



International cooperation and social protest in Colombia

Mariano Aguirre



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Mariano Aguirre has been the director of the Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution (NOREF) (2009-2016) and Senior Advisor of the Resident Coordinator's Office in Colombia (2017-2019). He is an Associate Fellow at Chatham House (London); a member of the advisory boards of the Pedro Arrupe Institute on Human Rights of the University of Deusto (Bilbao) and the Latin American Network on Sustainable and Inclusive Security of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Berlin and Bogotá). He is on the advisory boards of the Equitas Foundation (Chile) and the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) (United States) and he is an advisor at the Human Rights Funders Network (HRFN).

He is a professor in the Master's Programme in International Humanitarian Action (University of Deusto); in the School for a Culture of Peace (University of Barcelona); and in the Iberoamerican Master's on Governance, Human Rights and Culture of Peace (University of Castilla La Mancha). He regularly writes for Esglobal.org, opendemocracy, Política Exterior, BBC World and Radio France Internationale. His most recent book is *Salto al vacío. Crisis y declive de Estados Unidos* (Icaria publishing, Barcelona, 2017). He is co-author of *Los actores globales y el (re) descubrimiento de América Latina*, Andrés Serbin and Wolf Grabendorff (Eds.), Icaria publishing/CRIES, Barcelona and Buenos Aires, 2020).

1. Introduction

On November 21, 2019 large demonstrations were held in Bogotá and other Colombian cities. They were organized by trade unions, student movements, Indigenous organizations, Afro-Colombian, ecologist and feminist groups, among others. The response was massive, and a mainly peaceful strike ensued, although there were some violent incidents.

In the last semester of 2019 the protest demonstrations spread across Latin America. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC), the protests voiced a growing rejection of the culture of privilege, concentration of wealth, segmented access to quality public and cultural services, and the lack of recognition of individuals' and communities' dignity. This is in addition to the problems derived from climate change and demographic transitions, pandemics and nutritional deficits, rising migration flows, and the social impact of the technological revolution. The result is that traditional politics and democracy are being discredited.

This study analyzes whether international cooperation in the broad sense of the term (official, decentralized, unofficial) could play an innovative role in Colombia in connection with the issues raised by the 2019-2020 social protests, that are arising again in 2021, and possibly glean lessons for other countries in the region. Are the practices that international actors sustained for seventy years outdated? Are the mobilizations also a call for external cooperation to adopt new policies? Do the protests indicate a series of changes in Colombian society that could lead cooperation to change its strategies and working methods or integrate new topics?

This document is the executive summary of *La agenda de la protesta social en Colombia ¿Una oportunidad para la cooperación internacional? (The Agenda of Social Protest in Colombia: an opportunity for international cooperation?)* report. It is not an assessment on international cooperation, but it does include suggestions and recommendations about the kinds of programs that cooperation could implement or continue to support in connection with the issues emphasized by the protests. Some recommendations are appropriate for States and multilateral organizations, whereas others are appropriate for decentralized cooperation and non-governmental cooperation.

The report is based on 45 interviews with people from Colombia and other countries who have expertise in a variety of fields and disciplines in Colombia¹; on a series of studies on international cooperation and on the author's work in and about Colombia². None of the people interviewed are responsible for the content of the report, nor is the Basque Agency for Development Cooperation.

As a result of the interviews and research, the report presents, on the one hand, a series of recommendations.

¹ See list at the end of this text.

² The full bibliography appears in the full report. <http://www.deusto-publicaciones.es/deusto/index.php/es/cddh-es>

2. General recommendations for international cooperation

1. International cooperation must be a dialogue and a sharing of experiences between donors and individual or collective recipients, especially in connection with common concerns, such as strengthening public policies to provide sustainable services, advocating for human rights and democracy, creating policies to reduce inequality, corruption and tax evasion, and tackling climate change.
2. Adopt, examine and adapt to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with special consideration given to projects that focus on people, the planet, prosperity and peace.
3. Take note of the new OECD principles on development in transition that focus on integrating strategies and responses, considering a larger number of actors and tools, using new types of interactions to develop synergy, and focusing on the specific development priorities of the region and of each country.
4. Act as a moral observer to ensure that international (or national, such as peace agreements) agreements are fulfilled and that citizens' rights are respected
5. Redouble efforts to avoid projects harming, rather than benefitting, the communities they intend to assist. It is important to include the private sector, while avoiding programs and projects that favor privatization as opposed to public policies.

International cooperation, especially the official type, must begin to reflect on the economic paradigms often promoted in the name of "development", that are detrimental to the populations they intend to assist.

The participation of the private sector must be subject to compliance with international agreements on human and labor rights.

Explore proposals to create rural-urban value chains that include the private sector.

6. Consider that international cooperation is not only a technical or neutral actor. Development cooperation is a political task, not just a technical one. The issues of poverty, inequality, injustice, health and human rights are directly linked to political power. Any changes in those fields will depend on political decisions made by the State and social actors.
7. Assume that cooperation is, in itself, a political response. This implies identifying the interests underlying the problems by analyzing the political economy and the potential drivers of social change.

8. International cooperation must keep in mind that its contributions will be integrated into contexts of power dynamics and local inequality. Therefore, it should consider how to act in each case, aiming to bolster the capacities of social organizations in the recipient countries.
9. In the same way, international cooperation exists within a global system. Therefore, programs and projects must be implemented in both the donor and recipient countries, and impact both. This is generally applicable to projects that focus on climate change, tax evasion, arms transfers and illicit economies, for example.
10. A key element is to cooperate in establishing the Rule of Law with its ensuing protection and realization of rights. It is fundamental for States to be effective, but they should also implement policies that focus on equality, democracy and social justice.
11. In the field of international aid, the problem is sometimes not the lack of funds, rather excessive technocracy. More investment does not necessarily imply more development. The power dynamics that exist in recipient countries and in donor-recipient relationships need to be reformed, as they can resist changes in the structures that prevent development.
12. Defend the right to political dissent and to peaceful protest. International cooperation should advocate the right to social protest, decriminalizing protest and avoiding violent actions by police forces. This would enable cooperation to contribute to the democratization of society and to making public the economic, social and political shortcomings that are made invisible or normalized in Global South countries, such as Colombia. In the face of resistance from the elite, non-violent protest is a way to emphasize dissidence and to inspire new imaginaries.
13. Integrate the complex system approach into international cooperation projects. The issues that cooperation addresses are not linear, so it is insufficient to include “intersectional” topics (such as gender, the environment, inequality). Their nature, dynamics and the impact they have when combined need to be analyzed in combination with other issues. International cooperation projects should adopt this kind of research, modelling and practical implementations.
14. Together with the integration of the complex system approach it is necessary to use a methodology that takes into account the ensemble and their interactions when establishing priorities. This would enable issues considered urgent (such as rural reform) to be addressed together with issues that tend to be “left for later”, such as gender and the impact of the environmental crisis.
15. Offer international financial and political support to local and international research institutes and UN specialized agencies, to study, accompany and act as witness for issues such as forms of violence, human rights and the situation of refugees and migrants; and to research on corruption, tax evasion and other illicit activities that drain resources from development.
16. Likewise, it is suggested for international cooperation to focus on:
 1. Concrete projects carried out by local actors, preferably by the social groups affected by the problems. They should receive aid without the involvement of intermediaries, or as few

as possible, and their impact should be verifiable. The inclusion of local actors enables cooperation to respect and take their priorities and objectives into account.

2. Projects that aim to reinforce local authorities and institutions that comprise the supervision and participation of civil society. In this context, it is important to provide training on environmental issues to local authorities.
3. Projects that bolster the independent communication capacities of local communities and authorities. It is also recommended to encourage communication between journalists and reporters and local actors.
4. Addressing politically sensitive topics, such as tax system reform. Decentralized international cooperation could address them direct or indirectly through subnational actors (autonomous communities, local councils, town halls), and focus on projects based on cooperation with state authorities including civil society.
5. Researching violence, its roots, its different forms and the new characteristics of armed conflict.

3. Specific recommendations for Colombia

3.1. Support the development of state institutions in excluded territories (around 40% of the national territory) so that Colombia can become a socially and institutionally integrated country.

Colombia has more territory than State presence. Iván Duque's government is implementing stabilization missions in excluded and violent territories (dubbed Future Zones). The involvement of international cooperation must be subject to agreement that the planning and implementation of such cooperation will be undertaken with consultation and in coordination with local communities; that these missions include a strong component of investment in infrastructure (health, education, communications) and provide justice and security for citizens; and that they target territories prioritized by the Peace Agreement and its implementation, with a special focus on rural reform and voluntary illicit crop substitution.

In this context of expanding State presence, it is particularly important to target border areas, in particular between Colombia and Venezuela and Colombia and Ecuador, and to encourage relationships between authorities on both sides of the border and among civil society.

Suggestions:

1. Based on the stabilization experiences of previous governments, there must be a clear demarcation of: (1) military security (in the initial stage); (2) humanitarian aid and development projects; and (3) security duties permanently fulfilled by police.

3.2. Implement the entire Peace Agreement as a first step towards ending organized violence

International cooperation must continue to support and recommend (especially States, United Nations and other multilateral organizations) the Government to fulfill the entire content of the Peace Agreement reached between the Colombian State and the FARC Guerrilla in 2016. This is a fundamental step towards regaining the trust of different sectors of society and beginning to resolve the coexistence of institutional order and violence.

Various academic, political and civil society analyses prove that the Government is fulfilling the points included in the Agreement at a very slow pace, in particular those that address land reform, political participation, protection and reparations for victims, alternatives to coca cultivation agreed with the peasant population, and specific policies that focus on Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities and gender.

The lack of State presence, particularly in areas previously controlled by the FARC, has led to new armed groups and diverse forms of violence arising. In April 2021 the UN Secretary General presented a report drafted by the UN Peace Agreement Verification Mission, stating:

“In order to make true the promise of lasting peace in Colombia, it is necessary to consolidate an integrated State presence in the entire country. The concentration of violence that exists in some

regions is due to the lack of State presence, poverty and the proliferation of illegal armed actors fighting for control of the illicit economies.

The Verification Mission informs of violence against Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities in the Pacific region, made visible by confinement and mass displacements. The situation in Buenaventura, in the west of the country, is particularly notable: security there has deteriorated and thousands of civilians have been severely affected by the confrontations.

The Secretary General requests police forces to be deployed to the most critical areas. This, combined with the action of civil State bodies, should progressively lead towards higher levels of territorial control and improved protection for communities.”³

Suggestions:

1. To implement a rural reform. Most violent conflicts in Colombia are linked to unjust land tenure, illegal appropriation and
2. antisocial land distribution. Although production methods have changed, from the use of modern technology in intensive farming, to legal and illegal mining, and the exploitation and deforestation of the Amazon, this is still a key factor. According to the World Bank, 60% of rural land plots in Colombia do not have formalized property rights.⁴

Requirements:

- a. To formalize land tenure, particularly land titling and registry, with a focus on facilitating access to land for women in female-headed households.
- b. Back the national parks system and efforts to fight deforestation.
- c. Support the Territorial Approach Development Plans (Planes de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial - PDET for its acronym in Spanish). The Colombian government must take on the costs, but international cooperation can assist. Support local governments' capacities in PDET areas, and avoid all assistance being processed by multiple government agencies in Bogota, as this slows down processes and makes them more bureaucratic.
- d. International cooperation can provide support to the Government by investing in infrastructure, mainly for local roads that would enable peasant populations to take their produce to local and national markets, and access education and health services.
- e. Provide assistance to bring the judicial system to the entire national territory, to expedite the resolution of disputes about land tenure.

³ <https://news.un.org/es/story/2021/04/1490512>

⁴ “El 60 por ciento de los predios rurales en Colombia no está formalizado”: World Bank, *Semana Rural*, <https://semanarural.com/web/articulo/banco-mundial-asegura-que-mas-de-la-mitad-de-colombia-cuenta-con-predios-informales/1192>

- f. Integrate the recommendations included in the Agreement pertaining to positive discrimination of women, their access to land and integration to the workforce.

3. Political participation:

- a. Offer support to the Prosecutor's Office special investigation unit dealing with lethal and intimidatory attacks against social leaders and defenders of human rights, the environment, gender, promoters of alternatives to coca cultivation and to other illicit economies. 279 social leaders (men and women) were murdered in 2019.⁵ By the beginning of 2021, 297 leaders in this field have been murdered.⁶

Those attacks seek to discourage communities from participating in politics and driving social change. This unit needs to be enlarged and reinforced, and international technical support needs to be provided for the Government to identify and judge the accomplices and intellectual authors.

4. Victims:

According to the National Centre for Historical Memory, between 1958 and 2018 there were 266,988 fatal victims registered⁷. The Peace Agreement is a fundamental step towards recognizing this tragedy and bring reconciliation in the future. Consequently, the following is required:

- a. Political and financial support for the transitional justice system: The Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP for the Spanish acronym of Justicia Especial para la Paz); the Truth Commission, and the Search Unit for Missing Persons created by the Peace Agreement.
- b. Back victims' organizations efforts to guarantee such events do not reoccur.
- c. Continue using diplomatic channels to ensure the Government keeps the promises made to the victims.

5. Illicit crops:

Colombia is the biggest producer of cocaine in the world. In 2019 it had 154,000 hectares of coca crops⁸. Various armed groups with international connections fight for control of the

⁵ "Diciembre: diez líderes sociales asesinados en 7 días", *Semana*, August 12, 2020.

<https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/diciembre-diez-lideres-sociales-asesinados-en-7-dias/202024/>

⁶ "Once líderes sociales asesinados en lo corrido del 2021 y no hay respuesta de las autoridades: Indepaz", *Infobae*, January 18, 2021. <https://www.infobae.com/america/colombia/2021/01/18/once-lideres-sociales-asesinados-en-lo-corrido-del-2021-y-no-hay-respuesta-de-las-autoridades-indepaz/>

⁷ Observatory of Memory and Conflict. National Center for Historical Memory <http://micrositios.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/observatorio/>

⁸ UNODC, *Informe de Monitoreo de Territorios Afectados por Cultivos Ilícitos en Colombia (2019)*, Bogotá, July 28, 2020. <https://www.unodc.org/colombia/es/presentacion-informe-de-monitoreo-de-territorios-afectados-por-cultivos-ilicitos-en-colombia-2019.html>

territories, populations, production, routes and traffic. The 2016 Peace Agreement provides a plan to progressively substitute illicit crops through agreements with peasant communities. Duque's government froze those agreements and, with backing from the United States, wants to fumigate crops with glyphosate as the main method for eradication⁹. This is a highly controversial method due to its polluting nature, its lack of effectiveness in the medium and long term, and the fact that it is banned by the Constitutional Court and rejected by rural communities.

Requirements:

- a. Support the continuation of the voluntary substitution program, and expand it to more communities.
 - b. Plan long-term transition processes from illicit to legal crops that include stimulus packages to improve access of legal produce to the market.
 - c. Abandon plans for fumigation.
 - d. Offer assistance to fulfill the commitments undertaken with the voluntary substitution program.
 - e. Offer technical assistance to the Government and the local authorities who agree with the transition plans to formalize land tenure and road construction.
6. Ending the conflict

The Peace Agreement established that the State would create the necessary conditions to guarantee political participation in general and of former FARC members in particular. Although the FARC political party was legally formed, the murders of social leaders and ex-members of the dissolved guerrilla prevent coercion-free political participation.

Requirements:

- a. To investigate and judge the intellectual authors of over 240 murders of ex-FARC combatants between 2016 and 2020.¹⁰ To do so, technical and financial support is required for the Prosecutor's special unit.
- b. Expedite Access to land for ex-combatants.

3.3. Tackle inequality, corruption and create an effective tax system

⁹ Rodrigo Uprimny Yepes, "La adicción gubernamental a la fumigación", DeJusticia, Bogotá, December 13, 2020. <https://www.dejusticia.org/column/la-adiccion-gubernamental-a-la-fumigacion/>

¹⁰ Sebastián Forero Rueda, "Cuatro años de la firma del Acuerdo de Paz: estos son los 242 excombatientes asesinados", *El espectador*, November 24, 2020. <https://www.elespectador.com/colombia2020/pais/los-nombres-de-los-242-excombatientes-asesinados-cuatro-anos-despues-del-acuerdo/>

Inequality and corruption are some of the main causes of the social protests. A reduced group of people and their immediate social circles are using the institutional, legal and security system to maintain and reproduce their privileges and benefits to the detriment of the majority. Those social sectors are ever more distanced from the rest of society. Colombia is the most unequal country in Latin America, according to the Latin American Regional Development Index.¹¹

According to official figures, in 2018, income tax evasion rates reached 38% and VAT evasion was 22%. Other figures claim that the tax evasion rates of certain Colombian individuals could be close to 90%. Colombian wealth hidden in offshore tax havens is approximately 140% of the national budget and the equivalent of 40% of the country's GDP.¹²

In 2016 the corrupt practice of false billing revealed a 10,800-million-dollar gap between the figures informed by the State and those reported by its commercial partners. If we add to this Value Added Tax, customs tax, corporate tax and royalty rates, the Colombian government lost approximately 2,800 million dollars in income that year due to false billing.¹³

State tax collection has increased significantly from 7.5% of the country's GDP in 1985 to 15.1% in 2014. Nevertheless, this percentage is lower than that of comparable Latin American economies, and combined with existing levels of inequality, cannot cover the country's public policy needs.

Reducing inequality is possible and must be a common axis. In fact, it was achieved in Colombia for almost a decade. Any cooperation project that targets the disadvantaged sectors of society should include this aim as a cross-cutting axis by creating mechanisms and indicators to measure inequality reduction results beyond the improvement of the objective situation.

The types of inequalities that will be tackled must be identified: wealth or income inequality (differentiating them, because wealth inequality tends to be more significant than income inequality), education, health, and social/political participation.

It is fundamental to specify the social groups that cooperation projects will target (women, youth, the elderly, Indigenous Peoples, migrants)

Likewise, it is also fundamental to explore ways to measure the impact and progress of the programs that are launched.

1. Practical measures to reduce inequality:

- a. Promote employment and set a minimum income floor (minimum wage).

¹¹ Felipe Abondano, "Colombia, el país más desigual de América Latina", *DW*, December 7, 2020.

<https://www.dw.com/es/colombia-el-pa%C3%ADs-m%C3%A1s-desigual-de-am%C3%A9rica-latina/av-55858408>

¹² "Panama, the secret garden of the Colombian", Tax Justice Network, Chesham (United Kingdom), April 25, 2016. <https://www.taxjustice.net/2016/04/25/panama-the-secret-garden-of-the-colombian-oligarchy/>

¹³ Global Financial Integrity, *Illicit Financial Flows & Colombia*, Washington D.C, October 1, 2019. <https://gfintegrity.org/report/illicit-financial-flows-colombia/>

- b. Further rights and the provision of basic universal services (health, education, drinking water, transport, etc.), particularly for vulnerable populations, with a purpose of universality.
 - c. Advocate a robust and progressive tax system.
 - d. Promote social mobility through employment and public, accessible, quality education.
 - e. Control tax evasion and tax avoidance at the national and international levels.
 - f. Encourage citizen values that see universal rights as a compulsory foundation for equality.
2. Measures against corruption
 - a. Expose illegal forms of interaction and dynamics of reproduction of illicit benefits between political and economic powers.
 - b. Back control and research authorities (Attorney General, Comptroller and Prosecutor) and citizen monitoring organizations in the fight against corruption, aiming for public resources to be invested in implementing social, cultural, environmental and development plans, programs and projects in a transparent manner.
 - c. Advocate the protection of those who investigate, report and lead campaigns pertaining to corruption.
3. Measures to reform the tax system
 - a. Encourage dialogues among the State, the private sector and civil society that focus on the importance of having a fair tax system, and offer technical support to carry out a tax reform.
 - b. Set up systems to make tax exemptions public, eliminate discretionary exemptions and incentives, and adopt measures that favor transparency, prevent tax avoidance and control illicit financial flows (IFF).
 - c. Promote a tax system based on the principle of progressivity and on direct rather than indirect taxes, which affect the poorest sectors of the population. Direct taxes must address wealth concentration by taxing assets (land, real estate) and capital gains. Appropriately taxing the wealthiest sectors of society would be the fairest and most effective way to increase tax revenue.
 - d. Advise and cooperate with the Colombian government in regulating business registration with the aim of making public, clear and verifiable the identities of the owners and stakeholders. This would avoid the use of shell companies to evade taxes.

- e. Further technical knowledge pertaining to tax reforms, tax havens and extractive industries.
- f. Support civil society in becoming knowledgeable and empowered about the connections between human rights and strategic litigation.

Recommendations:

- g. To follow the example of the Norwegian Tax for Development initiative that links cooperation to tax system reforms and the reduction of inequality and poverty.
- f. To support international campaigns to declare tax havens a global impairment for the common good.

3.4. Governance

The country needs State consolidation. It is recommended to:

- a. Increase local capacities at the local level and the permanence of local civil servants (due to existing clientelism and high turnover rates).
- b. Strengthen the capacity to analyze interactions among local, regional and national (even international) dynamics in Colombia, linked to peace building.
- c. Bolster research centers' and civil society's capacities to analyze the local elites, their connections with national elites and resistance to social change.
- d. Examine and explore joint work with new local authorities that have distanced themselves from traditional electoral and political systems. The October 2019 elections opened the opportunity for official and unofficial cooperation to work in this direction. Furthermore, the importance of local authorities was emphasized by their management of the migration flows coming from Venezuela and the Covid-19 crisis in Colombia and abroad.

The importance of territorial entities (states, departments, municipalities) has significantly increased over the past twenty years in terms of security and sustainable development, and they now play a relevant political role. International cooperation can drive productive or resettlement projects, give visibility to existing problems and encourage State support for regional and local institutions.

- e. Further local governance through cooperative and private-public mixed projects, with a special focus on the inclusion of women, Indigenous communities and minorities. In addition, work with civil society organizations to bolster participation and accountability mechanisms.

- f. Reforming the security sector is fundamental to ensure democratic governance. This would imply demilitarizing and professionalizing the police with a focus on prevention; increasing the presence of armed forces in marginalized and border areas; establishing civilian control over intelligence services; strengthening parliamentary control over security forces; and counting on the cooperation of civil society to implement reforms. The abusive use of force by the Mobile Anti-Disturbances Squadron (Escuadrón Móvil Antidisturbios - ESMAD in Spanish) during the 2021 demonstrations showed the importance of implementing a security sector reform.
- g. Guarantee the right to protest and the protection of citizens who realize this right.

3.5. Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding in Colombia is a strategic process that includes concrete measures in the short and medium-term. Since 2016 it is the sum of all the issues and measures included in the Peace Agreement. They are the opportunity to address the structural problems and various forms of violence that afflict the country.

Among numerous suggestions, the following stand out:

- a. To develop sustainable economic capacities in local communities in order to bolster them in the face of the organized crime that exists in rural areas.
- b. Realize access to land and uphold the rural reform commitment undertaken in the peace process over time. This is decisive to enable rural communities to accomplish autonomous development in the face of organized crime and guerrilla groups that did not participate in the peace process.
- c. Reinforce local communities' capacities to mediate with actors who have opposing interests in highly violent contexts.
- d. Cooperate with territorial organizations and organizations of women who have been victims of violence perpetrated by the paramilitary, guerrilla groups or State security forces. Offer them international public support that guarantees that their voice is heard, that they have access to communications channels and financial and technical support to generate sources of income.
- e. To politically support land restitution or the allocation and titling of good rural land from the National Land Fund that the government is obliged to create.
- f. Encourage the development of Territorial Approach Development Plans (PDETs) and the illicit crop substitution program.

Recommendations on dialogue and mediation:

- a. International cooperation can play a mediating and moderating role and create bridges to connect State institutions, civil society organizations and local leaders. It can do this by creating “safe” spaces for dialogue where the causes of the demands and protests, as well as their possible responses, can be analyzed; and by establishing mechanisms to monitor the agreements reached.
- b. Cooperation should serve as a catalyzer for meetings between opposing groups in the conflict or who have different origins and identities, in order to lay the foundations for development and reconciliation projects. The aim is to promote “unlikely dialogues”, difficult conversations, and build trust.
- c. To support those who carry out local mediation, as they are often undervalued, with the aim of ensuring that they are prepared to act in complex violent situations between communities and criminal groups, for example.
- d. Make arrangements with various ministries (Interior, Justice, Mines and Defence) to implement capacity building that enables the various institutions to address complex issues in a constructive manner, and learn how to dialogue and negotiate.
- e. To map the significant dialogues that have taken place in Colombia on a small (for specific cases) and large scale (such as the process that resulted in the Constitution of 1991). This would showcase the existing capacities, willingness and spaces to discuss the issues the country faces.
- f. The international community can create spaces for dialogue to discuss humanitarian issues and the implementation of their principles in the —now interrupted— negotiations between the Government and the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional - ELN in Spanish).
- g. Bolster dialogue in the regions and among sectors that may be controlled by or connected to the ELN, and assist social organizations that have attempted to promote the participation of society in negotiations with the ELN.
- h. It is also suggested to give special consideration to youth as a sector of the population that can contribute to peacebuilding, as recommended by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

3.6. Rights and identities

It is recommended to give special consideration to the ethnic chapter of the Peace Agreement regarding rural reform. Implementation must be subject to the participation of ethnic groups and guarantee their individual and collective rights, their interests and worldviews, and include mechanisms for reparations and rebuilding in their communities.

It is important to promote processes of rapprochement and dialogue in rural communities (Indigenous, peasant and Afrodescendants) to create joint plans and develop the ability to communicate their situations and demands at the regional, national and international levels.

3.7. Humanitarian aspects

Pay particular consideration to the linear, structural and prolonged humanitarian crisis that led to accumulative mass displacements. Despite the Peace Agreement, this continues to occur due to the actions of armed groups, conflicts that arise among them and the army.

International cooperation should be articulated around the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Declaration and the Monterrey Consensus and other humanitarian action agreements. Displacements and humanitarian issues should be approached from conventionally accepted international perspectives: International Human Rights, the international asylum, refugee and internal displacement system, among others, which have their own unique implementations in the region.

3.8. Mixed migration flows

In recent years the political crisis in Venezuela has triggered mass migration out of the country. Some of the migrants are Colombian returnees. The main recipient, regardless of the permanent, semi-permanent or transitory nature of the migration, is Colombia. In August 2020 there were 1,723,000 Venezuelan immigrants in the country, in particular in border and urban areas. Providing assistance, security (in the face of organized crime, for example), education for children and employment has proven to be a serious challenge.

Political tension between the two countries is high: diplomatic relations have ceased and the borders on both sides are controlled by armed groups and very limited State presence.

Recommendations:

- a. Utilize international cooperation's organizations and initiatives to promote the social and financial organization, integration and empowerment of migrants.
- b. Cooperate with the Government, the local authorities and host communities to develop policies for the voluntary distribution of refugees and migrants across the territory. Establish capital injections and private incentives for public goods, the promotion of mobility and the improvement of infrastructure and services in host communities.
- c. Cooperate with national and international NGOs, the Colombian Red Cross, churches, the UN platform lead by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) that handles Venezuelan migrants in Colombia.

Other measures linked to the mixed migration flow of Venezuelan refugees and migrants:

- a. Together with displacement, mixed migration flows aggravate the problem of food security. Give particular consideration to productive projects that promote this security for both the Venezuelan community and host communities, particularly projects led by women heads of households. Initiatives in this direction have shown very positive and immediate results. Likewise, link food security to environmentally sustainable projects.
- b. Finance vocational training programs to improve the level of education of Venezuelan immigrants and the displaced Colombian population (which has a lower level of education than its Venezuelan counterparts) to improve access of both groups to the labor market.¹⁴
- c. Leverage and offer financial and technical support to subregional or national organizations composed of Venezuelan migrants, Colombians returning from Venezuela or who are following the exodus with the aim of: helping to regularize their situation, permits and documents; manage their demand for employment or to create a small business; and create databases.
- d. Counter xenophobia and develop long-term strategies that encourages their positive integration in Colombia.
- e. Encourage relationships between local authorities along the Colombia-Venezuela border areas and between both countries' civil societies.

3.9. Human rights

Human rights have deteriorated in recent years, particularly due to the selective and systemic murders of social leaders and former FARC members. The murders often coincide with political action events organized by victims in favor of the implementation of the Peace Agreement.

Recommendations:

- a. Reiterate to the Colombian government the international concern over these murders and attacks on community action boards and other civil society organizations.
- b. Defend institutions and groups that challenge impunity: researchers and human rights prosecutors, non-governmental organizations and investigative journalists. These actors require high profile accompaniment and frequent public demonstrations of support and resources.

¹⁴ On February 8, 2021 the Colombian Government announced that Colombia will grant temporary protected legal status (Estatuto de Protección Temporal, TPS in English) to Venezuelan migrants for ten years. The United National High Commissioner for Refugees supports this decision. <https://reliefweb.int/report/colombia/unhcr-s-support-temporary-protection-status-colombia>

- c. Strengthen communities to develop their autonomy, overcome fear, break the culture of silence and implement collective protection strategies that enable them to handle interactions with and pressure from non-State armed groups.
- d. Politically and financially reinforce the UN human rights institutional apparatus, in particular the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) in Colombia, its work on observation, reporting and technical and legal advice for the Government regarding its multilateral obligations.
- e. Support to the Colombian and international analysis institutes that conduct research about new forms of violence, monitor and analyze criminal organizations, how they operate and impact the civilian population.

3.10. The environment and climate change

The country's natural diversity is exploited by legal and illegal sectors with barely any State control. The global environmental crisis and rapidly depleting natural resources puts Colombia in a difficult place.

At the same time, the armed conflict is deeply entwined with climate change and the illicit and abusive exploitation of natural resources: violence over land tenure, illicit crops, mining, control and attacks over pipelines and wood. Organized crime's latest move is its involvement in wildlife trafficking.

Cooperation can offer technical assistance for the sustainable management of natural resources, biodiversity, ecosystems and their services. Resource management requires combined cooperation and cross-border coordination efforts.

Environmental cooperation actions must link humanitarian fields with gender, development and peace. Reducing vulnerability with a focus on reinforcing local capacities (organization, training, mobilizing their own social and material resources).

Recommendations:

- a. Examine the links between climate change and violent conflicts, and connections with human rights, human displacements, food security, gender, minorities, organized crime and the role of multinational corporations. International cooperation can promote research in Colombia and other countries (in and outside the region) about those links.
- b. Encourage dialogue among communities and with the State to discuss the handling of environmental problems and joint sustainable projects.
- c. Provide technical training aimed at carrying out strategic environmental assessments prior to concessions that take into account the multiple factors that can trigger conflicts.

- d. Offer assessment for a series of issues such as improving social, economic and environmental conditions created by the extractive industry and remedy the damages done by illegal operations.
- e. Reinforce institutional and technical capacities for participatory territorial planning and monitoring and improve public access to environmental information.

3.11. Gender politics

The role of women in Colombia's armed conflict varies: they are activists in numerous peace organizations and initiatives; militants in armed organizations; providers of support to families affected by war (in instances of forced displacement, for example); they negotiate livelihoods in the midst of tension between armed groups and the State; and attempt to uphold care ethics and values for themselves, their families and their social circles.

There is also an increase in Human Rights violations against women and high rates of violence against women, in addition to the threats, aggressions and murders of advocates for who human rights and other fields.

Under pressure from civil society, the Havana negotiations included a gender sub-commission in charge of the intersectional inclusion of this issue, for women and the LGBTI community.

Support for the issue of gender in Colombia must be sustained and reinforced by the international community. Including this issue in the Peace Agreement and addressing the high rates of intra-family sexual violence against children must be a priority on the agenda.

Many organizations and women's groups require funds to develop local programs and to consolidate their positions and representation on community action boards, town halls and local governments. It is important to cooperate with local communities that defend peace, with women's organizations, Indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations, victims' organizations and groups that interact with the private sector in regions with limited State presence where armed actors operate.

More specific recommendations:

- a. To cooperate with territorial organizations and organizations of female victims of violence perpetrated by paramilitary groups or the guerrilla. The aim would be to offer them clear international support that guarantees that their voice is heard, that they have access to communications channels and financial and technical support to generate sources of income.
- b. To politically support land restitution or land allocation and titling of good rural land from the National Land Fund that the government is obliged to create.
- c. To promote equal access for women to education on new technologies, budget management and accountability.

- d. More support is required in the field of justice, especially for organizations that represent victims of all forms of violence in long-lasting court proceedings.
- e. To provide support for research, knowledge and experience sharing, and reflect upon the practices implemented on the ground and existing problems.
- f. To offer legal assistance to imprisoned women —many of them for drug-trafficking crimes— and inform them of the law, the possibility to reduce their sentences and the rules that will enable them to regain their freedom and not reoffend. Support women who are released from prison, who are often single mothers, with training and financial support that enables them to not turn back to micro-trafficking, and by creating public childcare networks.
- g. Further young women’s capacities, leadership and networks.

4. Recommendations for decentralized cooperation

There are three promising factors for decentralized cooperation and municipal diplomacy.

The first is that the 2016 Peace Agreement took “territorial peace” into account to promote the economic and institutional development of what are dubbed “excluded territories”, areas affected by violence that have widespread illicit economies.

The second factor were the local elections held in October 2019. In over 30 cities alternative political coalitions beat traditional parties; this was the case in Bogotá, but also in small towns whose management capacities are precarious. Many new authorities are very positive about the Peace Agreement and its implementation¹⁵. The October 2019 elections gave rise to opportunities to examine and explore joint work with the local authorities.

The third is that the Covid-19 pandemic emphasized the importance of local authorities.

The Colombian State is centralist, incomplete and exclusive. One of the critical challenges the country faces in terms of State consolidation is to increase local capacities and to establish permanent and neutral local civil servants.

Decentralized cooperation has room for maneuver that enables it to act by criteria different from that of external policy and State cooperation. This flexibility offers the possibility to operate as a laboratory, implementing innovative approaches and methodologies. It also has the comparative advantage of being closer to the population and of building horizontal relationships with decentralized institutions in the recipient country.

Interactions among local, regional and national (and even international) dynamics in Colombia can be analyzed in relation to peacebuilding.

Territorial entities (state, departments, municipalities) and Community Action Boards are currently more empowered; over the past twenty years they have gained importance in the fields of security and sustainable development and have a more relevant political role than they used to. International cooperation can offer support with productive or resettlement projects, give more visibility to existing problems and promote State backing for regional institutions and local entities.

¹⁵ A number of independent candidates were successful in cities where traditional politics are very strong, such as Medellín, Cartagena, Santa Marta and Villavicencio. Alianza Verde was the political party that grew the most, particularly because it won Bogotá’s mayor’s office in coalition with Polo Democrático with the district’s first female mayor, Claudia López; The mayors’ offices in Cucutá (Venezuelan border), and Manizales, located in the Coffee Axis; Boyacá’s government, in coalition with the Partido Liberal, and another 49 mayor offices. Progressive parties and ethnic minority groups (AICO, MAIS, Afro-Colombians) obtained better results than in 2015 and put forward more candidates and coalitions for the departmental governments, challenging the traditional election structures and strong right-wing parties. Alianza Verde presented 21 candidacies, 8 of them independently and 9 as part of a coalition; Colombia humana-UP presented 3 independently and 9 as part of a coalition; and Polo Democrático presented 7 independently and 9 as part of coalitions. Sources: Javier Calderón Castillo, «Colombia: el mapa cambió tras las regionales», Celag.org, October 29, 2019. <https://www.celag.org/colombia-el-mapa-cambio-tras-las-regionales/#>

Suggestions:

- a. Promote adaptation and resilience actions —which implies valuing local resources and capacities— and training to create businesses and value chains. In addition, support trade and access to the global market, particularly the European market in order to favor products other than coca.
- b. Facilitate productive private investments by means of mixed private-public investments and financing, creating guarantee and technical assistance funds in order to create an appropriate fund with the aim of attracting capital that will serve the development of marginalized territories and the promotion of socially inclusive projects.
- c. Cooperate with local authorities (governor’s and mayor’s offices) through programs similar to those implemented at the State level, focusing on topics such as corruption, tax reform and inequality. Reinforce local governance (with a special focus on Indigenous communities and other minorities).
- d. Cooperation must maintain dialogues with local and regional candidates who will present their candidacies to the 2022 elections.
- e. Cooperate with civil society organizations on issues addressed by institutional authorities in order to reinforce participation mechanisms, accountability and local conflict management.
- f. Encourage town twinning, seek comparative advantages, the exchange of technical monitoring experiences and local spending accountability. Development plans in the territories must include training for international and decentralized cooperation management among southern countries, with an option to “triangulate” with a State or local government from the Global North.
- g. Build local governance. In the words of former a Colombian minister, Colombia’s armed conflict is “overly diagnosed”. Nevertheless, further analysis and public policy training is required. If this is carried out with political participation it will result in local peacebuilding scenarios.
- h. Work on designing and managing participatory budgets with local governments and on creating community projects that are linked to human rights, dialogue, peacebuilding and climate change.
- i. It is very important to set up local dialogues to resolve conflicts. They must offer real political participation spaces to discuss State affairs, such as how to utilize the country’s natural resources. The dialogues are local but connected to political affairs of national importance.
- j. Set up dialogues that focus on specific topics for governments and local communities, as well as for central government. Protecting the environment (issues like river pollution resulting from the presence of mercury, or the protection of tropical forests, for example) is a key issue at the local, national and global level. It is essential to identify the technical needs required

from cooperation and to measure impacts in connection with these issues. At the same time, the environment is linked to land ownership, local communities, the presence of armed groups and corruption, among other issues.

- k. On the one hand, link international cooperation to business actions that respect sustainable development, human rights and labor rights; and to projects that do not encourage the privatization of public services. On the other hand, encourage academic agreements between the Basque Country and Colombia.

An important initiative launched in the Basque Country and which could be implemented through decentralized cooperation were local development agencies. These institutions were created in various regions, with the aim of promoting local resources, offering training and support to young businesses (project feasibility analyses, subsidies). This kind of agency could promote territorial peace through water management and sanitation initiatives and other basic municipal services. That would also enable the promotion of food production and local markets; social and solidarity economies; vocational training; and the management of historical and cultural heritage and the environment.

If armed conflicts shape places in certain ways, so, too, should peace processes transform those places by laying down new foundations: new relationships between cities and the countryside (overcoming the exclusion of the countryside), infrastructure that gives way to territorial integration, and more equitable economic and social interactions.

Likewise, it is important to build relationships between the sectors of Colombian society (social, academic or political) that are interested in the links between tax and inequality relations with the academic networks that work on the issues of tax evasion, illicit financial flows and tax havens in the Basque Country, the rest of Spain and other countries. This support would strengthen their influential capacity.

5. Conclusions

Two main conclusions of this report are: (a) the need to accept the complexity of the issues at hand; and (b) international cooperation is not only a technical activity, it is political.

Colombia has its own resources and is a sufficiently developed State, but it only operates in part of its territory. If the State requires cooperation, international partners should expect it to make a series of reforms and to appropriately utilize its capacities with the aim of generating sufficient funds to finance public policies against poverty and inequality.

Technical and financial assistance is important, but Colombian civil society's main request from international cooperation is that it should offer political backing to society's battle for peace and democracy, its advocacy of human rights, the protection of the environment, the rights of identity groups, gender equality and the right to a dignified life.

The power dynamics underlying the issues of peace, violence, lack of justice and the right to a dignified life now and in the future are at the center of the discussion around the type of international cooperation that Colombia needs and the lessons that can be taken from other countries. Because we live in a globalized world, Colombian civil society aspires to discuss both its own problems, dilemmas and challenges and those of its partners in donor countries.

Although the Covid-19 pandemic interrupted the strikes and demonstrations, the factors that triggered them still exist and have been aggravated, as proven by the strong resurgence of protests in May 2021. The crisis emphasized the country's problems and it is only a question of time before the protests flare up again, because the lack of protection experienced of millions of people has been made evident.

At a time when governments, multilateral organizations and non-governmental organizations will face growing demands and, probably, cutbacks, priorities and work methods need to be reviewed. The words of the deceased expert in Colombian affairs, Virginia Bouvier, can serve as a guide: "The key seems to be helping people to develop their own foundational resources without promoting dependence on external aid and ensure that local needs are not subject to broader corporate interests".

Annex 1: List of interviewed

Carla Afonso, Corporación Humanas Programmatic Coordinator, Cali.

José Antonio Alonso, professor of Applied Economics, Faculty of Economics, Complutense University, Madrid.

Gerson Arias, director for social dialogue, Truth Commission, Bogotá.

Cynthia Arnson, director of the Latin America Program at the Wilson Center, Washington D.C.

Javier Betancourt, Human Rights Defenders. National Indigenous Organization of Colombia, Bogotá.

Kristina Birke, director of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Colombia, Bogotá.

Denise Cook Maude, former Resident Coordinator of the United Nations, Madrid.

Cristina Churruga, professor at the Social and Human Sciences Faculty and senior researcher at the Institute of Human Rights of the University of Deusto, Bilbao.

Alfonso Dubois, retired professor of economics at the University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU, Hegoa Institute, Bilbao.

Norberto Fernández, former senior official for the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), Vienna.

Monsignor Héctor Fabio Henao, director of the National Social Ministry of the Colombian Bishops' Conference, Bogotá.

Kristian Herbolzheimer, director of the International Catalan Institute for Peace, Barcelona.

Pilar Gaitán, political scientist, former Vice counselor, Member of Corporación La Paz Querida, Bogotá.

Daniel García-Peña, professor at the National University of Colombia. Former High Commissioner for Peace, Bogotá.

Manuel González Bustelo, senior advisor, Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution, Oslo.

Wolf Grabendorff, researcher, former director of the Friedrich Ebert offices in Colombia and Ecuador, and of Chile's Regional Security Project.

Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín, professor at the Institute of Political Studies and International Relations, National University of Colombia, Bogotá.

Adam Isacson, coordinator of the Defense Oversight program, Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), Washington D.C.

Oliver Kaplan, Associate Professor in International Relations and Human Rights at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies, Denver University.



Sabine Kurtenbach, main researcher on Latin America in the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA), Hamburg.

Julieta Lemaitre, judge in the Special Jurisdiction for Peace Chamber of Recognition of Truth and Associate Professor in Los Andes University, Bogotá.

Philipp Lustenberger, co-director of the Swisspeace Mediation Program, Berna.

Stefano Manservigi, former Director General of the European Commission's Directorate General for International Cooperation, Brussels.

Gabriel Muyuy Jacanamejoy, indigenous member of the Inga People in Colombia, former Senator, Bogotá.

Borja Paladini, Practitioner in Residence Fellow in the Peace Research Institute of Oslo (PRIO), Oslo.

Karlos Pérez de Armiño, tenured professor in International Relations and director of HEGO, University of the Basque country, Bilbao.

Jenny Pierce, professor and researcher in the Latin America and Caribbean Centre (LACC), London School of Economics, London.

Socorro Ramírez, Doctor of Political Sciences and former professor at the Institute of Political Studies and International Relations of the National University of Colombia (IEPRI)

Francisco Rey, co-director at the Institute of Studies on Conflict and Humanitarian Action, Madrid.

Marcos Robledo, former Foreign Affairs and Defense Advisor to the Chilean president Michele Bachelet and coordinator of the Latin American Network on Sustainable and Inclusive Security of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung foundation (FES), Santiago de Chile.

José Antonio Sanahuja, professor of International Relations at the Complutense University and director of the Carolina Foundation, Madrid.

Gimena Sánchez, director of the Andean Countries Section in the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), Washington D.C.

David Sogge, associate researcher at the Transnational Institute (TNI), Amsterdam.

Mark B. Taylor, researcher, Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research, Oslo

Arlene B. Tickner, professor at the Faculty of Political Science, Government and International Relations, Universidad del Rosario, Bogotá.

Barbara Unger, director of the Latin American Unit, Berghof Foundation, Berlin.

Augusto Varas, president of the Equitas Foundation, Santiago de Chile.

Christian Visnes, former representative of the Norwegian Refugee Council in Colombia, Oslo.