

COLOMBIA



Foto: Marcela Campos/Save the Children

SAVE THE CHILDREN AND THE HUMANITARIAN DEVELOPMENT-PEACE NEXUS

Country overview

Over the last 70 years, Colombia has experienced a succession of armed conflict affecting different parts of the country and undermining economic and social development. Since the signing of the Peace Agreement in 2016, Colombia has been transitioning from conflict to post-conflict. This context presents an opportunity to promote and secure child rights within peacebuilding, recovery and development processes. However, pockets of armed conflict continue to emerge within parts of the country, also requiring a focus on conflict-prevention and the continuation of humanitarian response. International actors must therefore adapt to the evolving context and forge greater links between humanitarian, development and peace frameworks.

Conflict has left these areas with limited or non-existent public services, disrupted education and limited future opportunities for children. These areas are home to many of the most vulnerable children in Colombia, including Afro-Colombian children and those from indigenous minorities who often feel that their voice is not heard. Without a commitment from national and international actors to prevent and respond to their immediate protection and education concerns whilst also investing in strengthening community resilience to respond to future needs and supporting them to engage in peace processes, these children are likely to be at-risk of recruitment and use, sexual exploitation and child labour associated with armed groups including the illicit cultivations of coca and marijuana.



Foto: Jenn Gardella/Save the Children

Save the Children **presence** in Colombia

Save the Children International has been present in Colombia since 1985, and currently works in both urban and rural areas of Cauca, Nariño, Valle del Cauca, Caquetá, Guajira, Arauca, and Norte de Santander. Our goal is to bring about immediate and long-term change in the lives of children and youth and their families affected by armed conflict, migration and natural disasters. We deliver humanitarian response and development programming aimed at improving the living conditions of girls and boys within some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities, often in hard-to-reach and conflict-affected areas. We also engage children in peacebuilding processes and empower them to share their experiences of conflict and the impact it has on their community. Our presence and engagement with children and communities has enabled us to build our knowledge of conflict dynamics and the impact of conflict on girls, boys and their families.

Nexus **approach**

SCI Colombia considers that “lasting peace is a premise and requirement for the exercise of all human rights”. One of our strategic priorities involves reinforcing complementarity between humanitarian and development frameworks in order to contribute to peacebuilding processes. This involves supporting government entities at local and national levels to fulfil responsibilities as duty bearers at the local and national levels. Peacebuilding is understood as a dynamic process involving activities that enable a society to prevent, manage and resolve conflict, without resorting to the use of violence. Activities may include peacekeeping, conflict prevention, reconciliation through restorative justice practices, security sector reform, the creation of early warning systems, and actions that strengthen systems and promote access to health, education, protection; livelihoods etc. We take a holistic and integrated approach to peacebuilding that brings together various sectors to contribute to the improvement of the living conditions of children and families affected by conflict.

SCI Colombia **five pillar approach:**

1. Mutual trust and co-creation with partners and strategic actors.
2. A strong contextual knowledge of children's environments, (family, school, community, etc.) and an understanding of the different experiences of children with diverse characteristics such as sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, territory, disability, and from urban and rural areas.
3. Participation of children and adolescents as both agents and beneficiaries of protection and peacebuilding.
4. A multisectoral approach (child protection, education, water and sanitation, nutrition, psychosocial care, poverty reduction), guided by child rights principles of non-discrimination, participation and the best interest of the child.
5. A core focus on positive child development.

Our approach is also guided by conflict sensitivity analysis which enables us to respond quickly and adapt our approaches in accordance with changes brought about by armed conflict, natural disaster and migration, and contribute to peacebuilding.

SCI Colombia is currently developing a conflict response strategy aligned to the current context of complex localised conflicts of varying intensities in different parts of the country. This requires a highly context-specific approach that blends humanitarian and development interventions and provides children and communities with a platform to speak out about their experiences of conflict and contribute to peace dialogues. A community-centered approach is being developed, grounded in the meaningful participation of children and communities in the design and implementation of programmes, with child protection integrated across the response. This strategy builds on lessons learnt from SCIs work in Colombia and links these to emerging opportunities related to the Nexus approach.



Key achievements

In Colombia, SCI have developed an intervention methodology for restorative justice and reconciliation based on strengthening the conflict resolution skills of children, adolescents and young people and supporting reparations for damage caused by the offender to the victim. The aim is to restore emotional family ties and re-establish relationships with neighbours, the community and the environment.

Key achievements include:

- Strengthening the capacities of boys and girls and community protection mechanisms to promote reconciliation and speak out about their experiences of conflict as part of a restorative justice approach. In 2019, 271 children from Cali and Bogota were involved in group workshops on the causes and consequences of conflict and how to resolve them through peaceful means. Staff accompanied children to undertake a variety of peacebuilding initiatives, including supporting inter-generational dialogue, using dance to challenge violence against women, using football to create space for reconciliation and violence prevention between girls and boys, and using radio broadcasts, YouTube videos and documentary film-making to demonstrate the types of violence that children face and to promote reconciliation. These initiatives were presented to municipal authorities, universities and CSOs in Cali and Bogota. The creation of 'restorative spaces' has supported community-level conflict resolution and reconciliation as part of peacebuilding.
- Supporting the active participation of children and adolescents in the drafting of current public policies and regulations, such as local municipal government budgets to ensure that adequate funding is given to child-focused services including sports activities for young people and investment in child protection services.
- Using campaigns to mobilise public opinion to ensure that the rights of all children are respected. The #pazmicompromiso (**Peace.MyAgreement**) is a social media campaign in which children and young people who participate in our programmes are invited to reflect on the challenges towards achieving peace and what children can do to support peace-building initiatives.
- Strengthening of primary and secondary education, and adequate early care and education actions in emergencies, aimed at guaranteeing and providing access to inclusive, safe and high-quality education for girls, boys and young people affected by armed conflict, migration and natural disasters in Colombia. In addition, our approach to education considers child protection risks in and around the school, to ensure that boys and girls can access a safe education.

Key learning

Below are some key messages, challenges and recommendations derived from the experience of Save the Children Colombia in linking humanitarian, development and peacebuilding in Colombia.

- Strong and on-going context analysis, including conflict analysis, is critical to understanding the social, cultural and relational dynamics within and between communities, and to help build on the capacity of communities for conflict resolution. This has enabled the creation of spaces for collective dialogue and engagement with peace processes at community and national level.
- In the current post peace-agreement period, there is a need for greater investment in supporting and building the capacity of children in Colombia to meaningfully participate in peace processes. At present, there is a recognition of adult survivors of conflict but very little focus on children, even though they are disproportionately affected. The Colombia office requires further investment to sustain and strengthen processes that enable children to meet, learn, discuss and present positions on political processes and decisions that affect their lives.
- Given the impact of Covid-19 and the increase in armed conflict in 2020, the Colombia office needs to **increase** our capacity to expand programming to prevent school drop-outs, address violence against children (including the recruitment and use of children by armed groups), and strengthen conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives.

This case study has been produced as an internal discussion paper and does not reflect Save the Children policy.

This case study was written by María Paula Martínez and María Teresa Cuesta M Research. We would like to thank staff members of the Colombia Country Office for their generosity in sharing their experiences and ideas.

This report is part of a series of briefs, guides, case studies and webinars led by the Nexus Task Team with the aim to inform Save the Children's policy and practice on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

More information is available for Save the Children staff on the Triple Nexus page on OneNet.