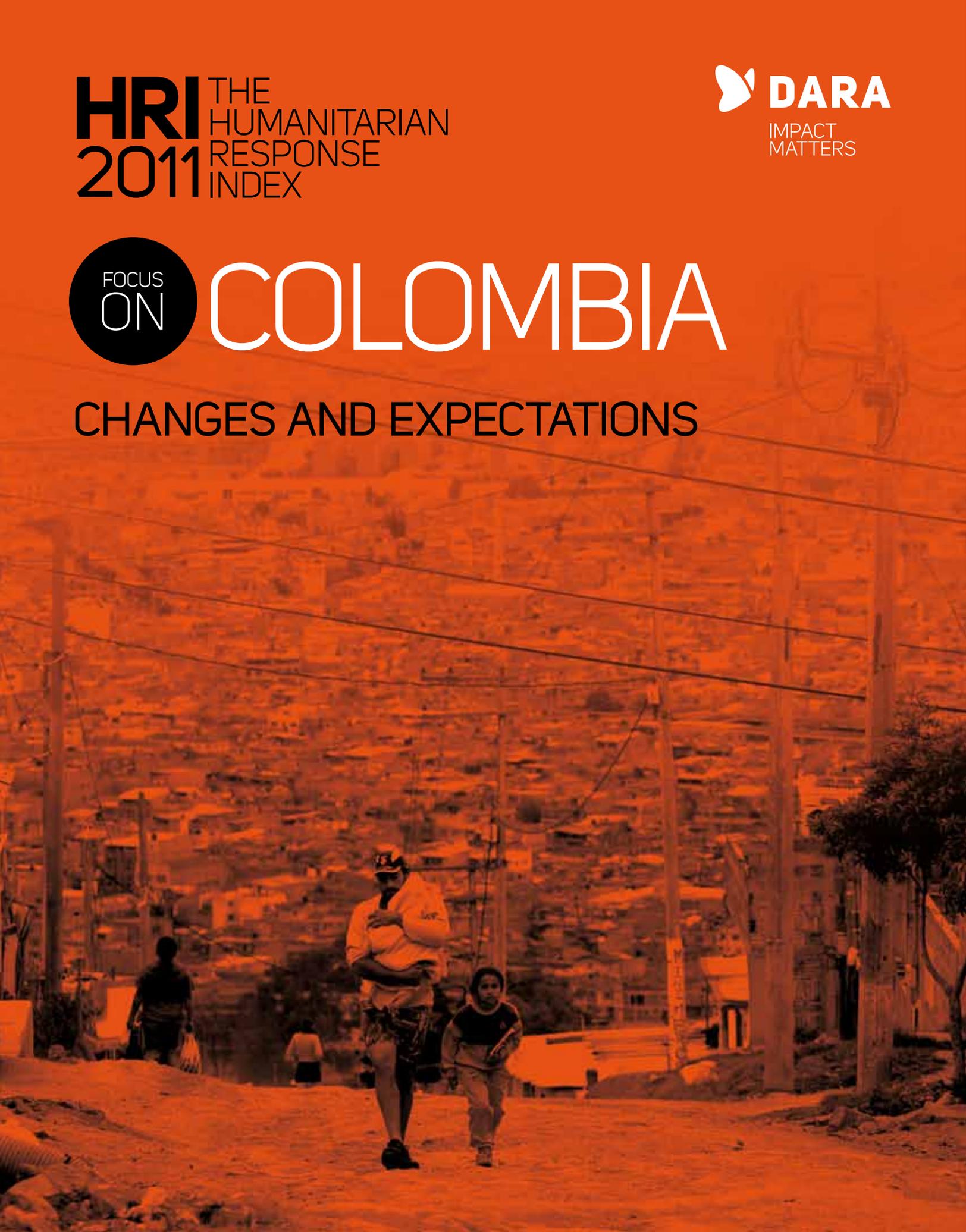


**HRI** THE  
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 **DARA**  
IMPACT  
MATTERS

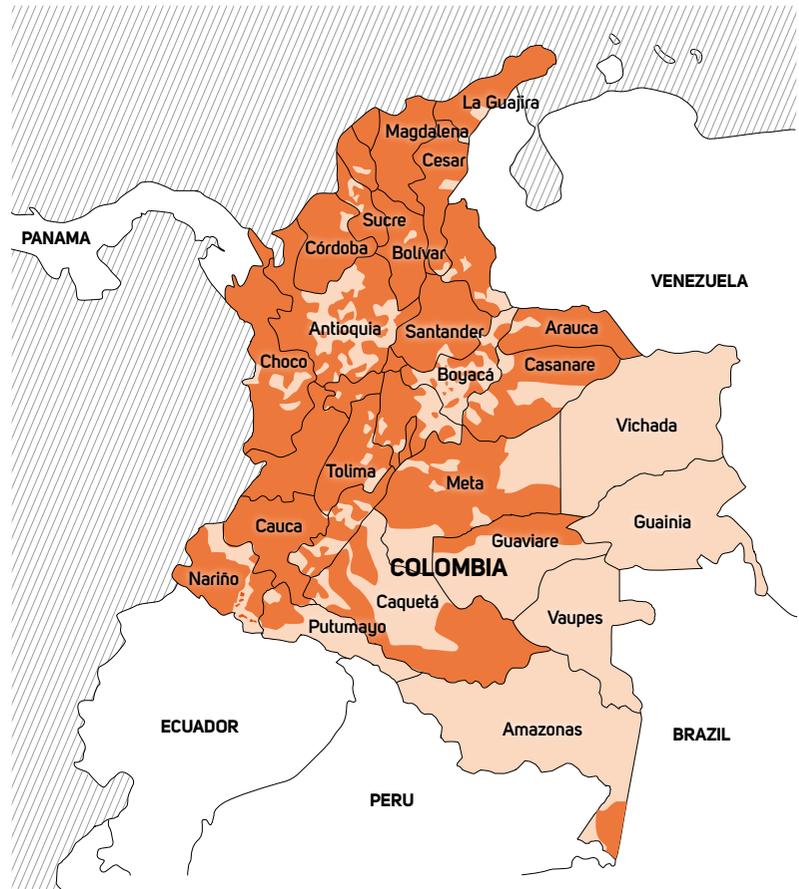
**FOCUS  
ON** **COLOMBIA**

**CHANGES AND EXPECTATIONS**



## THE CRISIS AND THE RESPONSE

- President Juan Manuel Santos, elected in 2010, approved the Law of Victims and Land Restoration. Among other things, this new law acknowledges a long-denied humanitarian crisis, yet the problem is far from resolved.
- The exact number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Colombia remains unknown, with figures ranging from 3,700,381 to 5,200,000. 2010 records indicate that around 280,000 people were displaced and many more were subject to confinement. In the first semester of 2011, almost 90,000 people were forced to flee their homes.
- It is estimated that 98.6 % of IDPs live below the poverty line - 82.6 % of which are considered extremely poor.
- La Niña caused the worst floods in Colombia's recent history, affecting 3,120,628 people, including displaced and already vulnerable populations.
- In response to the floods, the Colombian government created Colombia Humanitaria, a response and reconstruction fund. Nevertheless, the crisis still exceeded national capacities.
- Although the floods overshadowed the IDP crisis, the armed conflict remains the country's most pressing humanitarian concern.



**AREAS AFFECTED BY NATURAL DISASTERS (APRIL 2010 - FEBRUARY 2011)**



Source: IMMAP

TOTAL HUMANITARIAN FUNDING TO COLOMBIA IN 2010:

**US\$ 75.5 MILLION**

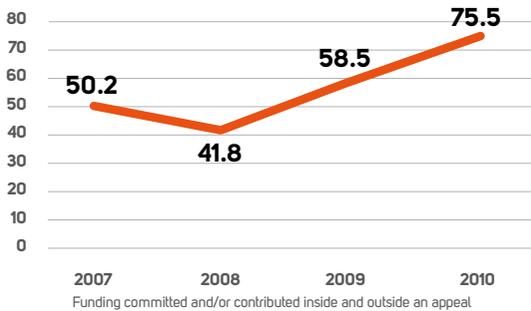
Cover photo: A poor suburb of Bogotá where displaced people settle. Due to armed conflict and poverty, many of the children here are behind in school. UNHCR's nine million campaign aims to provide a healthy and safe learning environment for nine million refugee children by 2010. [www.ninemillion.org](http://www.ninemillion.org) / UNHCR / P. Smith

# CRISIS AT A GLANCE

# COLOMBIA

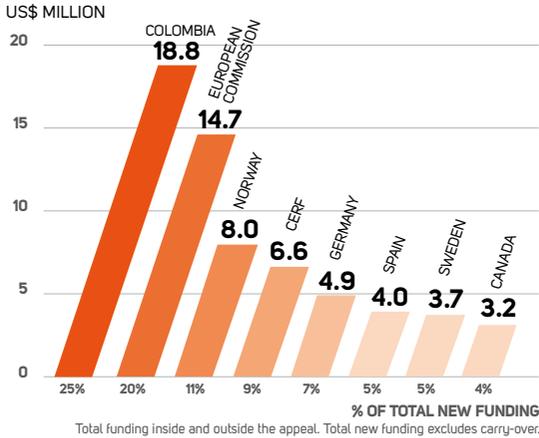
## TOTAL HUMANITARIAN FUNDING TO COLOMBIA

US\$ MILLION



## MAIN HUMANITARIAN DONORS IN 2010

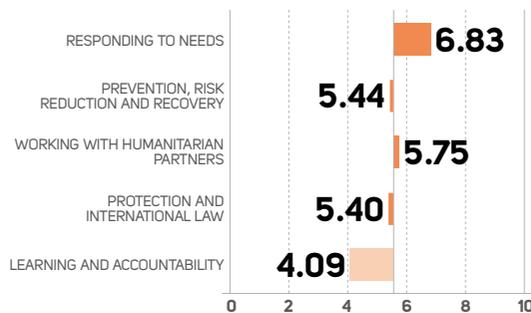
US\$ MILLION



Source: UN OCHA FTS, accessed in December 2011

## HRI DONOR PERFORMANCE BY PILLAR

FIELD PERCEPTION SCORES



Source: DARA

Colors represent performance compared to donor's average Humanitarian Response Index score:

● Good ● Mid-range ● Could improve

## DONOR PERFORMANCE AND AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

- Humanitarian aid has improved in the urban areas of Colombia, while attention to populations in more remote/rural areas continues to be insufficient. Donors need to step up their efforts in rural and conflict areas, where access to humanitarian aid and basic services is very limited.
- An overly cautious attitude on behalf of donor governments to avoid damaging their relationship with the Colombian government still limits the ability of the humanitarian system to respond appropriately.
- The new government's approach and acknowledgment of the armed conflict offers an unprecedented opportunity for the humanitarian community, in particular donor governments, to provide a more straightforward and coherent response.
- Donor governments and the Colombian government have yet to agree on a long-term plan to address the high rate of annual displacement.
- Donors and the Colombian government should prioritise disaster risk reduction and building local response capacities, as more natural disasters are expected to affect the country.

# CHANGES AND EXPECTATIONS

In 2010, the newly elected Colombian government created unprecedented expectations with the approval of the Law of Victims and Land Restoration. The new law on land restitution put an end to eight years of official denial of the existence of an armed conflict in the country – and therefore of its victims as well – and was evidence of a more constructive attitude toward one of the longest lasting armed conflicts in the world.

Former President Uribe's intransigent position towards the existence of a conflict with humanitarian consequences infringed international humanitarian law and drastically reduced humanitarian space, aid independence and access to vulnerable groups. On the contrary, the new Law of Victims recognises land dispossession as a key factor of the armed conflict and displacement and allows key issues such as protection of civilians to be addressed openly.

2010 also brought the worst floods in Colombia's history. By the end of the year, more than two million people across the country were hit by La Niña storms. Although the Colombian government responded with enormous willingness, gathering citizens and corporations around Colombia Humanitaria – a national public-private response and reconstruction pooled fund – a disaster of such unprecedented scale exceeded national capacities.

The new government's unexpected stance still needs to translate into concrete policies, especially after some doubts were raised regarding the limited definition of "victim" in the new law, and how it combines with existing laws that offer a better legal framework in protection of civilians and humanitarian assistance issues. Nevertheless, it is evident that the humanitarian system is faced with a new window of opportunity in Colombia. It is yet to be seen whether donor governments understand this new scenario and will fully take advantage of it by providing a more coherent and principled response.

## THE HUMANITARIAN REALITY

Inequity and lack of a state presence and investment remain the root causes of the humanitarian crisis in Colombia. In recent years, Uribe's military successes prioritised the recovery of guerrilla-controlled territories, but failed to acknowledge existing humanitarian needs. As a result, peace was not reached, not to mention development, whilst, paradoxically, Colombia proudly presented positive macroeconomic indicators.

In fact, Colombia's annual income grew at an average rate of 4.1% between 2000 and 2009 and its risk rating rose to Investment-Grade, allowing Colombia to join Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey and South Africa (CIVETS) – a group of countries considered attractive for foreign investment thanks to "wise policies and a solid economic ground" (Semana 2010). Moreover, in October 2011, the US signed the implementation legislation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Colombia, after years of blockade in Capitol Hill due to concerns of human rights violations.

President Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010) proved to be an intelligent propagandist, sparing no efforts to present Colombia as a safe, stable and prosperous country, while hiding human rights violations and turning a blind eye to the needs of the victims of the armed conflict. For that purpose, Colombia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs managed to keep international attention far from the humanitarian crisis, while welcoming bilateral aid agreements and partnerships. Thanks to this successful strategy, the Colombian government avoided uncomfortable questions and most Western embassies in Bogotá seemed to accept the official statement which claimed that there was "no armed conflict but terrorism" in Colombia, to

the detriment of a principled humanitarian response. As one interviewee told the Humanitarian Response Index (HRI): "Many diplomats mistake humanitarian dialogue with peace talks, and therefore consider it an improper interference."

The facts speak for themselves and even in the misleading official reports, figures on internally displaced persons (IDPs) – 3,875,987 people, according to the Colombian government (Acción

## ■ POPULATION CONFINEMENT BY LEGAL OR ILLEGAL ARMED ACTORS CONSTITUTES THE MOST ACUTE PROBLEM OF THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN COLOMBIA

Social 2011), and 5,200,000, according to independent sources (CODHES 2011) – remain extremely high. Although individual and family displacements continue to be the norm, massive displacements are on the rise, with approximately 280,000 recorded

displacements in 2010, evidencing an ever-increasing precarious security situation.

The transformation of former paramilitary groups into criminal gangs, as well as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia's (FARC) new strategy from territory-control to guerrilla-warfare, against a backdrop of drug-trafficking, all present major challenges to the government of Juan Manuel Santos. For instance, departments like Córdoba, in the North, are again scenarios of threats, killings and displacement, despite being officially tagged as "pacified territories," which calls into question the alleged security improvements in recent years. In other departments, especially in the South, fighting between the Colombian Army and armed groups never ceased. The land restitution process is also proving to be a complicated process, with threats and killings of returnees, making evident the need for effective protection of civilians.

While it may appear to be a contradiction at first, fighting, mine fields, direct threats or simply

fear continue to both displace and confine large numbers of people in rural areas, placing thousands of Colombians in a position of extreme vulnerability. In fact, population confinement by legal or illegal armed actors constitutes the most acute problem of the humanitarian crisis in Colombia. Confinement is a twofold reality that isolates entire communities, hindering the free movement of civilians as well as their access to basic services, rights and even humanitarian assistance.

This humanitarian reality was aggravated in 2010 by La Niña, the worst floods in Colombia's recent history, affecting 3,120,628 people or 6.78% of the total population. With 93% of municipalities hit, and four out of ten flood-affected Colombians being IDPs, the magnitude and complexity of the disaster was unprecedented and a challenge well beyond national capacities.

## THE HUMANITARIAN AID CHALLENGE

In 2010 most of the public and private resources and efforts went to the flood response. The responsibility to assist the affected population by the heavy rains relied on the Government's Directorate General for Risk and, notably, Colombia Humanitaria, a private-public initiative inspired by the experience of the 1999 earthquake response.

While recognising a huge effort and political willingness – around US\$83 million in cash and in-kind donations were made available – national capacity did not match the scale of the disaster. Mismanagement and a deficient prioritisation limited Colombia Humanitaria's performance by not making use of already available resources, partner networks and knowledge. Moreover, different legal frameworks for the assistance of those affected by the floods and by the conflict, led to parallel operations, which did not fully benefit from Acción Social's experience in the registry and humanitarian assistance of displaced population. As a result, unnecessary inefficiencies and delays occurred, lowering the quality of the assistance provided.

There are, however, other recurrent factors that account for the shortcomings in the response. Firstly, from the number of people affected by the floods and the widespread damage, it is easy to conclude that neither disaster risk reduction nor building local capacity have been a priority in Colombia, which is combined with deep-rooted deficient land planning to render people more vulnerable each time a disaster struck. Finally, good intentions and well-meant efforts are not enough to build a working response system overnight, especially given that Colombia is both a disaster-prone country and has endured several decades of one of the world's most protracted conflicts.

In an attempt to minimise foreign involvement and funding to United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) through the usual multilateral channels, the Colombian government has contended that it has sufficient capacity and experience to meet humanitarian needs. Although many donor governments have been willing to consider bilateral agreements as the best option, experience has repeatedly shown that

this is not the case.

As one interviewee told the HRI in Bogotá: "Budget support should no longer be an option for developing Colombia. Needs are still humanitarian."

In the face of this reality, the main international humanitarian NGOs in Colombia agreed to call for a more consistent international aid

approach, to allow for a more independent, neutral, impartial and efficient response (Consejo Noruego de Refugiados et al. 2011).

International humanitarian assistance in Colombia has traditionally been in a danger zone in its

The first time Henry had ever been out of his home region was when he was displaced by fighting at age 44 and had to find safety in Soacha, on the southern edge of Bogotá. His older brother, displaced ahead of him, helped Henry find a job recycling garbage. /UNHCR/ Zalmai



objective of helping victims of the armed conflict. The Colombian government has never allowed the United Nations to launch an international appeal for fear of foreign interference in what they consider internal affairs. This position also affected the recent response to the floods, as the Colombian government called for bilateral funding and blocked the launch of a UN Flash Appeal.

Therefore, in spite of signs of a more constructive attitude to allow humanitarian assistance in places where the state is absent or not sufficiently effective, thanks to President Santos' acknowledgement of the extent and the reality behind the humanitarian crisis unfolded by the armed conflict, Colombian authorities continue to hamper, in one form or another, the activities of international humanitarian organisations.

In Colombia, the international community faces a multifaceted challenge as to how to provide humanitarian assistance in a middle-income country, with a strong state, a highly politicised environment and an unstable security context. Humanitarian actors need to deliver aid and protect IDPs and confined populations in remote areas where there is no permanent state presence and humanitarian space is at stake.

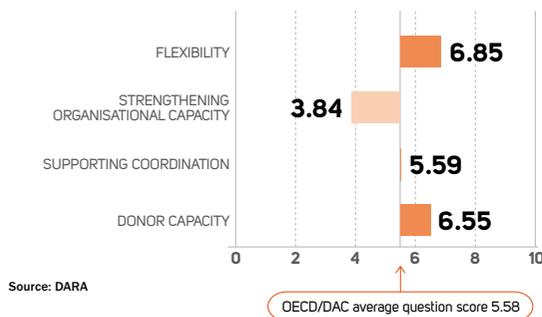
Even if only moderately successful, the the efforts of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, to maintain activities in the most

## INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN COLOMBIA HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN IN A DANGER ZONE IN ITS OBJECTIVE OF HELPING VICTIMS OF THE ARMED CONFLICT

affected communities constitute their highest added value. This success is possible thanks to their respect of humanitarian principles, whose importance are not always understood by the Colombian authorities, and the financial support of some key donor governments.

## DONOR PERFORMANCE ON WORKING WITH HUMANITARIAN PARTNERS

### FIELD PERCEPTION SCORES



Source: DARA

Colors represent performance compared to donor's average Humanitarian Response Index score:

● Good ● Mid-range ● Could improve

Complicating matters further, the already small donor support and presence is decreasing, as most of the humanitarian actors the HRI met in Bogotá confirmed. In fact, one could argue that the Colombian government might end up being successful in its efforts to present the donor community with an excessively positive image of the country. Humanitarian donors with little interest in signing a bilateral agreement and a shrivelling humanitarian budget may be wondering if they should continue in Colombia. In fact, according to the EU's new financial framework 2014-2020, development aid to Colombia, as well as to 18 other emerging economies, will end in 2014, allowing the European Commission to "help the poorest in the world" (EuropeAid 2011).

Occupying the lower ranks of the humanitarian donors' priority list, countries like Norway are closing their embassies in Bogotá, few (notably Switzerland and ECHO) have sufficient resources for field presence or a proper monitoring of the humanitarian needs and the projects they finance, and most feel

frustrated by an inability to transmit the gravity of the situation to their capitals. In sum, there is a perceived risk of donor abandonment, with the lure of more "attractive" humanitarian crises.

## HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION AND THE NEED FOR EFFICIENT AID

Many NGOs interviewed by the HRI were highly critical of humanitarian coordination, which they considered inefficient, although they recognised the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (OCHA) efforts. This criticism is mainly based on what they see as a UN-driven system, where more than twenty UN actors compete for scarce funds, forcing a complicated balance between them and leaving even the main international NGOs little leverage. As a result, not all UN agencies on the receiving end are the most suited for the job.

Clusters, one of the key elements for effective coordination, are seen by many humanitarian actors as disconnected from the field and, again, too UN-driven. The criticism is not limited to the way funds

## NO ONE DOUBTS COLOMBIA IS A COMPLICATED ENVIRONMENT FOR HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATIONS, BUT WHAT CRISIS IS EASY?

are allocated among organisations, but to the performance of some UN agencies as cluster leads, namely the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which "hasn't understood what cluster lead responsibility means yet", and the

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which "has not understood its role in WASH."

Many interviewees extended their criticism to the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC), who they perceived as more focused on balancing UN agencies' interests, and the relationship with the Colombian government and embassies, than on humanitarian advocacy and coordination.

As a result, international NGOs sought alternative ways to raise attention to what they considered the failures and the priorities of the humanitarian response in Colombia and were even taking steps towards a parallel coordination. In June 2011, after continuous delays in the release of a position paper as part of a Common Humanitarian Framework, 14 international NGOs signed the report *Humanitarian Crisis in Colombia caused by the internal armed conflict*, stressing the need for the international humanitarian system to fully acknowledge and respond to the humanitarian needs in a principled, efficient and coordinated manner (Norwegian Refugee Council, Plan International, et al. 2011). Even some donors were unsatisfied with the self-complacent attitude of UN agencies and, especially, of the RC/HC, the lack of positive results and a slow response.

ECHO is the only donor attending the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) meetings as an observer and is one of the few donors pushing for more and better coordination. Other donors are not invited to attend HCT meetings – not by decision but as a result of inertia. Donor coordination, suffering from the same setback, would be especially welcome in places with a high density of humanitarian organisations and funds, like Nariño, and to avoid situations where most donors stopped funding assistance in places like Córdoba just because they accepted the Colombian government's politically-motivated positive assessment.

The HRI found a common agreement among the humanitarian community on the need to advocate for and address the gaps in the response. No one doubts Colombia is a complicated environment for humanitarian organisations, but what crisis is easy?

## NEXT STEPS

Colombia cannot continue to be a humanitarian exception where responding to a crisis that has displaced almost 10 percent of the population is not considered the utmost priority.

At a point when the Colombian government has finally admitted the existence of an armed conflict,

and indirectly to the suffering of millions of civilians, the international humanitarian system has the obligation, and a valuable chance, to meet the government halfway.

## ■ DONOR FATIGUE IS UNDERSTANDABLE AFTER SO MANY YEARS OF HUMANITARIAN CRISIS, BUT IT IS ALSO THE RESULT OF AN INCONSISTENT APPROACH

This new scenario leaves little room for past excuses and a great deal of space for a principled response centered on the protection of civilians and prevention of further displacement. The humanitarian response must be comprehensive and also lead to sustainable solutions to the population. Donor fatigue is understandable after so many years of humanitarian crisis, but it is also the result of an inconsistent approach, with donors trying to work in the development of areas of Colombia where the armed conflict was still alive and then complaining about the lack of positive impact. While the need to prioritise humanitarian aid is unquestionable, the transition phase can no longer be neglected. For this endeavour, all humanitarian actors are important, but the donor community (and not only those already present in Colombia) and the United Nations have a fundamental role to play.



INFORMATION BASED ON 24 FIELD INTERVIEWS WITH KEY HUMANITARIAN ACTORS IN BOGOTÁ FROM THE 15TH TO THE 24TH OF JUNE 2011, AND 70 QUESTIONNAIRES ON DONOR PERFORMANCE (INCLUDING 58 QUESTIONNAIRES OF OECD/DAC DONORS). FIELD RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY IGNACIO MARTÍN-ERESTA. DARA EXPRESSES ITS GRATITUDE TO ALL THOSE INTERVIEWED IN COLOMBIA.

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# HRI THE 2011 HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE INDEX

FOCUS ON is a series of research papers on issues, donors and crises which result from our work for The Humanitarian Response Index (HRI). The HRI is an independent assessment of donor performance against Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles.

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Graphic design:  
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