

# START NETWORK



## START DEPP Linking

### Preparedness Response & Resilience

### (LPRR) 2013 Response to Armed Conflict & Forced Displacement in Colombia

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## Executive Summary

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This paper is one of a collection of Linking Preparedness Response and Resilience in Emergency Contexts (LPRR) case studies and analysis papers. LPRR is a START Disaster and Emergency Preparedness Programme (DEPP) Department for International Development (DfID) funded 3-year consortium led project which is aimed at strengthening humanitarian programming for more resilient communities.

Specifically, this case study has been developed as part of the humanitarian strand of the LPRR project which focuses on developing a practical method for improved, resilience informed humanitarian response. In order to do this, eight case studies of past humanitarian response interventions will be explored. This particular paper focuses on Christian Aid’s (and partners) response to forcibly displaced people and armed conflict in Cacarica, Colombia up until 2013.

**The aim of this paper** is to act as a communication tool, to feed back to the Colombia team and research participants, verify understanding and outline initial reflections prior to academic analysis. It is important to note that this project and paper recognises the term ‘community’ as a collective group of at risk, exposed residents.

Here, 2 weeks were spent researching Christian Aid’s humanitarian peace zone program in Cacarica. The main aim of this research was to capture community members’ perception of resilience and both community members and field staff’s recommendations for future, resilience focused humanitarian response programming.

For the communities of Cacarica resilience means education, community togetherness, peace and land rights.

*“If you are educated you are less likely to be tricked” (Community Member).*

Furthermore, field staff and community members together reflected on how resilience could be built. The community and field staff outlined the need for:

1. Guarantees from the state on their land entitlements, human rights and reparation

2. Guarantees on their economic activities
3. Protection and prevention from the state
4. Prevention is needed. Lots being done on defending human rights but little on preventing displacement and violence.
5. Collective identity and strong social cohesion and community togetherness
6. Empowerment and ownership: communities write proposals and run projects

The in-country staff and community members outlined seven strengths of the Christian Aid and partners' response to the displacement:

1. **Flexible funding.**
2. **Ongoing risk assessment**
3. **Training of community members to raise awareness, build confidence and develop advocacy skills**
4. **Strong community leaders and a high level of community ownership and project participation**
5. **Advocacy from the offset**
6. **Accompaniment**
7. **Role of Faith**

The core recommendations outlined by the field staff and community members for future resilience informed humanitarian response in conflict contexts include;

**Field staff:**

1. Ensure long term, flexible funding
2. Include advocacy as the primary focus from the offset. Build capacity and confidence of community to advocate for their needs.
3. Allow the community to organise and run the program
4. Implement the 24-hour accompaniment and denouncement method
5. Be in the community and present throughout the program
6. Get the support of global networks
7. Keep a very clear political agenda
8. Work through local partners
9. Stop and reflect along the way, conduct on going risk assessment and change how you do things to improve
10. Provide psycho social support
11. Implement strong protection strategies such as accompaniment

**Community members/ beneficiaries:**

1. Organise and unite the community
2. Focus on spiritual and mental damage too
3. Work on the government. Advocate for the government to take responsibility and provide the people with the basic human rights that they need.
4. Give the resources through the women.
5. Teach the people how to stand up for their rights effectively

6. Communicate; with each other and other communities (radio station; formation of CONPAZ the Network of Communities Constructing Peace in the Territories; etc)
7. Build food sovereignty
8. Give the voiceless a voice
9. Ensure food, teachers, counselling services from the very start

Ultimately it is clear that this Christian Aid (and partner) program in Cacarica has been highly effective and successful in enabling community organising and implementing protection and human rights advocacy from the offset of the response. It is felt that this has directly enabled longer term community resilience to be built. However, this case study has also shown that without successfully tackling the root causes of vulnerability, resilience is incredibly difficult to maintain. For the community of Cacarica this vulnerability is caused by the ongoing, protracted conflict (re)created and (re)enforced by societal inequality and intensified by military control and globalisation causing increasing interest on the survivors' land from the private sector

## 1. Introduction

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This case study aims to outline the strengths, challenges and recommendations of Christian Aid's (and partners) humanitarian work in Cacarica, Colombia. All reflections have been shared by the humanitarian staff, local partners, beneficiaries and other key stakeholders; such as local government and independent consultants involved in the response. This paper does not provide a comprehensive analysis of the case study's level of resilience building but aims to outline participants' reflections and recommendations. A second paper will be developed critically analysing the impact this example can have on resilience building.

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The LPRR consortium is led by Christian Aid and includes Action Aid, Concern Worldwide, Help Age, Kings College London, Muslim Aid, Oxfam, Saferworld and World Vision. The countries of focus include Kenya, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Democratic Republic Congo, Colombia, Indonesia and the Philippines and cover a multi-risk profile. The project has three strands focusing on; resilient informed humanitarian response, resilience informed conflict prevention and learning and capacity building.

Specifically, this case study has been developed as part of the humanitarian strand of the LPRR project which focuses on developing a practical method for improved, resilience informed humanitarian response. In order to do this, eight case studies of past humanitarian response interventions will be explored. This particular paper focuses on Christian Aid's response to forcibly displaced people and armed conflict in Cacarica, Colombia up until 2013.

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## 2. The Context

First, in order to provide a clear picture of the context and environment that the project was working in, this section will map out Colombia and particularly Cacarica's economic, environmental, political and social background and risk profile.

### 2.2 Colombia

Colombia is the fourth largest country and third largest economy in South America and with a population of 46,245,297 it has the continents third largest population. Colombia has a highly stratified society where the traditionally rich families of Spanish descent have benefited. The main religion in Colombia is Catholic with 90% of the population being Catholic, the national language is Spanish, the average adult literacy rate in 93% and the average life expectancy is 75 (KPMG, 2016).

Main household livelihoods include fishing, mining and agriculture. Despite living in a violent context, Colombians are hospitable and kind people, particularly to visitors. The family takes centre stage in the social structure and acts as a source of support and advice (Mortensen, 2015).

Colombia has substantial oil reserves and is a major producer of gold, silver, emeralds, platinum and coal, however has suffered decades of violent conflict. Colombia depends heavily on energy and mining exports, making it vulnerable to a drop in commodity prices. In addition, it is the world's fourth largest coal exporter and Latin America's fourth largest oil producer and an illicit producer of coca, opium poppy, and cannabis. Colombia supplies cocaine to nearly all of the US market and the great majority of other international drug markets (CIA, 2015)(The Economist, 2016) (KPMG, 2016). However, as outlined later in this paper Colombia's natural/rich resources are both a driver of its economy while also being a driver of the conflict in parts of the country.

#### *Governance*

The **Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI)** generated by the World Bank (2014) for Colombia measure from 0 (low) to 1 (high) the following aspects of the country (the most recent data is from 2014): **Voice & Accountability:** is average with 0.458 there has been a slight improvement during the last years, in fact hits has been the highest indicator reached. **Political Stability and Absence of Violence/terrorism:** With 0.107 this indicator shows very low political stability and absence of violence. Although there has been a slight improvement in the last decade, considering that in 2003 reached 0.013, it is still among the lowest in the world. **Government Effectiveness:** is below average with 0.495. In fact, there has been a substantial decrease compared to 2012 that was 0.569. **Regulatory Quality:** is above average with 0.678. There has been a continuous improvement throughout the last 10 years. **Rule**



**of Law:** is below average with 0.433. The highest index recorded is in 2011 with 0.474. Lastly, **control of corruption:** is low with .428. Although it has maintained similar index than the previous 3 years, in general there has been a downfall (World Bank, 2014).

### *Human rights*

Colombia accepts jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) (CIA, 2015). The most serious human rights problems were impunity, an inefficient judiciary, forced displacement, corruption, and societal discrimination. (US Department of State, 2014)

## 2.3 Choco & Cacarica

The Chocó region has the lowest level of living standards in Colombia. It is characterized by its diversity, water resources, and it is a tropical rainforest ecosystem. The local economy structure is based on informal and formal livelihoods. The region's economy is basically that of self-sufficiency, and depends on growing subsistence crops ("pancoger"), artisanal fishing, hunting and logging (IACHR, 2013). It has a population of 450,000. Afro-descendants 80%, indigenous 15% and mulatos 5% (Lombana, 2013)

### *Hazard profile*

The Urabá region is of major geostrategic importance in the armed conflict, in particular for the illegal armed groups, given its geographical location and its biological wealth. This region is favourable for the international **trafficking of arms**, chemical products, and **illegal drugs** (IACHR, 2013).

This region is also strategic from a military perspective because it serves as a hiding place and is a corridor to the southwest and the Bajo Cauca Antioqueño, the Sinú Valley, and the Nudo de Paramillo and a corridor to the western part of Antioquia (IACHR, 2013). Furthermore, it is one of the regions with the highest average annual precipitation record, making it the wettest place in the world. Directly relating to this, floods have also provoked forced migration (NOAA, 2012) (Davides, 2013).

### *Community, local government, CBO's and INGO's*

The local community have a low level of access to formal education and are among the most marginalized in Colombia. The local governments are perceived to be corrupt and the federal government is absent. There are some CBO's such as CAVIDA who have been active and effective in organizing life in the new communities, however they are under constant threats from guerrillas and paramilitary groups.

### *Communities' vulnerabilities*

Many of the communities' basic needs are not met and multiple international organisations have highlighted that "the context of marginalization, vulnerability and segregation that these communities continue to endure" (IACHR, 2013). Access to public services is almost inexistent, "electricity is a real luxury, there is only enough for a few hours" (Olmos, 2009). There is continued abandonment by the State in terms of social assistance, education, health and

sustainable development (IACHR, 2013). There are no doctors in the area (Peace Brigades International, 2010) and the unemployment rate is one of Latin America's highest – 9.7% in 2013 (CIA, 2015). Furthermore sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) is high in Colombia; this makes women more vulnerable at all stages of forced displacement (IACHR, 2013).

### ***Corruption & Inequality***

Chocó department “has been characterized by having a corrupt public administration, not only because of the diversion of public funds, but also owing to the award of permits or the corruption of public officials by logging companies, the illegal expansion of palm plantations and, in general, all kinds of mining exploitation” (IACHR, 2013). The power is centralized in the cities. The Afro-descendant communities that live in the department of Chocó are the most vulnerable and marginalised. (Mortensen, 2015).

### ***Drivers & Triggers of Conflict***

The main drivers of conflict include the abandonment of the government and the geostrategic importance: illegal armed groups have sought out this region as a corridor; the banks of its rivers are used by the illegal armed organizations to commit crimes, and the Darién Chocó is used by these groups for trafficking arms and illegal drugs.

### ***Who are the conflict actors? What is the root cause of the conflict?***

#### **1. Illegal armed groups (Guerrilla and Paramilitary groups)**

The Urabá region is of major geostrategic importance in the armed conflict, in particular for the illegal armed groups, given its geographical location and its biological wealth. This geographical location is favourable for the international trafficking of arms, chemical products, and illegal drugs.

#### **2. Military**

Choco is also a strategic territory from a military perspective because it serves as a hiding place and is a corridor to the southwest and the Bajo Cauca Antioqueño, the Sinú Valley, and the Nudo de Paramillo and a corridor to the western part of Antioquia. Consequently, “for more than three decades, the Urabá has been an epicentre of the armed conflict, which has extended to nearby areas, especially to Chocó (IACHR, 2013). In August 2012, General Rito Alejo del Río was sentenced to 25 years in prison for his role in the violent displacements and forming a “macabre alliance” with illegal paramilitary death squad.

#### **3. Enterprises/business**

Interested in profit, private companies are cutting down native species extensively, in order to plant coca, oil palms and bananas (IACHR, 2013). In July 2013, a total of 16 businessmen were each sentenced to over ten years in jail for crimes of conspiracy, forced displacement, and the invasion of ecologically important land through the removal of the communities of the nearby collective territory of Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó, in Chocó. (El Tiempo, 2013).

#### 4. Government

There has been significant, prolonged abandonment of the government in the area; however, the government has tried to regain control as well for the geopolitical importance of the region and to mitigate the threat of power that the guerrilla and paramilitary groups represent to it. In December 2013, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) ruled that the Colombian State was responsible for the forced displacement of the communities of Cacarica in Chocó and obliged to ensure proper reparation.

### 3. The Disaster

Between 24 and 27 February 1997, under “Operación Génesis”, a military operation was undertaken in the North-West of Colombia officially intended to capture members of the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) guerrilla group. In the development of these operations there were killings, torture, disappearances and forced displacement of the Afro-Colombian population and the brutal murder of civilian Marino Lopez Mena (WOLA, 2014). For all these crimes, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) ruled that the Colombian State was responsible for the forced displacement of the communities of Cacarica in Chocó. The IACHR issued the judgment on 21 November and the sentence was notified on 28 December 2014. From this moment the community is just asking Colombian government for the due reparation which implies public recognition of the facts.

Partner Interchurch Commission on Justice and Peace (CIJP), and the victims have insisted that the operation was held in collaboration between the paramilitary United Self-Defense Forces of Córdoba and Urabá (ACCU) and the Colombian armed forces, in particular the 17th Brigade of the army led by now sentenced and in prison General Rito Alejo del Rio.

Around 3,500 people were displaced and, of these, approximately 2,300 settled provisionally in the municipality of Turbo and in Bocas del Atrato (both in the department of Antioquia), around 200 people crossed the border into Panama, and the others went to different parts of Colombia (IACHR, 2013). 83 were killed or disappeared (Peace Brigades International, 2010).

According to various investigations the massive displacement that occurred during Operation Genesis has directly benefited large palm cultivator businesses in this region. In July 2013 businessmen Luis Fernando Zea Medina and Héctor Duque Echeverry were sentenced to over ten years in jail for crimes of conspiracy, forced displacement, and the invasion of ecologically important land through the removal of the communities of the nearby collective territory of Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó, in Chocó. (El Tiempo, 2013). Among a total of 16 businessmen some of which have fled to another countries not to be imprisoned.

Despite the IACHR ruling being a notable step forward in obtaining justice for victims, those who have returned to the region report continued threats and harassment by paramilitaries (Peace Brigades International, 2010)



## 4. The Intervention

Christian Aid Colombia has been supporting its local partners, **Inter-church Commission on Justice and Peace (CIJP)** and **Peace Brigades International** to engage in advocacy on human rights and land issues of forcibly displaced people. This particular intervention sought to accompany communities in the Cacarica River valley (Chocó) to inform them about their rights and take their cases to national courts and to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights that led to international acknowledgement of humanitarian zones, where returnee communities can live and feel safe.

## 5. The Project strategy

A summary of the project phases explored in this case study is outlined in the diagram below. The core focus of the project included advocacy capacity strengthening, cash for work, cash transfers, water filters, and community involvement, local market strengthening, Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience Building.

### Project Aims:

- Advocacy for human rights
- Seek truth, justice and reparation (Peace Brigades International, 2010)
- Help communities return to their villages (Olmos, 2009). About 100 families have come back and created two new settlements to better defend themselves: Nueva Vida (New Life) and Nueva Esperanza en Dios (New Hope in God).

### Specific communities include:

- Afro-descendent communities displaced from the Cacarica River basin: Balsagira, Balsita, Bocachica, Bogota, Bocas del Limón, Peranchito, Quebrada Bonita, Quebrada del Medio, La Honda, Las Mercedes Barranquilla, La Virginia Perancho, Las Pajas, Montañita Cirilo, Puente América, Puerto Berlín, Puerto Nuevo, San Higinio, San José de Balsa, Santa Lucía, Teguerre Medio, Varsovia, Vijao Cacarica and Villa Hermosa la Raya, all of them located in the jurisdiction of the municipality of Riosucio, Chocó department (IACHR, 2013)
- Communities displaced to: Turbo and Bocas del Atrato: municipalities that are both part of the department of Antioquia, Colombia.
- New communities created upon return of displaced people: “Nueva Vida” (New Life) and “Nueva Esperanza en Dios” (New Hope in God), Chocó, Colombia.

## 6. Research Methodology

### 6.1 Research Aims

1. To explore Christian Aid’s response to forcibly displaced peoples and armed conflict in the Cacarica river basin, Colombia

2. To explore both the response & rehabilitation, to capture lessons learnt; recommendations and challenges of smoothly aligning resilience informed response and rehabilitation phases to strengthen community resilience
3. With the over-all project aim of developing recommendations for global resilience informed humanitarian response

## 6.2 Methods, Study Site & Sampling

The LPRR research team spent two weeks in Colombia including eight days living in Cacarica, researching Christian Aid (and partners) ongoing Humanitarian Peace Zone program.

This research is underpinned by Bene et al's (2012) conceptual framework which outlines a resilient system as one which is stable, flexible and able to cope with change. A comprehensive and detailed outline of the methodology can be found in the LPRR learning google drive and project box account. Links to both can be found in the bibliography. Ultimately five core resilience principles have underpinned the research methodologies. These include:

1. There is community involvement, incorporating social values and appropriation of local knowledge in resilience building projects
2. There is effective governance, supporting community cohesion and recognising that resilient systems take a cross-scalar perspective
3. The inevitable existence of *uncertainty* and *change* is accepted with *preparedness activities enabling flexibility* to a range of future unexpected hazards
4. There are spaces and places for continuous *learning*
5. A high degree of *social and economic equity* exists in systems. The *non-equilibrium dynamics* of a system are acknowledged to support '*bouncing forward and better*'. Any approach to building resilience should not work with an idea of restoring equilibrium because systems do not have a stable state to which they should return after a disturbance.

Taking a triangulated approach this research adopts a mixture of methods including; semi structured interviews with key informants and household interviews and focus group discussions with community members. The FGD's included risk and resilience mapping as the primary data collection methods. The case study sites have been selected by Christian Aid as good examples of lessons learnt. Purposive sampling was adopted for participants in order to gain a diverse range of participants.

## 6.3 Data Analysis

Data was analysed through thematic analysis, drawing out core aligning and opposing themes and perceptions around the identified resilience variables and additional core factors. A further, more in-depth phase of analysis will be conducted after all case studies have been captured.

## 6.4 Challenges & Limitations

A number of limitations were reflected upon throughout the data collection process.

### **1. *Military and Paramilitary Presence***

The first limitation noticed was the obvious presence of the military and paramilitary in the area. On the first day in the community the research had to be put on hold as the community reported sightings of the paramilitary close to one of the humanitarian zones. Therefore, the protection protocols had to be put in place. Not only did this delay the research but also generated a level of anxiety amongst the community and research team.

Later in the week, the military came into the humanitarian peace zone, stopped and set up camp for a lunch break in the community area where the research team were supposed to run a focus group. When asked to move on, the army relocated under a nearby tree. It was felt inappropriate to do a focus group discussing the conflict and armed actors with the military so close and so the focus group had to be postponed.

### **2. *Presence of Christian Aid Staff***

Secondly, due to the fact that the community is located in such a remote area, the research team had to stay in the community for the week. Therefore, a number of additional Christian Aid staff were present for security and logistical reasons. After the second household interview, the team reflected that the community members participating in the interviews may feel less comfortable openly talking about what they were unhappy about with so many Christian Aid staff present. Therefore, going forward the Christian Aid staff left the interviews to be conducted by the Kings College London researcher and independent translator. Here, participants significantly opened up and spoke more freely.

### **3. *Time limitations, research limitations, community organizational and peace negotiations between the government and the FARC***

Due to the time constraints and capacity constraints of the project, the research team could only spend a limited amount of time in the community (one week) and in order to ensure academic rigor had to employ exactly the same participant sampling and methods as in every other case study. However, the strong community organizing and cohesion meant that the participants were reluctant to have a focus group of 8-10 people and wanted whole community meetings (involving hundreds of community members). It took negotiation, side meetings and persuasion from the Christian Aid staff and partner to assure community members it was okay to hold a small focus group in addition to a community assembly. Further to this the new context of the current peace negotiations happening between the FARC and government meant that the community wanted to talk about their concerns for the debate. Whilst incredibly helpful for the 'present day' aspect of risk and resilient, it took more negotiation to hear reflections on the past crises and displacement.

## 6. Findings

### Overview

It is clear that Christian Aid's work in Cacarica and with other displaced communities across Colombia is one of Christian Aid's biggest achievements. The projects here boast best case examples of strong project development and implementation with high levels of community ownership, participation, advocacy and human rights defence.

Alongside its partners Christian Aid has tackled the atrocities of conflict and worked tirelessly to support the displaced and traumatised to effectively return and accompany community members to their lands, support community members to fight for their rights and stand up to the conflict actors in the international court of justice.

The LPRR's initial reflections has noted seven core strengths of the way in which the projects have been designed, implemented and managed:

1. **Flexible funding.** The flexible, on-going funding provided to the program allowed the program to take a truly participatory method, with the community leading the process and adapting and developing methods as the risks and context developed.
2. **Ongoing risk assessment.** In direct correlation to the above strength, the flexible, ongoing funding has enabled on going risk assessments and adaptations to the program to be made as and when the situation changes; thus allowing for resilience to be built to ever changing context.
3. **Training of community members to raise awareness, build confidence and develop advocacy skills.** The level of capacity of the community is incredibly strong. Therefore, community leaders together with the community are able to independently take ownership of the project, make decisions, develop project proposals and advocate for their own rights and needs directly to the national government.
4. **Strong community leaders and a high level of community ownership and project participation.** Directly linking to point 3.
5. **Advocacy from the offset.** Advocacy for the rights of the community has been at the forefront of the project from the start and a priority of both Christian Aid and partners and the community members. Here, one group of community members explained that whilst food and water was necessary to stay alive, questioned what was the point if they did not have the right to live? The advocacy focus has enabled a long term, resilience focus to be taken. "What is the point of keeping us alive if we don't have a right to life?" (Community Member).
6. **Accompaniment.** For this context, the twenty-four-hour accompaniment from western INGO workers, at the height of the violent conflict was incredibly effective. Whilst it is recognised that this may not be the case for all countries and contexts, for Colombia to have international staff from Europe and America witnessing, denouncing and living with the community had a significant impact on the level of community protection and prevented violent attacks and human rights violations from occurring.
7. **Faith.** Directly linking to this, in country staff, survivors and community members outlined the importance of faith and faith actors in protection measures. Survivors explained that whilst accompaniment and political lobbying is the

most important, without faith actors it would not have been possible. “If it wasn’t for PBI, the nuns and the priests accompanying us, if it wasn’t for our brothers and sisters of the world then we would not have been able to return and we would not be here today. It has shown us that we are not alone” (Community member). The unity that the presence and support of the church actors and faith based organisations has given the community a strong sense of hope, wider global support and ‘togetherness’ and crucially, enabled a foundation of trust to be developed at the beginning of the crises, when the community was first displaced, confused, frightened and unsure of who to talk to and tell their story to. The faith based organisations could build this trust and begin the process of protection, human rights advocacy and the accompaniment of religious actors enabled the survivors to return to their land safely.

## Resilience Principles

Next, each resilient principle mapped out in the methodology was explored from both the community and field staff perception. Then key challenges and recommendations were reflected upon.

### **Principle 1: There is community involvement, incorporating social values and appropriation of local knowledge in resilience building projects**

*“There was a high level of participation. All the decisions were based on joint decisions of all the committees. We all shared the projects and worked together” (Community Member).*

*“We have all been very involved, making decisions and designing project proposals” (Community Member).*

*“The whole concept of the humanitarian zone was made by the community. It was their idea and their proposal. The idea to return and how to support that came from the community. The community was and is incredibly organised.” (Field Staff)*

It is felt by all participants, that there has been, and still is, a very high level of community participation and involvement throughout the program. When displaced, the community came together and decided that they had to get organised. The community formed a number of different committees to ensure everyone had a voice and were involved in working towards returning to their lands. Working alongside Justice and Peace, PBI and Christian Aid, the community have developed a strategy to develop a dialogue with the government, denounce what had and was happening to them and put together a three stage plan for returning to their land. Here, each sector of the community was involved, with a women’s’ committee, youth committee, elder’s committee, a dialogue committee and many more. Every decision made has been done so by the entire community and put forward to Justice and Peace or PBI for support.

Here, the community have been able to utilise their local knowledge of the lands, the rebel groups and risk and share this with Justice and Peace and PBI to develop effective security plans and procedures. Christian Aid and partners feel that the strength of community participation and local knowledge shared is a core factor that has contributed to the success and sustainability of the program.

In addition the community's social values and history have been identified as an extremely important aspect. Even though the community has not been able to return to their exact homes before displacement they focused on teaching younger generations about their history, values and way of life. This is felt by the community to be an incredible important aspect of the work that they did and still do.

**Principle 2: There is effective governance, supporting community cohesion and recognising that resilient systems take a cross-scalar perspective**

*"We worked together in small groups. We shared our hands to work together"*  
(Community Member)

*"Nothing happens without everyone approving it" (Community Member)*

*"Cohesion was strong before and is still strong now. The way they live is different, they have radically changed their social structure to be more resilient. At first they were not together and it was chaos then they realised they needed to come together and get organised. They depend on each other. Almost like a cooperative and community machine – they have a high level of trust and an organisational system." (Field staff)*

In reflection of the community governance it is clear that there is very strong community organisation and leadership. Both the community and field staff explain that the strength of local community leaders has had a significantly positive impact on the project. In addition to this, the community members and field staff explain how after the crises they decided to return to the lands as two large communities as oppose to 23 small villages to strengthen community unity, togetherness, cohesion and resilience. As a direct result of this the community feel stronger, safer and more protected living and working together.

*"The war brought us together and forced us to organise. We came together to make a list of demands but the main thing is unity. Without unity you are weak. Together we are strong. We came together to organise and protect our rights" (Community Member)*

*"We were able to form a dialogue with the government. To make our demands"*  
(Community Member)

**Gender**

Further to this, when reflecting on community leadership and the projects in Cacarica, all community members explained how the women of the households and the women leaders of the community were the ones who received the funding (or livelihood inputs to take care of them, such as seeds for example). The community clearly explained that the women should be responsible for the funding and budgeting, whether at a household or community level as they feel (both men and women) that the money will be better spent, looked after and prioritised if done through this model.



“Give the money to the women. If you give them money to the women all of it will go on improving the household. If you give it to the men, only some of it will.” (Community member).

Furthermore, when talking to the community leaders and members it was clear that they were very aware of gender issues and keen to support gender equality. For example when interviewing a number of male community members, all wanted to double check that the women of their community were also being given the chance to tell their stories. Additionally, many women were being supported by their husbands to go back to school. The community members explained how this had changed the social and gender dynamic within the household and community as the men of the household took on more responsibilities that would traditionally be the women’s’ (such as child care, cooking and cleaning) role in order to support the women to gain an education.

### **Formal Governance**

When reflecting on the more formal governance of the local government there is a mixed response. The local government are thought by the community and field staff to be very difficult to work with and often hostile and corrupt. The national government on the other hand are felt to be slightly easier to work with and a relationship seems to have been developed between national government and the NGO’s and community members over time. Both the community members and NGO field staff feel that this is a direct result of international pressure.

One of the program’s core aims has been to strengthen the community’s dialogue with the national government and enhance the community’s ability to denounce wrong doings and advocate for human rights and community needs. The government (primarily state protection unit who were interviewed) explained that they provide the community with information and protection measures and whilst they do not work directly with (I)NGO’s, they do have a good relationship with them.

### **Principle 3: The inevitable existence of *uncertainty* and *change* is accepted with *preparedness activities enabling flexibility* to a range of future unexpected hazards**

*“Before we were not prepared. Now we have a strategy, we are more prepared, more open, outward thinking, informed and aware. We have a future goal for the future generations. We look for long lasting truth, justice and peace.” (Community Member)*

*“The people are more prepared, more aware, more informed and stronger” (Field Staff)*

*“They live together so are stronger. They are very prepared now whereas they were not prepared before. They raise the alert, calls are made to the ministry of defence, to the partners. They are organised” (Field Staff)*

When comparing the community’s level of preparedness before the displacement and after (present day) both the community members and field staff state that the community are significantly more prepared today. It is felt that before the crises the community did not know what to do or how to protect themselves however now they know

how to monitor and communicate information, how to run the humanitarian peace zones and what to do if rebel groups or the paramilitary come too close to them.

The community have a very high level of risk awareness, human rights awareness and ability to effectively articulate their concerns, needs and future plans. The community clearly explain how aware they are of future risk and the future situation, particularly with regards to the ongoing peace negotiations with the FARC. The community have kept their committees active and continuously reassess the situation, risks and protocols.

**Principle 4: There are spaces and places for continuous learning**

*“The concept of the humanitarian peace zone started in Cacarica and has spread across the country. The community have shared their learning not only without other but with other communities. The organisations have learnt through this new idea and shared learnings. They inspire others and there has been a lot of learning exchanged” (Field staff).*

*“We have learnt from them (the community)” (Field staff)*

It is clear that the program has had a strong focus on learning. Partners have developed and strengthened the community’s capacity to understand and advocate for their right and needs. Partners and Christian Aid explain that they have learnt a lot from the community and taken forward the example of the Cacarica peace zones to a number of other communities and projects. Further to this, the community leaders have travelled across Colombia and to other countries to share their story and lessons learnt to other displaced communities. Here, the community of Cacarica have formed an organisation called CONPAZ, the Network of Communities Constructing Peace in the Territories, which is made up of 150 Colombian communities who have been displaced or threatened with displacement. Here, communities learn from one another about how to denounce what is happening, how to protect themselves and how to advocate for their rights. The community feel that this has significantly raised their confidence and feeling of importance and place in Colombia.

**Principle 5: Bouncing Back Better.** Bouncing back better means improving development opportunities through programing; resilience programmes consider issues of justice and equity when distributing risks with communities. Any approach to re- building and preparing should not work with an idea of restoring pre-disaster conditions.

*“We may be more aware politically, but economically in terms of building back to how we were before, we are unable to sustain our families, we are worse off.” (Community Member)*

*“I don’t think we have reached a better quality of life. Before we had a good life. We were able to construct the pillars of welfare. Then came the displacement and everything was destroyed. We were forced into a new way of existing. It was like the whole community being born again and starting from nothing” (Community Member)*

“To do this we need to address the social and economic inequalities. We are working towards restoring damage but we need to establish sustainable livelihoods. We are still accompanying them to gain their rights both legally, politically and economically.” (Field staff).

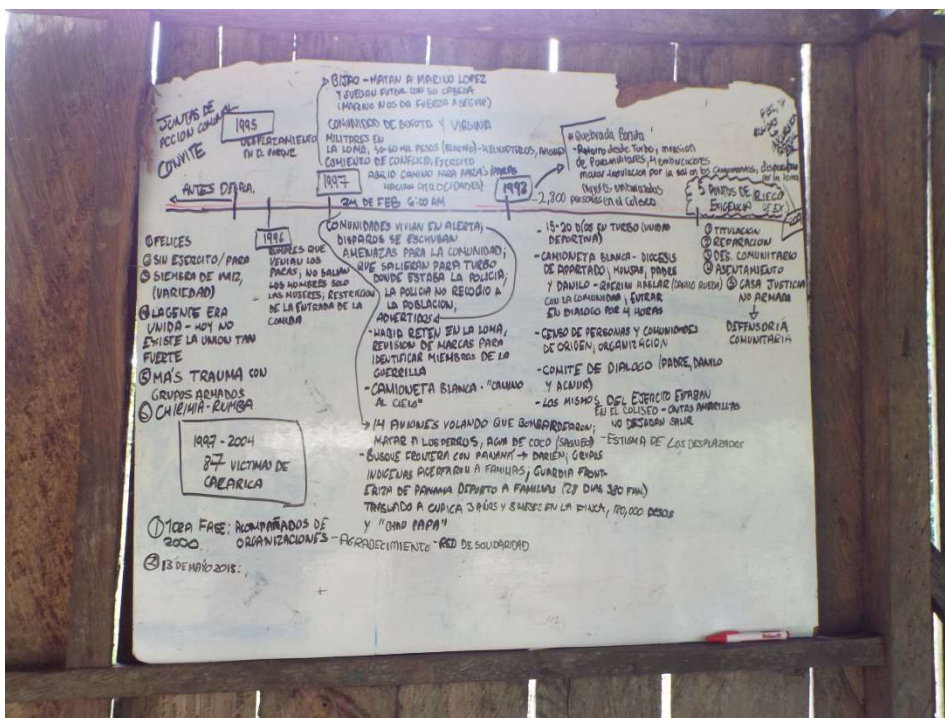
The community members and field staff explain that much has been both lost and won throughout the Cacarica displacement and peace zone development. However, the community feel that because they are still living in a refugee camp and do not feel safe to farm their lands, they have not been able to reach the quality of living that they had before the displacement, nor build the community back better. The community feel that in order to have bounced back better they need to have received the compensation that the government promised, feel safe to farm their lands, live in peace, and have increased access to higher education, a just market and livelihood opportunities.

“No we haven’t got there yet. The people do not feel safe to return to their lands or work in their lands they struggle economically” (Field staff).

“We need to government to give us the money that they promised us. To stop bother us, stop threatening us. Before we lived in peace and were not afraid.” (Community Member)

In the images below, the community mapped out a timeline of community history and developed a number of maps which were used to discuss the crises, the intervention, if the community were able to build back better and what resilience means to them.

**Timeline of community history (Pre displacement – present day)**



Maps 1: Before the displacement

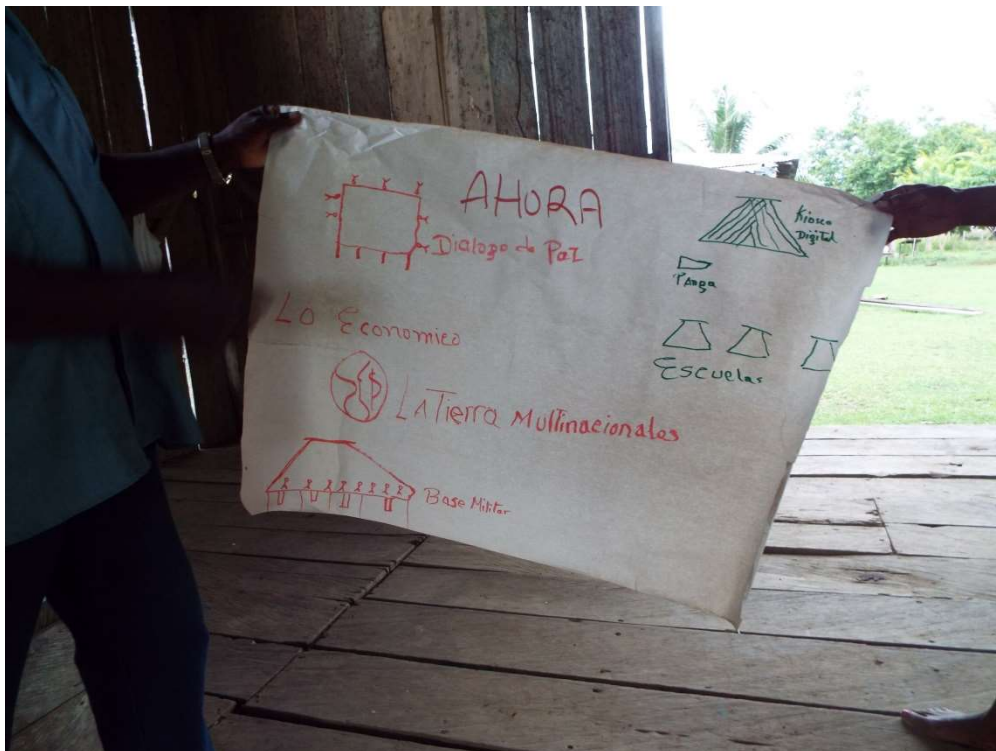




Maps 2: After the displacement



Maps 3: Present day





**Maps 4: The future: what resilience looks like and means to the community**



**What resilience means to the community**

Throughout the discussion of these maps, the community developed their idea of resilience. For the communities of Cacarica resilience means education, community togetherness, peace and land rights.

*“If you are educated you are less likely to be tricked” (Community Member).*

Furthermore, field staff and community members together reflected on how resilience could be built. The community and field staff outlined the need for:

1. Guarantees from the state on their land entitlements, human rights and reparation
2. Guarantees on their economic activities
3. Protection and prevention from the state
4. Prevention is needed. Lots being done on defending human rights but little on preventing.
5. Collective identity and strong social cohesion and community togetherness
6. Empowerment and ownership: communities write proposals and run projects

### Challenges & Recommendations

Lastly, the core challenges and recommendations that the community and field staff felt they faced throughout the program. These have been mapped out in box 1.

*“We want peace, to be left alone by armed actors and to live in peace” (Community Member)*

*“Allow us to economically thrive and to live in peace and we will look after ourselves” (Community Member)*

*“Organise, organise, organise. Unite, without unity you have nothing. Denounce everything, find accompaniment for protection and build a dialogue with the government” (Community Member)*

#### Box 1: Challenges and Recommendations

Challenges	Recommendations
<p><b>Field staff</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Violence, insecurity and terror, the presence of armed groups, new armed groups, the river being a very strategic location, threats, intimidation and attacks on staff. Often the community members were too scared to talk about what they had seen. It took a lot of trust building to get to a point where communities could openly talk to and confide in each other and the partner organisations.</li> <li>2. The core issues are still there. The community are living in a refugee camp and have still not received what the government promised. The community feel that there will not be peace until there is equality and Colombia is very unequal.</li> <li>3. Political resistance of the government</li> <li>4. Media portrayal of HZ's as 'concentration camps'</li> </ol>	<p><b>Field staff:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ensure long term, flexible funding</li> <li>2. Include advocacy as the primary focus from the offset. Build capacity and confidence of community to advocate for their needs.</li> <li>3. Allow the community to organise and run the program</li> <li>4. Implement the 24-hour accompaniment and denouncement method</li> <li>5. Be in the community and present throughout the program</li> <li>6. Get the support of global networks</li> <li>7. Keep a very clear political agenda</li> <li>8. Work through local partners</li> <li>9. Stop and reflect along the way, conduct on going risk assessment and change how you do things to improve</li> <li>10. Provide psycho social support</li> </ol>

<p>5. Stigmatisation of the afro Colombians and displaced peoples and accusations that they were cooperating with the FARC <b>Community members/ beneficiaries:</b></p> <p>6. There were very poor conditions in initial 'refugee camp' in Turbo; overcrowding, health issues, malnourishment, government confusion mixed messages. "Nothing was happy, everything was terror." "The best of the worst was when it was announced we might be able to return to our lands" "We were humiliated and suffered so much" "We lost everything including our hope" (Community members).</p> <p>7. Food sovereignty is an ongoing challenge in the community.</p> <p>8. The presence of paramilitary forces. "The paramilitary is very powerful and dangerous here, we are very afraid that they will come here if the FARC leave" (Community member)</p> <p>9. The interest of multiple actors (from the paramilitary to private organisations) in the community's land.</p>	<p>11. Implement strong protection strategies such as accompaniment <b>Community members/ beneficiaries:</b></p> <p>12. Organise</p> <p>13. Unite</p> <p>14. Focus on spiritual and mental damage too</p> <p>15. Work on the government. Advocate for them to take responsibility and provide the people with the basic human rights that they need.</p> <p>16. Give the resources through the women.</p> <p>17. Teach the people how to stand up for their rights effectively</p> <p>18. Communicate; with each other and other communities (radio station, formation of CONPAZ etc)</p> <p>19. Build food sovereignty</p> <p>20. Give the voiceless a voice</p> <p>21. Ensure food, teachers, counselling services from the very start</p>
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## 7. Bene et al (2012) Absorb (cope), Adapt, Transform Analysis

### Initial Reflections

In reflection of Bene's (2012) Resilience Absorb, Adapt, Transform (AAT) observations, it was felt important to gauge the community's perception of what resilience means to them and explore how the field officers and other stakeholders felt that the intervention impacted on the community's resilience. The table below illustrate the participants' reflections on the intervention's phases in relation to the resilience principles. It is important to note that this was more difficult for field staff to answer, compared to the other case studies as Christian Aid was not working in the community before the displacement. Furthermore, due to the fact that the program is ongoing and the community are still living in the humanitarian peace zone, the principles cannot be compared before and after. The results listed below illustrate just a few reflections as many participants didn't feel able to give a score.

Indicator	Before	Throughout Program and Now
1. Community involvement (participation)	-	5
2. Community Cohesion	3	5
3. Strengthen Links to Government	0	4
Understanding of risk strengthened	0	5
4. Access to information increased	0	4
Preparedness	0	4
5. Learning throughout	0	5
6. Building Back Better as a focus	-	3/ 4/5 is a strong focus but unable to do so

It is important to note that this case study does not provide the rigorous thematic analysis required to make an in-depth analysis. A second paper will be developed once the data analysis process has been completed. This paper aims to outline initial reflections. Keeping this in mind and reflecting upon the experiences and thoughts of the community members and field staff it could be thought that the community have shown a high level of resilience through their ability to withstand the initial shock, adapt to changing stressors and contexts and transform way of life to better cope with risks. Therefore, making this case study an excellent example of how community resilience can be built in ongoing, protracted conflict contexts.

### ***Absorb***

It could be felt that the community demonstrated shock absorption through the way in which they responded to the crises. United in Turbo (or Panama) and withstood the violence through retreating to safe spaces.

### ***Adapt***

It could be thought that the community adapted to this new context by getting organised, coming together to plan a way to return to their lands and obtaining protection measures from organisations.

### ***Transform***

Furthermore, it could be thought that the community radically changed and transformed their way of life and came together to form two large settlements instead of 23 small villages. They changed their livelihoods, increased their knowledge and capacity to denounce human right violations, implement protection measures and withstand future displacement threats.

Furthermore, social dynamics have been transformed with increased access to adult education, more women being educated and men taking more of a role in household chores and childcare which traditionally would be left to the women. Whilst there is clearly a strong culture of masculinity, it is clear that there has been some transformation in gender roles.

The community feel stronger and more resilience due to this transformation, however ultimately in order to reach the quality of life they had before being displaced feel that there needs to be peace, compensation, security to return to their farms, just and equal access to markets and opportunity for economic development and further education. The community fear the peace talks between the FARC and the government will de-stabilize the peace context and jeopardize the work they have done to get to this point. Therefore, whilst they feel individually more resilient and together, as a community more resilient, still feel vulnerable and at risk to future threats.

## **7. Conclusions**

This case study has outlined the strengths, challenges and recommendations of Christian Aid (and partners) humanitarian work in Cacarica, Colombia. All reflections have been shared by the humanitarian staff, local partners,

beneficiaries and other key stakeholders involved in the response such as local government and independent consultants.

Over-all it is clear that the Cacarica case study is an effective example of how long term funding, protection advocacy and human rights work can strengthen long term community resilience. It is clear that both the community and local partners have worked hard to increase community organisation, cohesion, awareness, preparedness and dialogue with the government. The community have radically changed their way of life to adapt and transform with the changing conflict context and increase their resilience to future conflict and forced displacement. The community and field staff have explained that they feel participation has been incredibly high with the community leading and designing the projects within the program. However, the community and field staff feel that they have not yet been able to bounce back better as the crisis is ongoing. The community still live in the humanitarian peace zones, still feel unsafe to farm their lands and are still living with ongoing conflict. For the community of Cacarica resilience means peace, education, rights, livelihoods and access to a just market.

Ultimately it is clear that the fact that Christian Aid's (and partners) programming in Cacarica was highly effective and successful in enabling community organising and protection and human rights advocacy from the offset of the response., directly enabled long term community resilience to be built. However, this case study has also shown that without successfully tackling the root causes of vulnerability, resilience is incredibly difficult to maintain. Again, for the community of Cacarica this vulnerability is caused by the ongoing, protracted conflict, (re)created and (re)enforced by societal inequality and intensified by military control and globalisation causing increasing interest on the survivors' land from the private sector.

This case study has outlined seven core strengths of the Christian Aid (and partners') project, including;

1. **Flexible funding.**
2. **Ongoing risk assessment**
3. **Training of community members to raise awareness, build confidence and develop advocacy skills**
4. **Strong community leaders and a high level of community ownership and project participation**
5. **Advocacy from the offset**
6. **Accompaniment**
7. **Role of Faith**

The core recommendations outlined by the field staff and community members going forward for future resilience informed humanitarian response in conflict contexts include;

**Field staff:**

1. Ensure long term, flexible funding
2. Include advocacy as the primary focus from the offset. Build capacity and confidence of community to advocate for their needs.
3. Allow the community to organise and run the program
4. Implement the 24-hour accompaniment and denouncement method

5. Be in the community and present throughout the program
6. Get the support of global networks
7. Keep a very clear political agenda
8. Work through local partners
9. Stop and reflect along the way, conduct on going risk assessment and change how you do things to improve
10. Provide psycho social support
11. Implement strong protection strategies such as accompaniment

**Community members/ beneficiaries:**

1. Organise and unite the community
2. Focus on spiritual and mental damage too
3. Work on the government. Advocate for them to take responsibility and provide the people with the basic human rights that they need.
4. Give the resources through the women.
5. Teach the people how to stand up for their rights effectively
6. Communicate; with each other and other communities (radio station, formation of CONPAZ etc)
7. Build food sovereignty
8. Give the voiceless a voice
9. Ensure food, teachers, counselling services from the very start

**Next steps.** Next, a further 2 case studies will be captured from DRC and Bangladesh. Finally, all eight case studies will be critically analysed and a global approach for resilient informed humanitarian response will be developed, piloted and rolled out. For more information or any questions please contact Becky Murphy the LPRR Resilience Learning and Capacity Building officer at [rmurphy@christian-aid.org](mailto:rmurphy@christian-aid.org).



Christian Aid Research Team and Community Participants

