

Strengthening local capacities for peace and development through a human security approach in the northern border zone of Ecuador



UN Trust Fund for Human Security



Fast Facts

Country: Ecuador

Duration: October 2013 to September 2015

Implementing UN Agencies: UNDP; UNHCR; UNICEF; UNESCO; WFP; UNFPA

Other Implementing Partners: Ministry for Coordination of Security; SECAP; INFA; Ministries of Health and Education, local Governments; CSOs

Budget: \$2,041,831.78

Key Words: Conflict prevention; social cohesion; human trafficking; youth; women; education; health care

BACKGROUND

In recent years, security along Ecuador's border with Colombia has become increasingly fragile. While the Government of Colombia has successfully subdued decades of conflict in many areas of the country, illegal armed groups and criminal networks have congregated along the border and are crossing into Ecuador. Consequently, the northern provinces of Esmeraldas and Sucumbios have experienced the highest levels of armed violence and crime in Ecuador, with disenfranchised youth increasingly joining illegal armed groups, human trafficking on the rise and the illicit trade of drugs and weapons intensifying. The proliferation of crime and violence has consequently exacerbated existing social and economic vulnerabilities in northern Ecuador where the region has long experienced high levels of poverty,

unemployment, food insecurity and a lack of access to basic services, including essential health care and education. Meanwhile, competition over land use has been the source of conflict between indigenous communities and Afro-Ecuadorians for many years. Recognizing the complex dynamics of insecurity in Ecuador, in 2008, the Government incorporated the human security approach into its new constitution as well as its national development plan. This project provides an opportunity to realize these commitments and to bring Government partners and the United Nations system together with civil society organizations and the affected communities in order to address the multiple and interrelated challenges faced by communities along Ecuador's northern border.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the project is to strengthen peace and development through a human security approach in the northern border region of Ecuador. To achieve this goal, the project is working to: (i) strengthen local capacities and livelihood opportunities for the

prevention of human trafficking and the forced recruitment of youth by illegal armed groups; (ii) promote local capabilities for social integration and peaceful resolution of conflicts; and (iii) increase access to health care and education services.

BENEFICIARIES

An estimated 13,000 of the most vulnerable people in the provinces of Esmeraldas and Sucumbios will directly benefit from the project's activities. This includes some 2,000 young people, almost 5,000 Afro-

Ecuadorians, 2,500 indigenous people and around 4,000 refugees fleeing violence on the Colombian side of the border

APPLYING THE HUMAN SECURITY APPROACH

The recent rise in violence and crime combined with pervasive poverty and fragile social cohesion in northern Ecuador requires a preventative framework which goes beyond short-term fixes. To advance a comprehensive solution that is preventive rather than reactive, the project was developed in collaboration with local civil society organizations and the affected communities, as well as national and regional governments. Accordingly, based on a deeper understanding of the realities on the ground, the project's activities are designed to address the underlying causes of current and emerging threats in the region. Subsequently, to limit the recurrence of violence and crime in the region and to build more resilient communities, the project works to strengthen the capacity of local authorities and civil society to promote inclusive economic development and foster a culture of peace in the border region.

Moreover, based on this thorough assessment of the insecurities facing the communities, an integrated protection and empowerment framework has been developed to reconcile mismatches between existing top-down initiatives with local needs and capacities. For example, to prevent human trafficking and the recruitment of youth by illegal armed groups, training is provided to law enforcement, the judiciary, health workers and the education sector on the protection,

assistance and monitoring of victims. Meanwhile, vulnerable groups such as women, youth and refugees are empowered with alternative livelihood options through vocational training and assistance in small business development. At the same time, activities to empower young people and build their capacity to participate in community-based peacebuilding are complimented by training for provincial government officials and security personnel on conflict-sensitive community planning and collective rights.

Lastly, the human security concept offers a practical and dynamic framework suitable to address widespread and cross-cutting threats in a comprehensive and coherent manner through collaboration and partnerships between all the relevant stakeholders. By establishing joint coordination networks between the United Nations, Government ministries and civil society organizations, the project aims to lay the foundations for an integrated multi-sectoral response to the human security challenges along the northern border of Ecuador. Above all, the engagement of local communities and their civil society organizations in these networks ensures that the responses provided by the project will be people-centred and that the most vulnerable groups will be better equipped to strive for freedom from fear, want and indignity.