



The Humanitarian Network: Local Leadership in the Crisis Response in Colombia

CAFOD and partners in Colombia

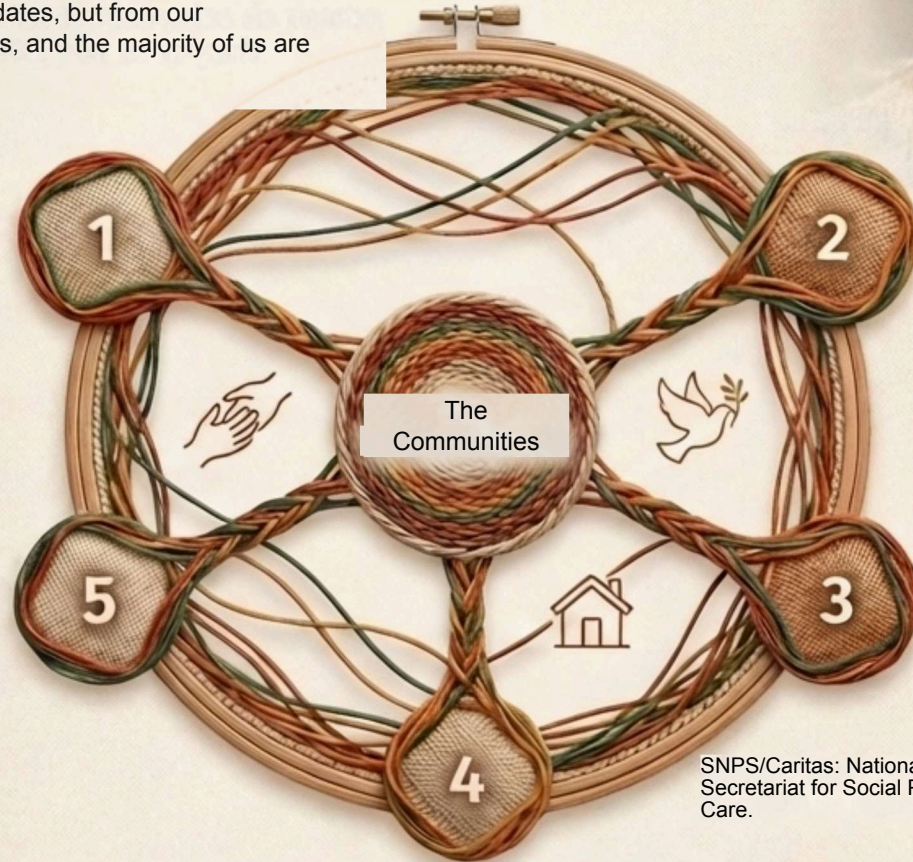
Lessons, capacities and a roadmap from the regions to build a fairer, more complementary and effective cooperation system.

The Weavers of the Loom: Who are we here?

Our legitimacy does not stem from technical mandates, but from our steadfastness and faith. We are CAFOD's partners, and the majority of us are Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs).

CINEP/PPP: Centre for Research and Popular Education / Peace Programme.

CODACOP: Corporation for the Support of Popular Communities.



COVIJUPA: Commission for Life, Justice and Peace (Diocese of Quibdó).

PDPMM: Programme for Development and Peace in the Magdalena Medio.

SNPS/Caritas: National Secretariat for Social Pastoral Care.

Our identity goes beyond the purely humanitarian.
We integrate the social, the spiritual and the community. We are there before, during and after the crisis.

The Humanitarian System at a Crossroads

Funding crisis and withdrawal of actors

Cuts in international cooperation (exacerbated by the reduction in US support in 2025) are deepening poverty. The withdrawal of UN agencies and international NGOs leaves the burden of the crisis on local actors with severely limited resources.

The risk of technocratic localisation

Some international actors use localisation merely to ensure their own institutional survival, prioritising international intermediaries over a genuine transfer of power.

Call for Radical Complementarity

Given the scarcity of resources, it is imperative to move from institutional competition to solidarity. Every actor is needed to prevent the collapse of the system.

Increased regional vulnerability

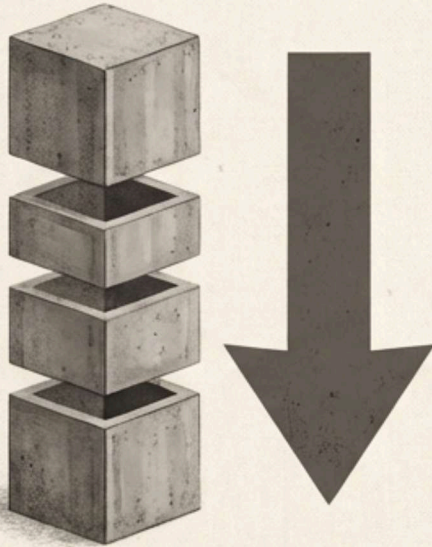
Imminent risk of an explosion in needs due to migrant/refugee flows and the intensification of internal conflict, exacerbated by instability in neighbouring countries (Venezuela, Ecuador).

Fragmented architecture and bureaucracy

Parallel systems (EHP led by OCHA vs. GIFMM led by UNHCR/IOM) and a lack of harmonisation create technical barriers and suffocating administrative burdens for grassroots organisations.

Changing the Paradigm: From Financial Quotas to Territorial Agency

Yesterday (The traditional model)



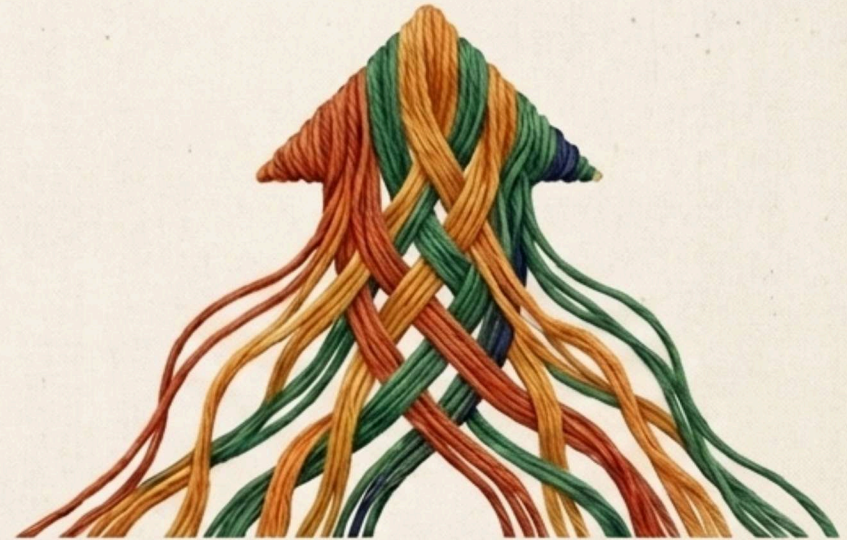
Localisation

Viewed as a quantitative target imposed by the humanitarian system (e.g. transferring 25% of funds) and a transfer of security and financial risk.

Humanitarian Response

Short-term interventions, isolated within sectoral silos, assuming that the crisis is a temporary event.

Today (The reality from the ground up)



Local Leadership

Recognition of the agency, decision-making power, shared governance and territorial autonomy of local actors.

Crisis Response

Recognition that in Colombia crises are protracted and structural, requiring continuity that combines urgency and transformation.

Local Leadership in a Cascade: The Knots that Hold the Fabric Together

1

Signatories to the Grand Bargain
(Donors and UN Agencies)
• Central source of funding and global guidelines.

2

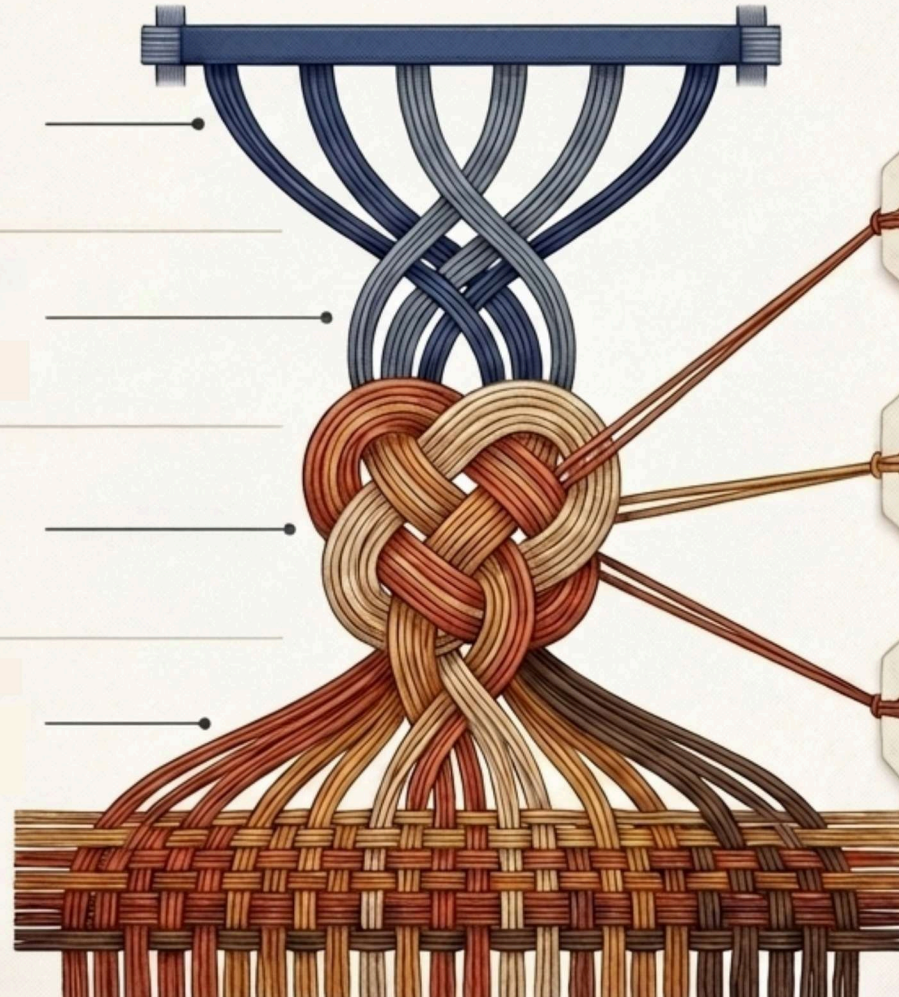
International Intermediaries
(INGOs)
• Resource channellers (often with high operating costs).

3

National and Local
Intermediary Actors
(e.g. OBF and HR NGOs)

4

Civil Society and Communities
• First responders and defenders of the territory (Local Councils, Community Councils, Committees).



Strategic Bridge: They translate the bureaucratic demands of the international system into the reality of civil society, and vice versa.



Implementers and Supporters: They do not merely execute projects; they provide ongoing ethical, spiritual and technical support to communities (Triple Nexus organic).



Risk Absorbers: They bear the hidden cost of the territorial response. They shoulder the risks of security (threats, access restrictions), financial (exchange rates, defaults, overhead), legal, etc.

The Threads of the Ecosystem: Key Actors and Capacities

CINEP/PPP

Knowledge management, Human Rights and Political Violence Database, diplomacy and multi-level advocacy.

COVIJUPA

Ethnic-territorial support, safe humanitarian access in Chocó, intercultural mediation with indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities.

PDPMM

Residents' Network, coordination of local governance, territorial peace-building and grassroots development in the Magdalena Medio.

SNPS/Caritas

National Emergency Service (SNE), own flexible funds (Goods Campaign), diocesan outreach across 78 jurisdictions.

CODACOP

Gender and ethnic focus, preventive community protection, strengthening of indigenous community processes and women's leadership.

La Trenza: The De Facto Articulated Triple Nexus

The international system funds in silos. On the ground, the crisis knows no sectoral boundaries. Local organisations articulate the Triple Nexus out of sheer necessity for survival.

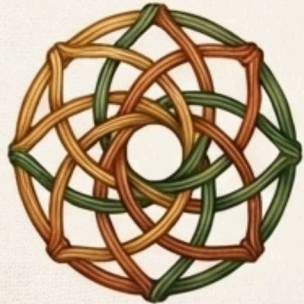


Delivering a food kit (humanitarian) whilst preventing the recruitment of young people (peace) and strengthening the community council (development) is a single, continuous process on the ground.

The Tapestry in Detail: Diagnostic Matrix of Approaches

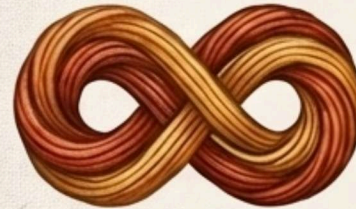
	Access and Legitimacy	Triple Nexus	Management of Knowledge	Strengthening Local
CINEP	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Traditional Traditional	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Analysis and Advocacy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Database Human Rights	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Network of Banks Regional
COVIJUPA	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High-risk high risk	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Human Rights + Assistance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Documentation Territorial	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Indigenous Indigenous/Afro
PDPMM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Community Community	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rural rural + Peace	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Systematisation Network	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Network of Residents
SNPS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Capillarity National	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Welfare + Cohesion	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reports SNE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dioceses and parishes
CODACOP	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Indigenous indigenous	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Recovery early	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Participatory Participatory	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Women's of women

The Resilience of the Community: 4 Pillars of Local Leadership



Community Knowledge and Organisation

Interventions based on existing knowledge and real local structures (e.g. town councils, community action committees), avoiding the imposition of external models that fracture the social fabric.



Intermediary actors and capacity building for leadership

Relationships based on solidarity, the two-way transfer of skills and mutual trust, moving beyond the transactional view of the subcontractor.



Holistic Approaches to the Nexus


Organic integration of physical protection, life-saving assistance, the restoration of livelihoods and the enforcement of rights, managing the crisis in all its complexity.



Leadership in Negotiating Access

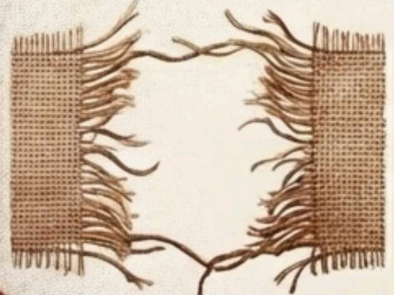
Moral and territorial legitimacy allows entry (and continued presence) in restricted areas where the State and international agencies cannot operate safely.

Knots and Tears: 4 Structural Challenges of the System



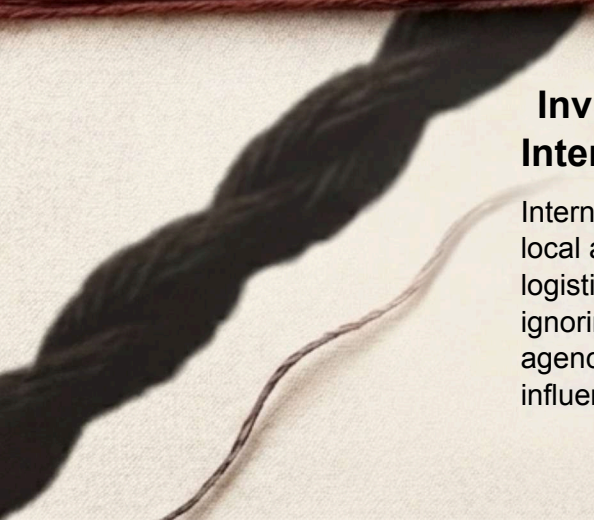
Access to Funding

Highly rigid, short-term and sector-specific funds that stifle local processes and force the fragmentation of comprehensive interventions.




Gaps in Government Policies

The state procurement system (with 30% local content requirements) effectively excludes local organisations and non-profit NGOs from the state's emergency response.



Invisibilisation of Intermediary Actors

International agencies view local actors as mere logistical implementers, ignoring their analytical capacity, agency and political influence.



Lack of International Accountability

Risks (security and financial) are transferred to local actors on the ground, whilst strategic decision-making power remains with international headquarters.

Mending the Fabric: A Shared Roadmap

True localisation demands differentiated responsibilities. It is not enough to transfer funds; we must transform the architecture of power.



Donors

International
NGOs
(INGOs)

UN
Agencies

The Colombian
State

Civil Society
National and Local

Recommendations to Donors Signatories to the Grand Bargain



1. Establish clear and measurable objectives to advance the localisation of aid, with compliance mechanisms.



2. Create flexible and specific funding windows for national and local organisations.



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



4. Harmonise due diligence and reporting requirements among donor agencies.

Strategic Imperatives for UN Agencies: Optimising the Humanitarian Ecosystem

Towards a more agile, harmonised and locally-centred funding and coordination architecture.



Operational Improvements to the OCHA Fund

- Expand eligibility: Include development and peace organisations with a proven track record of crisis response, removing the strict requirement for a humanitarian mandate.
- Accessible micro-grants: Reduce minimum amounts to a range of USD 50k–100k to include smaller grassroots organisations.
- Fast-Track: Establish accelerated approval processes (maximum 15 working days) for emergency allocations under 200k USD.

Allocate 10% of the total budget to a specific capacity-building fund.



Harmonisation of Requirements and Processes

- Unified criteria: Convene quarterly inter-agency meetings to eliminate discrepancies in eligibility criteria between agencies (UNHCR, IOM, FAO, UNICEF, WFP, OCHA).
- Shared database: Standardise due diligence and capacity assessments to eliminate duplication of processes for local partners.
- Full standardisation: Standardised formats for budgets, narrative report templates and financial calendars.

Strategic Pilot: Implement a 'Single UN Partnership Agreement' in 2–3 departments.



Coordination Mechanisms Formal

- Direct liaisons at OCHA: Designate specific posts for coordination with the Great Pact National Reference Group, the PAHNAL network and the Humanitarian NGO Forum.
- Joint planning: Institutionalise quarterly strategic alignment meetings between the UN system and local platforms.
- Binding biannual consultations: A formal review where local networks provide input on the priorities of the Response Plan, cluster strategies and fund allocation prior to finalisation.

Transition and Equity for International NGOs (INGOs)

Moving from direct implementation towards accompaniment, joint advocacy and local empowerment.



Transition to Accompaniment

- Transition plans: INNGs with >10 years' experience in Colombia must develop explicit 3–5-year plans to move from direct implementation to strategic support.
- Flexible funding: Ensure a minimum of 30% unrestricted core funding for local partners.
- Voice and vote: Joint fundraising where local partners are co-applicants with veto power over proposals and an equal say in the development of the country strategy.
- Advocacy budgets: Allocate 10–15% of the partnership's budget to ensure local participation in political forums.



Support for National Intermediaries

- Strategic alliances: Establish agreements with national organisations that already have broad national reach and local territorial legitimacy.
- Multi-year grants: Investments of \$500k to \$2m USD (over a period of 3 to 5 years) for in-depth institutional strengthening.
- Comprehensive development: Support organisational development, financial management systems and fundraising/advocacy capacities.
- Co-created plans: Jointly develop capacity-building plans, avoiding the imposition of external evaluation frameworks.



Coordinated Advocacy with the Government

- Removing financial barriers: Advocating for the removal of the 25% co-financing requirement for non-profit organisations in emergencies.
- Government simplification: Advocate for the creation of simplified procurement procedures within SECOP for contracts under USD 100,000.
- Protection: Commit resources (time, legal expertise, budget) to document cases and strengthen mechanisms for human rights defenders.
- International visibility: Leveraging access to UN rapporteurs and EU institutions to denounce attacks.



Equitable Partnership Practices

- Radical transparency: Commitment to transparent annual reporting on the participation of local partners in governance and decision-making bodies.
- Fair overhead costs: Report on and guarantee a minimum target of 7–10% overhead for local partners.
- Financial efficiency: Ensure a maximum average time of 30 days from the partner's request to the disbursement of funds.
- Assessment and tools: Develop harmonised due diligence tools shared between INGOs and create an equity scorecard.

Institutional Recommendations: The Colombian State



Procurement Reform (SECOP): Remove the co-financing requirement (25–50%) and adapt SECOP to facilitate rapid response to emergencies with local non-profit NGOs.

Grassroots Investment: Mobilise agile national and regional funds that strengthen the response of first responders and grassroots organisations.

Triple Nexus as Policy: Ensure the effective protection of human rights defenders and social leaders, integrating community security into the humanitarian response.

Justice and Accountability: Curb systemic impunity in the face of violence against leaders, recognising that such violence undermines any humanitarian or peace-building effort.

Institutional Recommendations: Local and National Civil Society

Local leadership is not granted; it is exercised. Civil society must organise its own political and institutional strength.

Defining a Common Framework:

Articulate a distinct definition of 'localisation' from Colombia, based on solidarity, complementarity and the devolution of power.

Systematise Evidence:
Rigorously document successful models (such as the Data Bank Network or the SNE) to generate irrefutable evidence of impact and territorial efficiency.

Strengthen Internal Networks:
Deepen the operational connection between national intermediary organisations and community-based first responders.

Protecting Identity:
Preserving political autonomy, ancestral knowledge and ethical/spiritual principles in the face of the assimilative pressure of the international system.

A Resilient Fabric: Local Leadership is the Only Guarantee

“ When the crisis begins, we are already there; we activate the alerts, we know who has fled, who remains in hiding, and we stay there throughout the crisis. ”

— Testimony from the field

Local leadership is neither a favour nor a concession; it is the guarantee of a legitimate, relevant and transformative response to the protracted and complex crises in Colombia.