leverage international NGOs' access to international mechanisms (UN Special Rapporteurs, EU institutions) to raise awareness of issues arising from attacks on community leaders.

4. Implement and document equitable partnership practices for sector-wide learning.

- a. Through the Humanitarian NGO Forum's working group on localisation, commit to reporting transparently and annually on: the percentage of overheads allocated to local partners (target: minimum 7–10%), the risk-sharing mechanisms in place, the participation of local partners in

- governance/decision-making bodies, and the average time from the partner's request to the disbursement of funds (target: maximum 30 days).
- b. Develop and test harmonised due diligence tools that can be shared among international NGOs, reducing the burden on local organisations working with multiple agencies.
- c. Create an equity scorecard for partnerships, with indicators developed jointly with PAHNAL and Colombia NRG, and an external evaluation every two years.

To national/local civil society actors

- 1. Develop and coordinate a shared Colombian localisation framework based on complementarity, solidarity and local leadership.**
 - a. Convene a series of 3–4 workshops over a six-month period bringing together local actors who are members of the PAHNAL network, NEAR network, Colombia NRG, Colombia Humanitarian Forum and key local actors to jointly create a framework document defining what localisation means in the Colombian context, distinguishing it from international interpretations.
 - b. This framework must explicitly articulate the principles of complementarity between local, national and international actors; expectations of partnership based on solidarity (rather than transactional relationships); and the non-negotiable elements of local leadership.
 - c. Publish this framework in Spanish and English and use it as a basis for collaboration with donors, UN agencies and international NGOs.
- 2. Establish coordination mechanisms for advocacy that is aligned and respectful of diversity.**
 - a. Create a quarterly coordination space between the Colombia NRG, the PAHNAL network and key consortia/platforms (TOGETHER, START Network Colombia and regional members of NEAR), specifically to align advocacy, without requiring organisational mergers or loss of autonomy.
 - b. Develop 2–3 shared advocacy priorities annually (e.g. reform of government emergency funding, harmonised due diligence, provision for overheads), whilst allowing organisations to maintain their distinct positions on other issues.
 - c. Establish a shared database and documentation system for localisation exercises, in which members contribute cases, data and analysis to strengthen collective advocacy, and coordinate these through a rotating secretariat.
- 3. Raise awareness of the humanitarian situation in Colombia and maintain funding in the face of global cuts.**
 - a. In the face of dramatic cuts in global aid, redouble efforts to actively communicate to donors and the international public the gravity of the humanitarian situation in Colombia, highlighting that reduced assistance exacerbates the suffering of vulnerable populations and generates counterproductive effects, such as an increase in forced displacement.
 - b. Use advocacy platforms to defend the need to maintain, and even increase, funding for the country, highlighting Colombia's strategic role in the region and the risk that cuts could undermine progress in peacebuilding.

4. To document and systematise models of collaboration between grassroots organisations and national organisations.

- a. Invest in the systematisation of successful cases of collaboration between community organisations and national intermediary companions (similar to the case studies in this report).
- b. Create learning exchanges (2–3 per year) in which grassroots organisations from different regions share experiences on: accessing funding through intermediary companion organisations, maintaining autonomy whilst receiving technical support, and joint advocacy strategies.
- c. Develop practical guidance documents on the principles of equitable partnership from the perspective of local actors, including model contracts, methods for calculating overheads, and decision-making structures.

5. Compile evidence and strategic positioning for government policy recommendations.

- a. Commission a detailed study (6–9 months, budget of \$80,000–\$150,000) to document: the specific barriers within SECOP processes that prevent grassroots organisations from accessing government emergency funding; an analysis of the impact of the 25% co-financing requirement on the response capacity of non-profit organisations; and case studies of responses by local organisations that government systems have failed to support.
- b. Use this evidence to draft specific legislative proposals with technical and legal support, present them to the Congressional Human Rights Commission, and build a coalition of national and international NGOs to advocate for them.
- c. Engage sympathetic government officials at an early stage of the process to build internal advocates.

To the Colombian state

1. Establish a special procurement regime for non-profit organisations in humanitarian emergencies that removes current barriers.

- a. Draft and submit to Congress (within 12 months) a legislative proposal addressing the main obstacles:
 - i. eliminate the 30% co-financing requirement that prevents grassroots organisations without sufficient assets from accessing emergency funding,
 - ii. waive insurance and surety bond requirements, which can cost between 3% and 8% of the contract value and require commercial banking relationships that community organisations cannot access,
 - iii. extend implementation periods beyond the current limitation of the calendar year, agreeing to future terms to allow implementation periods of 18 to 24 months aligned with crisis recovery cycles,
 - iv. create simplified SECOP procurement procedures for humanitarian contracts under \$100,000, reducing documentation requirements by 60% and approval times from 45 to 10 days, and

- v. establish exemptions from standard tendering processes for qualified humanitarian organisations during the first 90 days of an emergency declaration.
 - b. Provide technical support through the UNGRD and UARIV to ensure that the proposal addresses legal issues and maximises accessibility.
2. **Establish a permanent, government-funded Colombian Humanitarian Response Fund based on principles of transparent governance and flexibility.**
- a. Create a specific budget allocation within the Colombian national planning department of between \$10 and \$20 million annually for humanitarian response, managed through a funding structure similar to the OCHA Colombia Humanitarian Fund.
 - b. The governance structure should include representatives from the UNGRD and the UARIV, between three and four national civil society organisations (rotating every two years), between one and two observers from international organisations, and independent financial oversight.
 - c. Establish transparent allocation criteria that prioritise:
 - rapid response (within 7 days of the declaration of an emergency)
 - funding for local organisations (at least 70% of allocations)
 - flexible multisectoral support allowing for budget reallocation between categories with a documented notification process (without the need for approval)
 - implementation periods of 12 to 24 months (not limited to the calendar year).
 - d. Include explicit safeguards to ensure respect for the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, with mechanisms to prevent the political instrumentalisation of aid delivery. Conduct a pilot trial in 3–4 departments prone to recurring humanitarian crises (due to climate variability and/or the impact of armed conflict) and with significant needs, over an 18-month period prior to nationwide implementation.
3. **Strengthen existing inter-institutional committees on risk management and transitional justice with mechanisms for accountability to citizens and the participation of local actors.**
- a. Ensure, by presidential decree, the effective participation of national and local civil society organisations, as well as grassroots organisations, in the risk management and transitional justice committees already established, comprising UNGRD, UARIV, the Ombudsman's Office, four or five representatives of national and local civil society organisations, two representatives of international cooperation and independent observers.
 - b. The expanded mandate of these committees includes quarterly reviews of public humanitarian expenditure, monitoring of compliance with humanitarian principles and prevention of the political instrumentalisation of humanitarian aid, social audit processes in which affected communities assess the quality of the response, follow-up on allegations of corruption related to humanitarian assistance, and annual public reports.

- c. Establish citizen feedback mechanisms (hotline, online platform) through which communities can report their concerns regarding the delivery of aid, including violations of neutrality or political conditioning, with a guarantee of follow-up within 15 days.
4. **Strengthen protection mechanisms and accountability for attacks against human rights defenders.**
- a. Increase the budget of the National Protection Unit (UNP) by 30% for humanitarian contexts, with expedited assessments (maximum 30 days), eliminating excessive paperwork that delays protection for community leaders at risk.
 - b. Establish quarterly reports to Congress on attacks, prosecution rates and the implementation of protection measures.
 - c. Create a specific protocol within the Attorney General's Office for the priority investigation of cases involving humanitarian workers, with the aim of ensuring that 60% of cases reach the preliminary hearing within 12 months.
 - d. Fund collective protection mechanisms led by human rights defender platforms and networks (DHRD platforms), providing multi-year funding (between \$500,000 and \$1 million annually per platform) for community early warning systems, secure communication networks and peer support structures that complement the UNP's individual protection measures.

7. Glossary:

APC (Presidential Agency for International Cooperation): A Colombian government body that coordinates all international aid entering the country and aligns funds with national public priorities. In its 2021 Management Report, it identified the lack of knowledge management and the lack of coordination between organisations as the two main challenges facing the cooperation system in Colombia.

CAFOD (Catholic Agency for Overseas Development): An international non-governmental organisation based in the United Kingdom, founded on principles of solidarity and the leadership of local partners. In Colombia, it works through long-term partnerships with church and civil society organisations, providing technical support, institutional strengthening and access to funding.

CINEP - PPP (Centre for Research and Popular Education - Programme for Peace): A centre for research and social action run by the Society of Jesus in Colombia, with expertise in social studies, community support, human rights advocacy and peacebuilding. It manages the Human Rights and Political Violence Database and promotes action research with Indigenous communities and grassroots organisations.

CHS (Core Humanitarian Standard): An international standard establishing quality and accountability commitments for humanitarian organisations. In June 2025, for the first time in Latin America, Colombian humanitarian organisations obtained this certification, representing recognition of technical capabilities and a strategic step towards direct access to international funding.

CODACOP (Corporation for the Support of Popular Communities): An organisation that supports Indigenous peoples', rural and popular urban communities and organisations in protection, organisation and territorial defence processes. It focuses on strengthening the leadership of women and young people, participatory assessments and the integration of Indigenous knowledge with technical tools.

Country humanitarian team: A humanitarian coordination mechanism led by OCHA that brings together UN agencies, international NGOs and, in theory, national organisations for crisis planning and response. In Colombia, it operates in parallel with the GIFMM.

Colombia Humanitarian Response Fund (proposed): A state funding mechanism proposed in the document, managed according to principles of transparent governance and flexibility. It would include civil society representation, priority allocation to local organisations (minimum 70%), rapid response (7 days), implementation periods of 12–24 months, and safeguards to ensure respect for humanitarian principles.

Colombia Humanitarian Fund (FHC) / OCHA Pooled Humanitarian Fund: An OCHA funding mechanism which, in Colombia, operates under the 'local actors only' principle, allowing national and community-based organisations to access resources directly without international intermediaries. Recognised as a positive innovation, although its eligibility

criteria present a challenge because they exclude organisations without a formal humanitarian mandate.

COVIJUPA (Commission for Life, Justice and Peace): A commission of the Diocese of Quibdó working in Chocó, integrating humanitarian response with human rights advocacy, psychosocial support and peacebuilding. It acts as a bridge between Afro-descendant, Indigenous and peasant communities in the Pacific region and external actors, ensuring humanitarian access in high-risk areas.

Crisis: A situation that goes beyond the immediate emergency to encompass prolonged and structural dynamics of violence, inequality, exclusion and vulnerability. Unlike the technical concept of a 'humanitarian emergency', the notion of crisis allows assistance and protection to be integrated with human rights approaches, early recovery, prevention, anticipatory action and links to peace and development. In Colombia, many crises are protracted (forced displacement, confinement, land dispossession), requiring sustained responses that extend beyond conventional humanitarian funding cycles.

Due diligence: An assessment and verification process carried out by donors and international agencies on their local partners to ensure compliance with financial, legal and operational standards. In Colombia, the lack of harmonisation between agencies leads to duplication of effort, hidden costs and institutional fatigue for local organisations.

ECHO (the European Commission's Directorate-General for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations): The European Union's leading humanitarian donor. Its Humanitarian Implementation Plan (HIP) 2025 stipulates that between 20% and 25% of operations must be carried out by local organisations, which has prompted many international NGOs to establish partnerships with national actors, not always out of strategic conviction but to comply with regulations.

ECO Model (Ecosystem Model): A model developed by Humanity United and the Ideas for Peace Foundation in Colombia, based on four principles: capacity-building, recognition (recognition of interests and strengths), connection (active links between organisations) and collaboration (collaboration at critical moments). It seeks to overcome competition between national organisations through flexible funding and peer learning opportunities.

EMPOWER: A project by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) that invests in the operational and organisational capacities of local partners, as well as in an advocacy agenda so that key actors can present their interests to US government bodies.

Equitable partnership: A relationship between international and local organisations based on principles of mutual accountability, devolution of power, shared decision-making, proportional distribution of overheads and risks, and mutual visibility. It involves breaking away from the logic of vertical subcontracting to move towards models of horizontal collaboration where local partners participate in the design, not just the implementation.

EUTF Colombia (European Union Trust Fund for Peace in Colombia): A financial instrument created in 2016 to support the implementation of the Final Peace Agreement, managed by INTPA (the EU's development arm). It mobilised around €148 million across 34

programmes, but remained structurally disconnected from the humanitarian system, functioning as a post-conflict development instrument without mechanisms for immediate response or protection.

Grassroots community actor / First responder: An organisation or group which, without necessarily identifying itself as 'humanitarian', initiates the initial response to a crisis. These are the actors who identify needs, manage protection, open safe access to areas and guide the delivery of external aid based on their local knowledge and priorities. Examples: community action committees, Indigenous authorities, women's committees, traditional authorities.

GIFMM (Inter-Agency Group on Mixed Migration Flows): A coordination mechanism running parallel to the EHP, co-led by UNHCR and IOM, focused on responding to the situation of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Colombia. It creates duplication of structures and complexity within the country's humanitarian architecture.

Grand Bargain: A global agreement on humanitarian system reform signed in 2016, which includes a commitment to allocate 25% of humanitarian funding directly to local actors by 2025. In Colombia, as in other contexts, this target is far from being met.

Humanitarian principles: a set of standards guiding humanitarian action: humanity (alleviating suffering), impartiality (without discrimination based on origin, race, gender, etc.), neutrality (not taking sides in conflicts) and independence (from political, economic or military interests). Local organisations in Colombia often combine these principles with human rights, development and peace agendas, which can create tensions regarding perceptions of their neutrality.

IASC (Inter-Agency Standing Committee): United Nations inter-agency committee responsible for global humanitarian coordination. It issued the Reference Framework on Localisation, which defines local actors and sets out commitments for the international humanitarian system.

IOM (International Organisation for Migration): UN agency responsible for migration management. In Colombia, it co-leads the GIFMM alongside UNHCR.

INTPA (Directorate-General for International Partnerships): the development arm of the European Commission that managed the EUTF Colombia, as opposed to ECHO (the humanitarian arm). This institutional separation created a disconnect between the development and peace response and the humanitarian response.

Intermediary actor: An international organisation (NGO or UN agency) that channels cooperation funds to local actors, but which frequently retains a significant portion of the resources for administrative and operational costs. It operates as a filter and distributor of external resources, with an agenda determined from outside the local context. It may reproduce hierarchical subcontracting dynamics without any real transfer of power or visibility to local partners.

Intermediary companion actor: A civil society organisation operating at national level whilst maintaining deep links with diverse communities and regions. It does not represent a single community but acts as a bridge between international cooperation and more local actors. It combines direct implementation capacity with the strengthening of local partners, the production of contextualised knowledge and political advocacy. It plays a role both in project implementation and in supporting communities. Examples in Colombia: SNPS-Caritas Colombia, PDPMM, CINEP/PPP, COVIJUPA, CODACOP. Unlike international intermediaries, they are deeply rooted and have a permanent presence in the territory, as well as their own agency.

Local actor (IASC/Grand Bargain definition): According to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Reference Framework on localisation, this refers to non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations, community networks, social movements and traditional authorities operating in the context where the crisis occurs, whether in their own country (national actors) or in specific communities (community actors). The Grand Bargain distinguishes between: (a) first responders, (b) national organisations with sub-national or national reach, and (c) grassroots community organisations. The document emphasises that these categories should be understood as a continuum where actors support one another, rather than as hierarchical levels.

Local coordination teams: Subnational humanitarian coordination structures operating in specific departments or regions of Colombia. Although they exist formally, many local actors are excluded for not being 'purely humanitarian', limiting recognition of their capacity for coordinated response.

LNAs (Local and National Actors): An acronym used in the document to refer collectively to grassroots community organisations, national intermediary companion actors and Colombian civil society networks with a presence and mandate in the region. This includes both formally structured organisations and social movements, ethnic-territorial authorities and civic platforms that respond to crises based on their own approaches and knowledge.

Local leadership: an alternative approach to localisation that positions local and national actors as key players in the crisis response, recognising their knowledge of the context, community legitimacy, territorial access and permanent presence. Unlike localisation, which may be limited to the transfer of implementation functions, local leadership involves the actual transfer of decision-making power, strategic autonomy and the promotion of collaboration between levels (local, national, international) rather than competition. The document proposes this approach as the most transformative framework for reforming the humanitarian system in Colombia.

Localisation of humanitarian aid: A process of reforming the international humanitarian system arising from the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (Istanbul) and the Grand Bargain, aimed at strengthening the role of local actors in crisis response. It seeks to transfer resources, capacities and decision-making power from international agencies to national and community organisations, in response to criticisms regarding the inefficiency, high costs and territorial disconnect of the traditional humanitarian system. In Colombia, it faces the risk of becoming technical rhetoric without real transformation, as international

agencies seek to position themselves within localisation to maintain funding sources without restructuring to reinforce existing national capacities.

Magdalena Medio Residents' Network: A community platform of the PDPMM that brings together rural, urban and Afro-descendant residents to lead development and humanitarian response processes. It acts as the backbone of local action, lending legitimacy and sustainability to these processes.

National Emergency Service: A system run by SNPS-Caritas Colombia that organises the response across three levels (community, diocesan, national) with unified activation protocols, participatory assessment, community list verification, aid logistics and protection routes.

NEAR (Network for Empowered Aid Response): A Global South-led global network of national and local organisations promoting humanitarian system reform. In Latin America and the Caribbean, it has established a regional 'localisation laboratory' with twelve national organisations and supported the creation of the Grand Bargain's national reference group in Colombia.

NEAR LAC (NEAR Regional Fund for Latin America and the Caribbean): A NEAR network funding mechanism that channels resources directly to national and local organisations in the region, without international intermediaries.

OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs): UN entity responsible for coordinating emergency humanitarian response. In Colombia, it leads the EHP, manages the Pooled Humanitarian Fund 'for local actors only' and has promoted people-centred coordination initiatives.

Overhead costs: Indirect institutional operating costs (administrative, accounting, monitoring) that organisations require to function. An equitable partnership practice involves transferring these costs proportionally to local partners, recognising that they also need sustainable structures, not just funds for operational activities.

PAHNAL (National Humanitarian Action Platform): An emerging humanitarian network of national NGOs in Colombia, inspired by the Venezuelan model, with support from OCHA. It seeks to identify, certify and strengthen local organisations as first-response humanitarian actors.

PDPMM (Magdalena Medio Development and Peace Programme): A regional initiative working continuously over three decades to bring together communities, social organisations, the church and local authorities to protect life, promote rights and forge alternatives for development and peace. It is known particularly for its Network of Residents and its approach of turning complaints into proposals. A founding member of RedProdepaz.

Solidarity chains: Networks of mutual support that are activated in crisis situations, bringing together various local actors (traders, transport companies, professionals, recipient

communities) to mobilise resources without relying exclusively on external aid. Example: the mobilisation of local resources in Istmina-Tadó during mass displacement emergencies.

SECOP (Electronic Public Procurement System): A Colombian state public procurement platform which, when applied to humanitarian action, imposes business requirements that are unsuitable for community-based organisations: co-financing of 25–50%, insurance, bonds and bureaucratic processes that exclude the most local actors.

SNPS-CC (National Secretariat for Social Pastoral Care - Caritas Colombia): A church-based organisation with a national reach that coordinates diocesan social ministries and grassroots organisations. It operates the National Emergency Service (SNE) with activation protocols at three levels (community, diocesan and national), combining assistance, protection, livelihood recovery and peacebuilding.

Solidarity (as opposed to competition): A principle guiding relations between humanitarian actors, recognising that each (local, national, international) needs the others to mobilise effective support. It involves working in a complementary manner, ensuring that institutional preservation or competition for funds does not hinder transformative change.

Special procurement regime (proposed): Proposed regulatory framework to remove barriers preventing non-profit organisations from accessing state emergency funding in Colombia. This would include the removal of the 25% co-financing requirement, exemption from insurance and surety bonds, extended implementation periods (18–24 months), simplified procedures for contracts under \$100,000 USD, and exemptions from tendering during the first 90 days of an emergency.

Start Fund / Colombia Start Ready: A Start Network initiative that provides rapid funding for emergency responses, enabling local organisations, such as the Diocese of Quibdó, to diversify their funding sources and respond swiftly to crises.

Start Network: A global network of national and international humanitarian organisations that provides rapid funding for emergency responses. Its Colombia Start Ready project enables local organisations to access flexible funding.

Subcontracting: a traditional model of relationship between international and local NGOs, in which the international organisation manages funds and contracts the local organisation to carry out specific activities, often reproducing hierarchical dynamics without any real transfer of power or visibility.

Systematisation: a process of documenting and analysing local experiences that transforms practical learning into knowledge that can be used for action and advocacy. This has emerged in the report as standard practice for the PDPMM (Network of Residents) and CINEP, linked to specific projects or as an ongoing institutional practice.

ToGETHER: A German-funded consortium involving Caritas Germany, which brings together five local organisations and includes an autonomous fund for small-scale humanitarian responses. It promotes joint learning, local coordination and capacity building.

Triple nexus: An approach that seeks to coherently link the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding dimensions in contexts of protracted crisis. In Colombia, local organisations apply this approach de facto as an operational and ethical necessity, combining immediate assistance with the restoration of livelihoods, the protection of rights, the prevention of violence and the strengthening of the social fabric, even though international funding mechanisms keep these areas in separate silos.

UARIV (Unit for Comprehensive Care and Reparation for Victims): A Colombian state entity responsible for providing care to victims of the armed conflict. It would participate in the governance of the proposed Colombia Humanitarian Response Fund.

UNGRD (National Unit for Disaster Risk Management): Colombian state entity responsible for disaster risk management and response. It would participate in the governance of the proposed Colombia Humanitarian Response Fund.

UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees): UN agency responsible for the protection of refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons. In Colombia, it co-chairs the GIFMM (Inter-Institutional Group on Mixed Migration Flows) alongside the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), in parallel with the humanitarian coordination system led by OCHA.

UNP (National Protection Unit): Colombian state agency responsible for the protection of human rights defenders, social leaders and journalists. The document recommends increasing its budget by 30% for humanitarian contexts and eliminating excessive paperwork that delays protection.

Uprooted Populations Mechanism (European Union stream): A European funding instrument in force until the mid-2010s that enabled the combination of humanitarian assistance, protection, early recovery and community strengthening for displaced populations, following a rights-based approach. Many local Colombian organisations had direct access to these funds, which facilitated contextualised and sustained interventions.