

Briefing Note – 18 December 2014

Colombia: Pacific Region

Deteriorated Conflict



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|--|---------------|-------|----------|-------------|--------|
| Need for international assistance | Not required | Low | Moderate | Significant | Urgent |
| Expected impact | Insignificant | Minor | Moderate | Significant | Major |

Crisis Overview

- Armed violence for the past 17 years has had serious humanitarian consequences in isolated rural communities in Chocó, Cauca, and Valle del Cauca departments of the Pacific region, which already had limited access to basic services and a lack of local response capacity.
- Security conditions have worsened in the past year, with the arrival of new armed groups fighting for control of territory, illegal mineral mining, and lucrative drug-trafficking corridors, especially around Alto and Medio Baudó municipalities in Chocó. 3,311 people were affected by massive displacements during the first half of 2014 in Chocó.
- Insecurity in Alto Baudó since June has caused severe movement restrictions and displaced Afro-Colombian and indigenous populations to Cauca. Non-state armed groups are increasingly using mobility restrictions and threats as part of their strategy, leading to confinement of civilians, which limits their access to crops, labour markets, and basic health services. An estimated 6,500 people are affected by the current crisis in Chocó.

| Department | IDPs (2012-2014) | APM/UXO victims (2012-2014) | Sexual violence victims (2012-2015) | Affected by access constraints/confinement (2013-2014) | Affected by natural disasters (2012-2014) | Total people in need (2012-2015) |
|-----------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---|----------------------------------|
| Chocó | 38,319 | 29 | 46 | 14,487 | 271,034 | 315,953 |
| Cauca | 78,548 | 59 | 77 | 17,543 | 195,251 | 488,383 |
| Valle de Cauca | 92,202 | 32 | 173 | 7,544 | 103,008 | 302,543 |
| Total | 209,069 | 120 | 296 | 39,574 | 569,293 | 1,106,879 |

Source: HNO, 2015.

Key Findings

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|---|---|
| Anticipated scope and scale | Mobility limitations are expected to increase and nutrition and food security to worsen. |
| Priorities for humanitarian intervention | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Priority needs in the region are for protection, WASH, health, food security and nutrition. Interventions should be aimed at strengthening and building community and institutional capacities. |
| Humanitarian constraints | Local authorities and institutions often face access constraints in the Pacific region due to security concerns but also topographical and logistical constraints. As a result of mobility constraints and confinement, civilians face difficulties accessing their crops, markets, and basic services. |

Crisis Impact

The three departments of the Pacific Coast have been among the most affected by mobility restrictions and confinement in Colombia between 2013 and June 2014. 3,311 people were affected by massive displacements during the first semester of 2014 notably (Defensoría del Pueblo, 2014). The most recent clashes between the National Liberation Army (ELN) and paramilitary group Gaitanistas on 13 June in Alto Baudo, Chocó, caused severe movement restrictions and displacement of Afro-Colombian and indigenous populations, mainly for fear of being caught in the fighting: 364 indigenous people remained displaced and sheltered in poor conditions in Puesto Indio in October and required significant health, protection, and food assistance. An estimated 6,500 people are affected in Chocó, most of them due to confinement; the situation is critical for 2,000. Almost half of Chocó's populations lives in extreme poverty and is therefore unable to sustain itself, making confinement a particular concern. Food scarcity and access to health are major issues throughout the department: 80% of inhabitants' basic needs are not covered (Colombia Reports, 11/07/2014). In Cauca, 35.9% of the population lives in extreme poverty.

Food

Harvest activities were suspended due to movement restrictions, there is limited access to the river for fishing (Equipo Humanitario, 17/10/2014). The December harvest, which includes maize, plantain, sugar cane, yucca, and fruits, has been compromised, as has trade with urban communities. Food security is further deteriorating due to aerial fumigation of illicit crops falling on agricultural production and destroying staple food crops (ABC Colombia, July 2014). From 18 November, Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities in Medio Atrato in Chocó have restricted their movements and daily activities for fear of insecurity, due to a massive army presence and military operations to rescue a kidnapped General in Quibdó on 16 November, resulting in limited access to food and other basic services (OCHA, 21/11/2014). 1,400 people fled Chocó for the city of Buenaventura in Calle del Cauca end November and were in dire need of food and WASH assistance (Local media, 11/12/2014).

The restrictions of movement faced by most indigenous people and Afro-Colombians since the renewed clashes in June negatively affects their ability to buy quality food. 94.9% of people in indigenous communities in Chocó were severely food insecure before the crisis.

Nutrition

GAM prevalence was estimated between 5 and 9% in the Pacific Coast region, compared to the 0.9% national average. About 8 out of 10 children under five were stunted. Confinement may worsen the nutrition situation (HNO, 2015).

Health and WASH

- The ability of Quibdó hospital in Chocó to provide proper health services is hindered by lack of financing from local authorities and structural issues (El País, 07/12/2014). 400 people were treated in Condoto, Atrato, Istmina and Pizarro between January and April for symptoms related to the consumption of contaminated water (El País, 24/06/2014).
- Armed groups in Chocó have been using mercury for illegal mining activities, like extraction of gold, which has contaminated at least eight major rivers (Atrato, San Juan, Andágueda, Apartadó, Bebará, Bebaramá, Quitó and Dagua), the water of which is used directly for consumption, as well as for fishing, bathing, and washing.
- The poor quality of public infrastructure (lack of treatment plants for potable water for instance and open waste disposal), is adding to the raising serious health concerns in the region.

Shelter

At least 206 out of 375 Afro-Colombian and indigenous people (85 families) displaced in Guapi, Cauca, since 9 September, need urgent shelter assistance. They were displaced by clashes between FARC and military forces (OCHA, 07/10/2014). Schools in Puesto Indio in Alto Baudo, Chocó, were used as shelters for those displaced by fighting between the ELN and Gaitanistas in October (Equipo Humanitario, 17/10/2014).

Protection

- **Mines, unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive devices (IED)** mainly affect areas of northern Cauca and southern Valle del Cauca. In **Chocó** in 2014, 12 IED incidents were reported, compared to **eight** in 2013; the main affected municipalities were Acandí, Alto Baudo and Bagadó.
- **Extortion:** 90 cases were recorded in the first half of 2014, compared to 157 for the whole of 2013. Furthermore, 53 cases of disappearance were recorded, 59% of which in Quibdó and Riosucio. 58 homicides had been reported at June, while 169 had been reported in all 2013, mainly in Quibdó (Defensoría del Pueblo, 2014).
- **Gender-based violence (GBV)** in the context of the armed conflict, such as rape, sexual violence, slavery, and exploitation, are a serious concern in Colombia, especially for indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations in rural areas. In the

most affected regions there is a lack of standard operating procedures for survivors of GBV, which increases the risks of teen and unwanted pregnancies, transmission of sexually transmitted diseases and psychological and physical trauma (HNO, 2015).

- Displaced populations in Alto Baudo expressed fears over targeting by armed groups (Equipo Humanitario, 17/10/2014).

Impact on Critical Infrastructure

Frequent attacks by non-state armed groups on infrastructure in the Pacific region, including electricity grids and roads, affect the population's access to basic services, in some cases for extended periods (HNO, 2015).

Vulnerable Groups Affected

- Around 38% of the country's Afro-Colombian population and 23% of the indigenous population lives in the Pacific region. The humanitarian consequences of the armed conflict and armed violence are especially serious for indigenous (Emberá Chami, Dobida, Waonaan, Eperera Siapidara) and Afro-Colombian communities, who frequently live in remote areas where access is difficult and living conditions are precarious. Forced displacement and illegal acquisition of lands are among the challenges faced by these populations.
- Women, children, and young adults, people with disabilities and the elderly are prioritised for humanitarian action (HNO, 2015).

Humanitarian and Operational Constraints

- Local authorities and institutions often face access constraints in the Pacific region due to security.
- Topographic and logistical constraints also impact the operations of humanitarian workers. Many communities can be reached only by river.
- Mobility restrictions and confinement constrain civilians' access to crops, markets and other livelihoods as well as basic services such as health care, safe water and education.

Potential Aggravating Factors

Seasonal Information

- The consequences of natural disasters create situations of double vulnerability. Between 2012 and June 2014, more than 2 million people (an average of 65,000 per month) were affected by natural disasters in Colombia, primarily floods, strong winds, high temperatures and reduced precipitation. Chocó and Cauca were among the most affected departments.
- In Chocó, frequent flooding over recent years has impacted more than one in every four residents. Given its geographic peculiarities and the vulnerability of housing in the area, the region is prone to heavy impacts from floods and windstorms. Nearly 9,000 indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities were affected by floods in Medio Bodo in Chocó over 3-4 December that caused extensive damage to houses, food crops, and livestock in nine communities (OCHA, 12/12/2014).
- There is a high probability of an El Niño event (December 2014–April 2015) that would adversely impact the region (HNO, 2015).

Other Factors of Vulnerability

The persistence of Post-Demobilization Armed Groups (PDAGs), the possibility of other violence (e.g. FARC factions that do not demobilise or the creation of new armed groups), the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and difficulties reintegrating demobilised combatants, could all cause an increase in armed violence and impact communities (HNO, 2015).

Contextual Information

Drivers of the Current Conflict

Chocó has been affected by conflict between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP) and ELN guerrillas for more than 17 years; the conflict has worsened over recent years as armed groups are fighting for the control of territory, illegal mineral mining, and lucrative drug-trafficking corridors, especially around Alto and Medio Baudo municipalities.

Cauca has been an epicentre of the country's armed conflict for decades. Its varied terrain, including jungle along the coastline and steep mountains interspersed with agricultural valleys, has also been subject to prolonged disputes over property rights, while the area's demographic diversity has also played a role in the local context, as more than two thirds of the population lives in rural areas and almost half of the population is indigenous or Afro-Colombian (OCHA, 30/03/2014).

The ongoing peace talks between the Government and the FARC-EP and the exploratory talks with the ELN have made progress on specific points, but have so far

failed to impact the conflict's devastating effects on civilians. Between 1985 and June 2014, some 6.5 million people have been registered as victims of the armed conflict. Violence has worsened in the Pacific region, and peace talks were interrupted on 16 November after the capture of General Ruben Alzate. They resumed on 10 December (AFP, 10/12/2014).

Relevant Stakeholders

The Pacific region has an active presence of FARC-EP guerrillas and ELN, paramilitary groups, and other criminal armed groups such as Gaitanistas. In some areas alliances or agreements between these groups have been reported. There is limited state institutional presence in the region.

Displacement

39% of the total IDP caseload between 2012 and June 2014 was concentrated in the Pacific region, as were more than half of all IDPs affected by mass events during the same period. The municipalities of Cali (Valle del Cauca), Popayán (Cauca) and Buenaventura (Valle del Cauca), were the main reception areas of displaced populations. The three departments of the Pacific Coast have also been among the most affected by mobility restrictions and confinement in Colombia between 2013 and June 2014 due to the escalation of hostilities between the FARC-EP and the armed forces, an increased diversity of armed groups and restrictions imposed by them, and the use of mines to protect coca crops (HNO, 2015).

Response Capacity

Local and National Response Capacity

Colombia has a robust legal and institutional framework for emergency preparedness and response, supported by specialised entities that respond to emergencies caused by the armed conflict (UARIV) or natural disasters (UNGRD). However, there are still important response gaps at the local level, where institutional capacities are weaker (HNO, 2015).

The magnitude of emergencies in Cauca has overwhelmed the response capacity of several municipalities. Most municipalities along the Pacific coast are only accessible by river or sea. In mountainous areas, towns can be cut off for weeks at a time due to the poor state of roads. These conditions increase humanitarian response costs considerably and make timely assistance, monitoring and sustainability difficult. Few organisations have the logistical capacity to reach the most remote areas.

In Cauca, gaps in the design and implementation of the city's Territorial Action Plan are one component of structural challenges for the protection of victims of the armed conflict. Assistance focuses on responding to the most visible cases of forced displacement. Further efforts are needed to address the causes of displacement, such as threats, forced recruitment, or sexual violence. Many of these incidents are never legally declared, due to lack of trust in authorities, fear, and the non-state armed groups' and PDAGs' social control of many neighbourhoods and communities. Institutions in charge of the state response have limited personnel and resources to meet the high level of demand (OCHA, 30/03/2014).

International Response Capacity

The presence of international humanitarian agencies in the country, although limited, supports state response and preparedness efforts through complementary assistance, capacity building and technical assistance. UN and humanitarian partners remain largely under-funded and this hinders their capacity to address all needs (HNO, 2015).

Information Gaps and Needs

While Colombia is considered to be a 'data-rich' environment, there is a lack of indicators directly measuring sanitation, food insecurity, and nutrition at municipal level, the forced recruitment of children, sexual and gender-based violence related to the conflict, morbidity rates for several major diseases, among other issues.

There is no consolidated data on the humanitarian assistance provided by municipal and departmental authorities. Many datasets are only available for Colombia's major urban areas, are regionalised to include several departments, or are updated only every five years. Most clusters have no data on sectoral indicators for the whole country and depend on needs assessments carried out in regions where there is humanitarian presence (HNO, 2015).

Lessons Learned

The network of organisations involved in humanitarian assistance in the region is an important pillar for the implementation of new humanitarian projects. The involvement of local organisations in these projects is vital to verify the families identified as in

need. Commitments and actions with local authorities, civil society, associations should be agreed upon before allocating resources (OCHA, 02/09/2007).

Assistance strategies have to take into account the fact that the humanitarian crisis in Chocó not only results from armed conflict, but is fuelled by chronic underdevelopment and discrimination in the region (Colombia Journal, 12/10/2013).

Key Characteristics of Population

| Key indicators | Chocó | Cauca | Valle del Cauca |
|--|--|--|--|
| Total population (2014) | 495,151 | 1,366,984 | 4,566,875 |
| % rural population (2005) | 49.9% | 41.1% | 13.4% |
| Gender and age distribution of population (2014) | <u>Male: 49.9%</u> 0 to 14: 14.7% 15 to 19: 5.2% 20 to 59: 25.7% 60+: 5.1% <u>Female: 50.1%</u> 0 to 14: 14.1% 15 to 19: 4.8% 20 to 59: 24.8% 60+: 5.6% | <u>Male: 50.7%</u> 0 to 14: 19.2% 15 to 19: 5.7% 20 to 59: 21.8% 60+: 3.2% <u>Female: 49.3%</u> 0 to 14: 14.7% 15 to 19: 5.2% 20 to 59: 25.7% 60+: 5.1% | <u>Male: 48.4%</u> 0 to 14: 12.2% 15 to 19: 4.1% 20 to 59: 28.9% 60+: 5.2% <u>Female: 51.6%</u> 0 to 14: 11.8% 15 to 19: 4.2% 20 to 59: 25.7% 60+: 6.8% |
| State capital | Quibdó | Popayán | Cali |
| Sewerage Coverage | 15.9% | 43.9% | 89.7% |
| Infant mortality – per 1,000 births (2005) | 36 | 33 | 23 |
| Maternal mortality – per 1,000 births | 429.2 | 120.7 | 49.1 |
| Nutrition levels (GAM rate for under-five children) | 6% (2005) | 5% (2010) | 1.8% (2011) |
| Literacy rates (15 and older) | 78% (2004) | 88% (2004) | 96.5% (2013) |
| Proportion of population using solid fuel (2005) | 44% | 47% | 4% |

Sources: Census 2005, Census Data Projections 17/12/2014, Government 13/03/2013, UNDP 2012, Government November 2012, World Bank 2009

