



# PUTTING PEOPLE AT THE CENTRE

of the World Humanitarian Summit

A consultation with persons affected by conflict  
and natural disasters in Colombia  
led by Plan International Germany and *Fundación Plan* in Colombia

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# INTRODUCTION

## The World Humanitarian Summit and the Colombian context

The first World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), summoned by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, will be held in May 2016. In preparation of the WHS, numerous regional and thematic consultations were conducted during the years 2014 and 2015,<sup>1</sup> taking as their starting point the following subjects: 1) humanitarian effectiveness; 2) reducing vulnerability and managing risk; 3) transformation through innovation; and 4) serving the needs of persons in conflict. Communication and engagement with communities affected by crises increasingly emerged as an important topic under the various themes, reflecting a longer-term development in both humanitarian response and development cooperation, where efforts have been made to strengthen community participation, communication, and “accountability to affected persons” with the aim of putting people more firmly at the centre of the planning, implementation, and evaluation of assistance programmes.<sup>2</sup> With the intention of realising this vision of involving crisis-affected persons in the processes that aim to improve the delivery of humanitarian assistance and protection also in the WHS preparations, an initiative was carried out to listen to the members of communities affected by the conflict or natural disasters in Colombia.

Plan International Germany, with the support of *Fundación Plan* in Colombia and funded by the German Federal Foreign Office, conducted consultations with a number of actors, mainly the beneficiaries of humanitarian response, aimed at developing recommendations and points of reflection on how to improve the relationships between communities and other humanitarian actors and participation of the affected persons in the various processes relating to humanitarian action. Colombia was chosen for the implementation of these consultations because of the particular conditions of the Colombian context, which make it an interesting space for reflecting on the topics to be addressed by the WHS in 2016. Colombia is currently the only country in Latin America with an armed conflict that continues to affect the civil population. As a consequence, the population has been suffering a range of negative effects, such as

deterioration in the security situation, high incidence of displacement, and the deterioration of living conditions. Although the progress in the ongoing peace process between the Colombian government and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) raises hopes for an improvement, in the longer term, of the situation for the civilian population, humanitarian needs are expected to remain in the foreseeable future. In addition, Colombia is vulnerable to natural disasters; according to a report by the National Planning Agency (Departamento Nacional de Planeación), between 2006 and 2014, 26% of the total population estimated by the National Administrative Department of Statistics (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística) – have faced an emergency situation. This means that out of around 48 million inhabitants, over 12 million have been affected. Finally, Colombia has long been called a “forgotten crisis” and treated as such by humanitarian organisations and donors; therefore, it appeared appropriate to use the opportunity to raise this crisis scenario in the WHS debate.

During the consultations, it was pointed out that humanitarian response and development cooperation could not be seen in isolation, especially in a protracted crisis scenario like Colombia; although each one has clearly defined functions, they must work hand in hand. This consultation initiative focuses on the humanitarian perspective, which is guided by the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence. This document advocates that humanitarian response is more effective when it is able to help the beneficiaries in attaining their own objectives of development, moving from a strictly assistance-based mentality to an approach that prioritises sustainability by increasing the capacities of the beneficiary communities. This approach demands a more thorough contextualisation of the assistance and an enhanced and direct relationship with beneficiaries.

## Scope of the document

This document aims to give a voice to affected persons regarding the topics of the WHS and to present the ideas put forward in the various consultations conducted in Colombia.

The consultations were conducted in a way as to bring out concerns and specific suggestions from the participants, to bring alive the topics of the WHS in the particular context of decade-long conflict, and create ideas regarding the realisation of suggestions already put forward in other preparatory documents, including on the work and behaviour of humanitarian actors. The focus of the document is not an interpretation of the findings, but the direct reflection of the communities’ voices. Many of the observations may refer to issues already well-known from organisations’ daily experience or previous listening exercises;<sup>3</sup> as such, they may serve as a reminder that effective solutions are often still lacking.

## Methodology

Initially, 11 focus group discussions were conducted in the departments of Chocó, Nariño, Cauca, and Valle del Cauca, with members of communities affected by the armed conflict and/or natural disasters, which had been recipients of humanitarian aid. Most communities in these areas are indigenous or Afro-Colombian.<sup>4</sup> In selecting participants in the discussion groups, the criteria for a differential approach were taken into account, especially age and gender. Through such deliberate involvement of youth and women, information on specific perceptions and needs of those groups could be collected.

Upon collecting the primary information directly from the communities and drafting a document summarising the main findings of these consultations, a complementary event was held in Bogotá, where representatives of the principal organisations and humanitarian actors that are present and active in the country were invited in order to integrate a larger view of the actors involved in the planning, delivery, and evaluation processes of

humanitarian assistance and protection in Colombia. This extended discussion served as the basis for the development of the present document.

Various topics identified for the WHS were discussed in an attempt to contribute to understanding the way in which humanitarian actors engage with affected communities with respect to the delivery of humanitarian assistance and protection; it was also explored how this engagement, in turn, can be used to improve the effectiveness of the action, using vulnerability, innovation, and the context of conflict as dimensions to stimulate the debate. The tools used to guide the discussions were adapted from the community engagement initiative conducted by the WHS Secretariat itself in order to establish a degree of comparability and complementarity.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/whs\\_timeline](https://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/whs_timeline), accessed 1 April 2016

<sup>2</sup> For instance, the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) International or the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (<http://www.corehumanitarian-standard.org/>), and from the Paris Declaration on the effectiveness of assistance to the Mexico Forum in 2014.

<sup>3</sup> One of the most prominent of such works is: Mary B. Anderson, Dayna Brown, and Isabella Jean, *Time to Listen: Hearing People at the Receiving End of International Aid*, 2012; available from: <http://cdacollaborative.org/publication/time-to-listen-hearing-people-on-the-receiving-end-of-international-aid/>, accessed 1 April 2016

<sup>4</sup> Please refer to the Annex for details (p. 14)

# LISTENING TO THE COMMUNITIES: AFFECTED PERSONS' VIEWS ON COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND EFFECTIVE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

## What does effectiveness mean to the communities?

**“The assistance has allowed us to face other needs by ourselves. Having sorted out the food problem allowed us to use the money to fill the holes in the roof and, therefore, live with more dignity.”** Community of Pueblo Nuevo, Isla Grande, Tumaco

Community members explain that an effective form of help is that which allows them to face other needs by themselves and facilitates ways to solve immediate problems. To this end, humanitarian actors should enter into a dialogue about what is most urgent, rather than making such decisions on a unilateral basis. At the same time, listening is far more than simply hearing; it means that those who are assessing needs and designing interventions have to be able to decipher the codes used in communicating with them, knowing that sometimes pain, fear, and despair block the ability to communicate. Beyond looking at having an impact in addressing immediate needs, the vision of effectiveness should, consequently, include listening to different languages – including non-verbal – and encourage the flexibility necessary to adapt to a changing situation.

The general perception of people taking part in the focus group discussions is that the assistance received has been very effective. It has accompanied them at their worst times, and, by meeting their most basic needs, it has provided them with the opportunity to think about how to tackle other problems.

They highlight food assistance for boys and girls, particularly for those in early childhood, as an important contribution, because once families had access to nutritional support for their children, they were able to allocate some of their financial resources in meeting other needs such as clothing, mobility, or home repairs. There is great awareness on infant feeding and recognition of the importance of school in the lives of boys and girls.

Similarly, they acknowledge that assistance received in the area of home improvements has been very important, since a decent shelter is an important part of a dignified life; some of them even say that this type of support is as important as, or even more important than, the food assistance they received.

Several focus groups say that, to be more effective, it is necessary to know first the specific context of each group or community. In this way, the measures taken to facilitate the process, for example communication, can acknowledge the needs, characteristics, and capacities of the community, which are not the same for all communities. They tell us that, in their opinion, interventions are more effective whenever a previous diagnosis is made.

Participants also highlight the ways in which relief organisations relate with communities. They state that usually there is a lot of respect for the views of beneficiaries, but in some cases there are issues that are not fully understood or respected by organisations, and this adds weight to the importance of analysing in detail the characteristics of each group.

In this regard, there are complaints on the unreliability

**“If the children are well fed, they do not doze off, they pay more attention, and do not feel dizzy. They do better at school and come back with prettier drawings.”** Mother in Tumaco

of communication processes, which sometimes leads to difficulties in solving problems in a timely manner, for example when there are distributions of types of food that they do not eat, or even of spoiled food. However, it is important to highlight that communities acknowledge the good work done in this regard, but it is still a sensitive and important issue to be improved.

They also note that the fact of ignoring the context sometimes delays the delivery of much-needed assistance, such as construction of access roads and support to the mobility of those affected. Participants say that this is one of the major issues regarding long-term effectiveness of assistance. Though assistance certainly reaches the communities, the poor condition of access roads and natural events such as rain and its consequences, constantly prevent the use of such roads. They express that those who are going to work with them must be aware of the geographical context and the real possibilities of mobility. Therefore, relief organisations must know as accurately as possible the natural or other parameters, such as armed conflict, which may influence their possibility of mobility.

Moreover, the creation and maintenance of solidarity in their communities is acknowledged as an essential element for the effectiveness and impact of humanitarian response. Community networks stimulate social cohesion, facilitate the striving for the common good, and represent a great cultural asset. Despite some difficulties, these networks allow a flow of knowledge and a way to deal with their experiences in a more familiar way.

Participants also note that, to be more effective, any type of assistance would have to be complemented by an accompaniment of the beneficiaries, so as to provide them with the knowledge, stability, and security necessary to continue the process of improving their situation. They point out that the fact of feeling personally assisted and supported strengthens their chances of achieving a better quality of life. They suggest that if very specific courses are taught, it is also necessary to help them implement the knowledge acquired and turn it into a productive activity. There have been situations where training processes were not supported by the supplies required for income generation, this created significant frustration for participants.

**“The Teacher [of the organisation providing support] promised to deliver chickens and pigs to start the process, but he failed to fulfil his commitment.”** Community of Novita

In this same vein, difficulties have repeatedly been encountered in making some forms of assistance actually useful, e.g. difficulties in processing of bank checks, further underlining the urgency of contextualizing as-

sistance and generating assistance processes, so that solutions offered can have the desired impact rather than ending up being a source of further frustration and suffering.

The most common complaint regarding obstacles to effectiveness is the undermining of humanitarian actors' credibility. Most notably, community members emphasise that the failure to comply with promises is the greatest enemy to effectiveness. This failure can lead to frustrations, confusion, and a deterioration of communications with affected persons, as well as of the coordination between actors.

Coordination among actors is highly demanded by beneficiaries. They see it as a prerequisite for preventing and avoiding repetitions, uncoordinated actions, and especially the unexpected cessation of activities. Participants observe that it often happens that one organisation expects another organisation to conduct certain measures and vice versa, with the result that none of them actually implements these measures. While each actor, government, private or third parties, have specific roles, beneficiaries are asking for an improvement in the quality of their actions by setting up clear roles and responsibilities and mechanisms that ensure best use of resources and effectiveness of interventions. To achieve this, it is seen as indispensable to have an active engagement of community members in designing and managing interventions, creating monitoring processes for ongoing actions, and identifying future ones.

As a conclusion, effectiveness has much to do with improvement of networks, increased participation, and shared evaluation processes.

## How can humanitarian response be more effective in addressing vulnerability?

**Vulnerability is understood here as the reduction of a person's or a group of persons' capacities to anticipate, face, and resist the impact of natural hazard or hazards caused by human activity, and to overcome such impact. It is a relative and dynamic concept. Vulnerability is often associated with poverty, but persons who live in conditions of isolation, insecurity and helplessness regarding to risks, shocks, or stress are also vulnerable.<sup>5</sup>**

<sup>5</sup> cf. IFRC definition of vulnerability: <http://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/disaster-management/about-disasters/what-is-a-disaster/what-is-vulnerability/>, accessed 1 April 2016



Participants note that training processes were among the most important contributions made by external assistance to the mitigation of the populations' vulnerability. They say they usually do not have time or money to attend formal education processes, and, therefore, they are left behind as their abilities and knowledge become insufficient for the job market, including new work opportunities. This leads to increased vulnerability. Obtaining new knowledge and abilities helps them to generate income, which also brings positive consequences on their state of mind and mental health.

Attendants especially value training courses on micro-entrepreneurship because they help them create and adapt their own work models and, in the best-case scenario, allow them to hire other community members.

**“The diverse workshops, courses, and teaching processes have taught us to think that we are capable of climbing out of the hole in which we currently find ourselves.”** Community of Tumaco

They say that the fact of not having their primary needs covered makes them more vulnerable. The lack of drinking water in some of the communities visited makes them waste a great deal of time and, on occasions, money, as they must go fetch it and distribute it in the community. In their opinion, this should be the duty of the authorities, or one of the main objectives of the assessments conducted from time to time.

Another factor contributing to a high level of defencelessness is the deterioration of public facilities such as schools, community rooms, or health centres. Very rarely appropriate solutions are found for this kind of situation. As a consequence, insecurity, the lack of services and space for constructive community engagement, and the misuse of public spaces render communities more vulnerable, in particular girls, boys, and adolescents.

When they see that external assistance arrives with inappropriate supplies or materials, and what is provided to the communities wears down quickly, this causes problems and a feeling that they have been mistreated, and this affects their dignity. Therefore, they point out that anyone working with them must listen to what they consider is most necessary and appropriate, not what is believed to be most necessary with an outside perspective.

Moreover, they see a field of action of the humanitarian response in the increased support and training for identifying land that provides suitable and safe living conditions. In cases of displacement, whether from conflict or natural disaster, the urgent need to find a place to settle down often results in dangerous decisions, thus increasing the vulnerability of the persons (whether due to natural risks, insecurity in the area, illegal lands, etc.), which, in some cases at least, could be avoided if better information and knowledge were available.

They point out that identifying differences in culture, age, gender, and type of impact is fundamental to also understand differences in the response. If these differences are understood and taken into account, comprehensive and integrated interventions can be designed that are more effective in reducing different vulnerabilities specific to each demographic group. In several of the focus groups they enquire specifically why there is no more specific focus on elderly persons and their particular needs in the humanitarian assistance and protection provided. They point out that, if provided with adequate opportunities of participation, each group can also better contribute to the improvement of their own situation and that of the community.

Participants also observe that national relief and civil protection agencies are often constituted by voluntary personnel and usually not provided with adequate equipment. First responders have to be better equipped in order to restore living conditions following the first moments of a disaster.

Consequently, reduced vulnerability can be observed where the work of the organisations has an effect on:

- Training processes that support and increase opportunities for work and income generation.
- The generation of continuous and trustful listening and communication processes; identification of cultural differences and adaptation of communications and response accordingly.
- The creation of more reliable responses and durable solutions in protracted crisis situations.
- The inclusion of vulnerable groups such as the elderly, youth, women, boys, and girls, in order to address their specific needs and to include them in social transformation processes, acknowledging their potential as sources of knowledge and ideas.
- Supporting social cohesion, the attention to vulnerable groups, and the communities' own processes by focusing more on the rehabilitation of public installations.
- Support and strengthen the national first responders, who are often unprepared to assume their responsibilities.

### How can innovation contribute to a more effective humanitarian response?

**For the purpose of this report, innovation is understood to be a process of adaptation, change, and improvement that can help persons, communities, organisations, or systems to find solutions to operational and strategic problems with greater speed, and escalate such problems if necessary. Innovation refers not only to technology or a specific idea, but also to way of thinking that can be used to solve problems. Successful innovations are those that bring on improvements in efficiency, effectiveness, quality, and impact.**

As mentioned above, much emphasis is put on the need for more communication that reflected true participation in the processes, and which helped recognise distinctive features. Accordingly, it is suggested to implement training processes and provide counsel for the communities on the development of needs and capacity assessment. These assessments, in turn, should then provide the communities' perspectives on adapting and putting assistance and protection into context to improve the way communities benefit from them. This way, the contributions of the community can be a direct and valuable source of improvement and sustainability of living conditions.

In this regard, an idea repeatedly brought up is the formation of networks through which the communities themselves were enabled to monitor the effectiveness of the response in a specific community, but also across several communities in an area. The collaboration between several communities is seen as an added value, as it could facilitate learning lessons from each other and produce input that goes beyond a single community. Relying on persons of the community not only in the identification of needs, but also during the distribution of assistance, implementation of activities and, especially, monitoring of such interventions should help to strengthen collaboration within and between communities, as well as with the relief organisations.

Moreover, although community leaders are highly appreciated and valued in most of the communities - they have a special role and high degree of organisation in the indigenous communities - on occasions it is suggested that participation mechanisms should better ensure that the voice of the community members be heard in addition to those of their representatives.

The lack of coordination between actors is seen as having a negative impact on effectiveness. Therefore, putting in place new measures for collaboration between all the actors of humanitarian assistance by using new technologies and conducting more in-depth monitoring could be an innovating measure leading to improved effectiveness.

Comprehensive perspectives are necessary to approach problems, including those related to traditions; e.g., including men in the work performed around gender relationships and gender-based violence. Taking advantage of local knowledge in order to design new teaching forms for the strengthening of capacities is also seen as crucial. In addition, it is possible to build teaching strategies and tools for awareness-raising among children on the basis of the elders' experience and popular knowledge of communities.

Innovating measures requested from the humanitarian actors focus on the special impact on improving communication through true participation of community members. They include:

- Advising communities so they can learn to conduct their own needs and problem analysis and mobilise their own resources and capacities necessary to address them.
- Create monitoring and consultation networks between the communities, directed at a better participation of all members rather than relying only on the existing leaders in each case. This can bring about new solutions to traditional problems and more effectively strengthen channels for communication and participation of all community members.
- Improve the coordination processes between actors providing humanitarian assistance and protection.

### Which measure can improve humanitarian effectiveness in conflict situations?

In areas of conflict, affected persons cite personal security as their primary concern. Therefore, top priority should be given to any activity that can strengthen safety mechanisms, which they recognise is the government's duty in the first place.

**“Insecurity leads to conflict in the communities. Gangs are formed because of the presence of armed groups. Locals are exposed to these groups, apart from the fact that young people, because they lack the motivation to strive to study or work, end up involved with these groups. Communities are frightened, and people go out onto the street with fear. They are exposed to shootings, mostly between young people.”** Communities of Paraíso and Fuego Verde, Quibdó

Persons who have suffered forced displacement<sup>6</sup> say their greatest concern is the youth. Their reasons for this concern are that there is little chance to study or of getting a job to keep them occupied and start building a life plan that would help them break the cycle of poverty. These youth have been undernourished since their early childhood, which accounts for health problems that have never been detected or treated. This is caused by the long-standing precarious conditions in the communities of population displaced by any conflict, whether an armed conflict or a natural disaster.

Participants repeatedly state that, in the situations of conflict that they witness, youth have particular vulnerabilities and are faced with particular risks, which are often inadequately acknowledged and addressed. Therefore, special attention should be given to the development of interventions that focus on his population group; this should happen in a way that not only addresses their needs enables their participation, but also fosters their capacity as agents of change. Likewise, participation of the entire community should be a part of the peace oversight through the strengthening of the community fabric and of community-based organisations. In order to deal with conflicts, it is important to have a fabric of networks and innovate measures for conflict-resolution, participation, and communication between the various sections of the communities.

In turn, according to the communities that have suffered the consequences of natural disasters, the tensions and insecurities they face are different from the armed conflict and are the result of reoccupying highly vulnerable lands. They recognise that counsel, assistance, and support in the identification and adaptation of safe lands for relocation are key factors in providing stability and safety.

**“The Afro communities claim that apparently the indigenous are given priority in projects; that their projects are approved while Afros' are rejected.”** Community of Docordó, Chocó

Another important finding is the acknowledgment, by both Afro and indigenous communities, of the presence of cultural and ethnic “conflicts” (which could be described as “tensions” to distinguish them from the armed conflict).

In this regard, they suggest the importance of the existence of some kind of “cultural mediator”, who would work in the programme area on a permanent basis and whose duty would be to support and improve the relationship between donor organisations and beneficiaries. Cultural issues are often relegated in humanitarian response because, for example, the urgency of ensuring survival and the complexity of security situations tend to take precedence; this can lead to a lack of understanding, on behalf of the communities, of priorities set and activities planned by the organisations, and, in turn, a lack of understanding, on behalf of the organisations, of the repercussions of their interventions. Participants see this cultural topic as crucial, since their worldviews and traditions are a fundamental part of their identity; therefore, examining the cultural scope serves to adapt humanitarian response and improve its efficiency and effectiveness.

**“We need help to overcome the fear caused by losing our close relatives. You cannot live with fear. No one helps us with that. We cannot lead a normal life after what we have been through.”** Young mother of Tumaco

In addition, one of the views expressed most emphatically is how important it was to include psychosocial

support in the humanitarian interventions. Many participants who are victims of violence or of natural disasters believe that their main necessity is of a psychological nature. They feel that the adequate promotion of tools or processes is lacking to help them cope with the impact of the loss of loved ones, livelihoods, homes, support networks, etc. In addition, they do not sense any difference between the support offered to victims of the conflict, for example, and to victims of other situations, which shows a disregard for their particular condition of vulnerability, but also of the different psychosocial needs related to different experiences and personal crises. This analysis was conducted mainly by women.

In relation to the above, they also stress the lack of support in the search of missing persons, be it due to kidnappings, armed confrontations, or natural disasters. They complained that despite the figures that exist for this phenomenon in Colombia, authorities have not made strategic alliances with other entities for a comprehensive management of the situation. In the midst of a conflict, it is all the more necessary to strengthen the community-based organisations, prevent communication failures, and improve the humanitarian organisations' mechanisms for participation.

It also became evident that the victims' roundtables (“mesas de víctimas”) have to be made more visible, as they are not well-known, not even among community-based organisations bringing together victims of forced displacement. Likewise, it is important for relief organisations to have available databases with up-to-date demographic information on communities in affected areas, so that emergencies can be addressed in a contextualised and effective manner. In addition, municipal contingency plans are suggested to have a mapping and definition of institutional coordination to facilitate coordinated assistance processes in moments of crisis. Where there is no political will to coordinate and optimise resources, we lose the opportunity to ensure human dignity and the reinstatement of rights.

In conflict situations, special care should be given to revision of the victims' lists. Some testimonials talk about the creation of “mafias” around the resources assigned to victims' reparation, i.e. oftentimes they are not reaching those who really need them. This is why participants see it as important to create oversight systems with transparent access to accurate and first-hand information. The proposal goes beyond the simple control of the distribution of assistance to victims,

and involves strengthening the community fabric in such a way that communities are put in the position to perform this oversight function; this way, participation would also be promoted. Furthermore, it is essential that the information on the restitution of rights and services to which the affected persons can access should be adapted to all types of conditions of language, reading and writing skills, knowledge of the context, etc. Currently, difficulties are often observed even in the interaction with officials in charge of communication with victims due to limitations of this sort.

The following recommendations can be captured regarding work in conflict settings:

- Prioritise activities that improve the security and protection of the civil population; this a primordial responsibility of the State.
- Better differentiate between needs in situations of conflict and natural disaster; give more priority to psychosocial support and attention to the search for missing persons, as well as to support for their relatives.
- Focus more on the role of youth and the creation of new perspectives and life plans in order to remove them from special risks and put to use their potential.
- Identify “cultural mediators” to improve communication and understanding between communities and humanitarian actors, and support them in mitigating tensions between different affected groups.
- Update data bases with demographic information on the potentially affected population in anticipation of emergencies, in order to be able to respond in a more targeted way.

<sup>6</sup> According to UNOCHA, “Between January 2013 and August 2015, on average, almost 15,000 people were forcibly displaced every month in Colombia”; Humanitarian Needs Overview 2016, p. 7; 2 out of 4 recently displaced internally displaced persons are under 18.

# FINAL REMARKS

In addition to the findings solicited in relation to the WHS issues presented to the community members, it would seem opportune to highlight two aspects that have proved to be of high importance for the participants: community engagement and the role of youth. The following is a Colombian perspective, but can also be applied to other contexts in the Americas region, since the set of problems, the actors, and the levels of government can be considered comparable, notwithstanding the obvious differences that exist between countries.

## Community engagement

Accountability to the affected communities<sup>7</sup> has become a central theme to improve the pertinence and effectiveness of humanitarian response; the need to contextualise the form of interacting with the communities forces the organisations to create feedback mechanisms. Communication, listening and participation should precede the actions performed. Participants reiterate that it is important for the actors involved to understand that the community's participation and accountability to such communities should always play an important part in the search for a greater humanitarian effectiveness. It should be one of the core ideas of the intervention carried out. Participation should extend to all parts of programming, from assessing and developing response strategies to monitoring and evaluation. The views and contributions of the community should be taken into account in the allocation of funds, including the long-term organisational strategies. In order to strengthen such participation, participants in the consultations suggest that a better understanding of the leadership and representation structures in the communities is need to ensure that the relevant voices are heard. They also recommend investing in proximity to communities and listening between staff providing humanitarian response and its beneficiaries in order to enhance trust and mutual understanding. A condition for this is an understanding of the communication processes and technologies that each community prefers and is likely to use effectively; some communities suggested that rather than using new technologies, personal exchanges and focus groups would often be most appreciated and useful.

Other consultations carried out in South America at a larger scale<sup>8</sup> have indicated that humanitarian crises have other dimensions, which are not always taken into consideration but which, with the adequate levels of participation, could be first identified and subsequently addressed; these situations are by-products of everyday life in vulnerable communities, which have been called "social risks" and include all forms of delinquency, drug addiction, intra-family violence, gender-based violence, among others. Considering these factors, a coherent humanitarian response to crisis situations must take into consideration the continuous context of multiple vulnerabilities in which the affected populations live.

## Youth as a driving force

Community members identify special vulnerabilities in the young population in their communities, especially where they are exposed to the impact of conflict. This analysis is due, among other reasons, to the undernourishment experienced as children, the lack of adequate training and of opportunities in the job market, forced displacements, or the lack of a permanent and stable affectivity throughout their lives. It is felt that, while children are often receiving attention as vulnerable group, youth are often overlooked and under-served. As such, youth should benefit from a more targeted needs and vulnerability analysis, followed by adequate and specific measures to address those needs. In addition to listening to young people and taking their views into account in shaping future programming, their potential should be valued and incorporated in humanitarian programming as an asset rather than only as a group with special risks. Humanitarian response should learn to better tap into their enthusiasm and their potential to mobilise and transform their own communities with a view of creating a better future. During the consultations, a number of initiatives were mentioned and observed where youth are organizing themselves, often with the support of humanitarian or development organisations, and affect change in their own communities. Good examples include communication initiatives, be they radio stations, flyers, or other written materials, in which youth debate their situation, their problems, but also their dreams, vision of the future, and practical

examples of change and improvements. Including the youth gathered in these initiatives in communication with humanitarian organisations could bring new elements to the dialogue and create new options of action and attitudes.

When looking at the consultations conducted in 2014<sup>9</sup> on the perception of risk and sources of crisis with children, adolescents, and youth, they reflect the information obtained through the present consultations in Colombia, including the concerns of the young regarding livelihood opportunities, that is often considered as an "adults' issue"; this topic is a concern because, on the one hand, they recognise a difficult situation at the family level, but on the other hand, because in many cases it means that the very young end up in the street begging, working, or taking over tasks of the adults; in almost all those cases they have to abandon school, being fully aware of the negative impact this will have on their present and future.

## Conclusion

This document aspires to reproduce, in the most direct way possible, the perspectives of the persons consulted in the communities as the added value of the consultation initiative. It is important to underline that the findings also reflect and confirm many of the suggestions developed in the WHS preparation process. For example, the final report of the Global Consultation in 2015 also addresses the importance of strengthening the accountability to affected communities and their engagement in the assistance, recommending that trans-

parency at all levels and ensuring leadership and resources for the active participation of the communities in humanitarian programming.<sup>10</sup> This points to larger issues behind many of the issues raised above, including for example the need to put humanitarian actors in the position not only to listen but also to react and adapt according to the feedback received, which, in turn, is linked as much to a change of institutional culture as to the limits of flexibility in a lot of funding from institutional donors - issues that have to be addressed if accountability to affected populations is to be brought to life. At the same time, instruments already exist to take forward a number of those recommendations, like the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability, and the WHS presents the opportunity for humanitarian actors to make specific commitments on their use and implementation. Likewise, the subject of a more active role for youth has come out very clearly in the WHS process, not least in the broad, global survey conducted by the WHS secretariat that brought out "Guarantee protection and education for children, and engage youth as partners in emergency preparedness and response" as the most supported proposal across all topics;<sup>11</sup> it recognises the youth as much as human resources as their particular vulnerabilities, and recommendations call for the formation of a global alliance for the empowerment of youth and their active engagement in humanitarian situations. In this sense, the hope is that the present report can present some elements to inspire specific and operational changes to improve the work with the persons that humanitarian organisations seek to support in crises.

<sup>7</sup> According to enquiries in the region of the Americas the 'rendición de cuentas a las comunidades' from the English term 'accountability to affected populations', can result in misunderstandings in its Spanish translation as it is associated with financial matters, although its meaning is much broader.

<sup>8</sup> Regional Report "Children and Risk Management in South America", Plan International and Practical Action, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid cit. 8

<sup>10</sup> Global Consultation, Geneva 14-16 October 2015, Final Report; p. 89

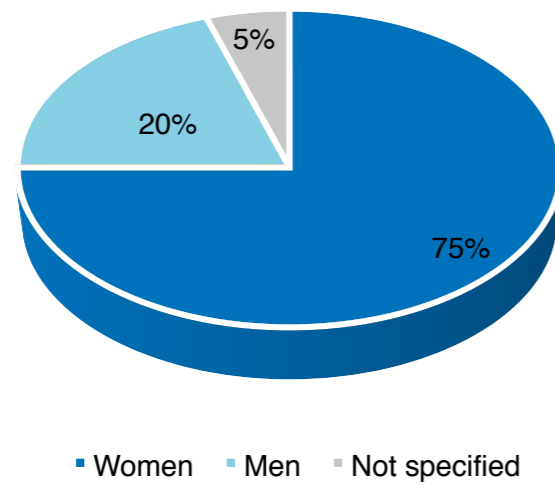
<sup>11</sup> Ibid cit. 10, p. 90; and <http://voices.whsummit.org/results>, accessed 1 April 2016

# ANNEX: PARTICIPANTS

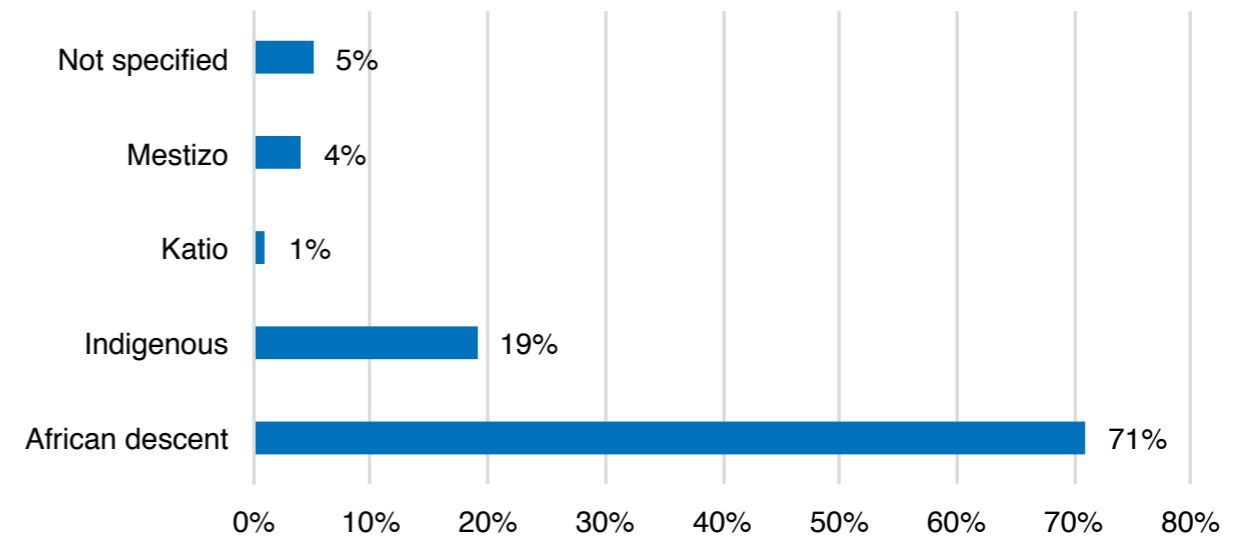
More than 230 persons participated in the various consultations with communities, with representation from the municipalities of Bajo Baudó, Litoral de San Juan, Novita, and Quibdó in Chocó; from Buenos Aires and Suarez in Cauca; from Buga and Jamundí in Valle del Cauca; and from Tumaco in Nariño. As a representa-

tive sample, 144 of them were separately interviewed to obtain the following, more detailed information on their situation. In addition informal group discussions were held with several groups of school pupils in Bajo Baudó and Litoral de San Juan.

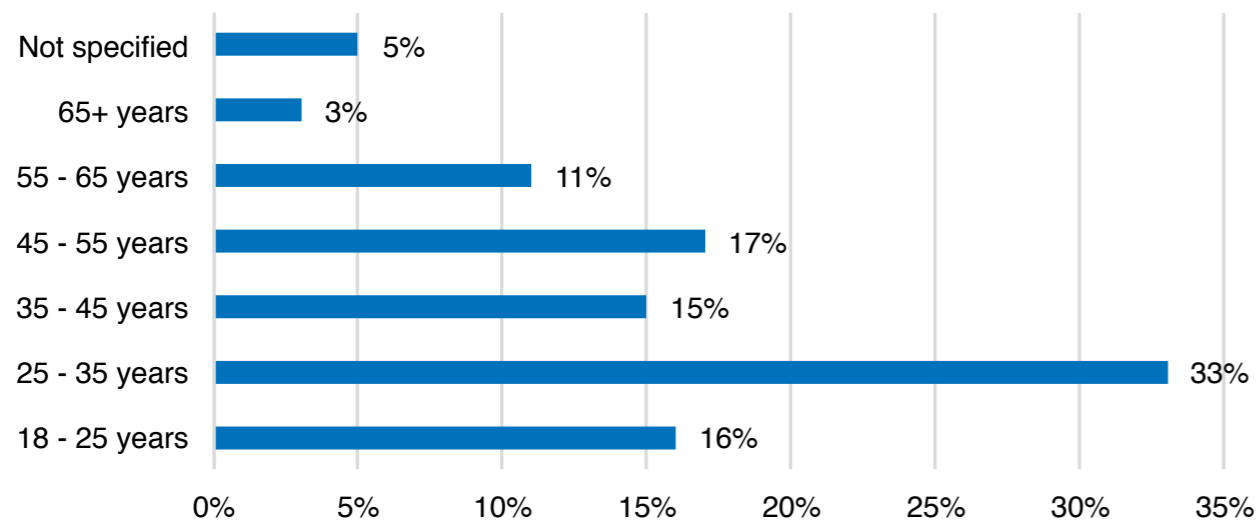
### Gender Distribution



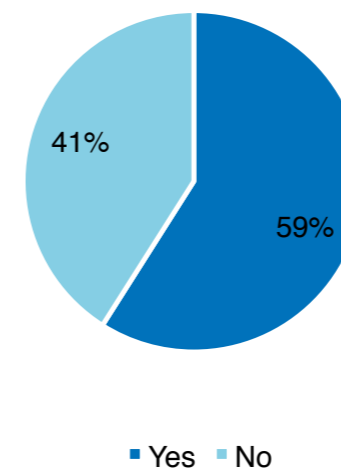
### Ethnic group



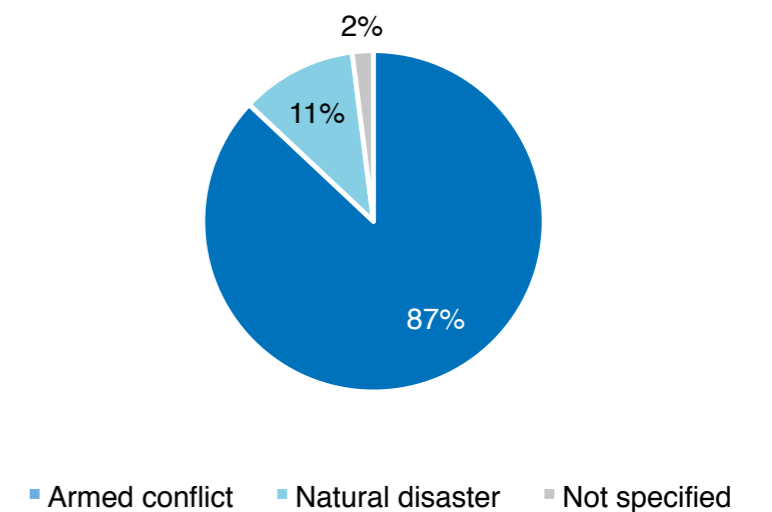
### Age distribution



### Displaced



### Reason for displacement







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