

Improvement of human security conditions for vulnerable groups in Soacha through the development of participatory, integrated and sustainable social protection solutions



UN Trust Fund for Human Security



Fast Facts

Country: Colombia

Duration: May 2010 to May 2013

Implementing UN Agencies: OCHA; WHO/PAHO; UNICEF; UNODC; UNIFEM; UNHCR; FAO; WFP

Other Implementing Partners: Social Protection Ministry; Colombian Institute of Family Welfare; local municipalities; NGOs/CSOs

Budget: \$ 2,547,654

Key Words: IDPs; informal urban settlements; education; food security; youth; women; empowerment

BACKGROUND

Colombia has enjoyed many years of economic growth and democratic stability. Nevertheless, a disaggregated view of the country's development revealed pervasive disparities between regions and population groups. When formulating the project, around 3 million people, displaced by nearly 50 years of conflict, faced significant daily hardships. Many settled in informal communities in the municipality of Soacha on the south-western edge of Bogotá. Joined by a continuous influx of rural economic migrants, the municipality is one of the largest recipients of internally displaced populations (IDPs) in Colombia. The uncontrolled growth of these settlements contributed to a significant deficit of quality housing,

which was further compounded by the impact of natural disasters including landslides. Moreover, ill health and disease, combined with limited access to basic health care, poor sanitation and hygiene, as well as food insecurity, posed significant risks to the human security of these communities. Displaced families also struggled to pull themselves out of poverty due to limited access to education and training, and a lack of opportunity for formal employment. At the same time, the presence of armed criminal gangs exerted further pressure on an already vulnerable population through violent crime, robbery and intimidation.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

With a view to improve the human security of the most vulnerable groups in Soacha, the project aimed to (i) protect vulnerable groups in a systematic, comprehensive and preventive way through the participatory design of public policies and the establishment of community groups and follow-up

mechanisms; and (ii) improve the living conditions of IDPs and host communities in the 6th Commune of Soacha through community empowerment and improved access to quality basic social services including health, education, food, nutrition and housing.

BENEFICIARIES

The project reached over 5,400 direct beneficiaries, with a special focus on IDPs, women and children, while some 300 local government officials and 100

private sector representatives were also engaged in the project.



NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

(i) Through a coordinated and multi-sectoral response, seven United Nations agencies, in collaboration with municipal and civil society counterparts, were able to tackle a number of inter-related challenges in Soacha in a more integrated and sustainable manner. For example, 520 young people, through extra-curricular activities and income generating initiatives, were empowered to look to alternative livelihoods versus engagement in illegal activities. At the same time, working with the Municipal Secretary of Education, six classrooms were built, and flexible education methodologies were developed to meet the needs of children from displaced families.

(ii) Moreover, by integrating community school gardens with the promotion of home vegetable gardens, the project improved food security in schools

and at homes and created a sustainable source of income for vulnerable families who could sell their extra harvest in the community. Meanwhile, food security was bolstered by the installation of 504 domestic rainwater-harvesting systems, which also brought benefits to health and sanitation of the participating communities.

(iii) A key achievement of the project was the successful engagement of national and municipal Governments. Specifically, the human security approach was influential in the development of a more multi-sectoral and people-centred Local Development Plan for Soacha – one that was better able to respond to the needs and gaps identified by the local community.

LESSONS LEARNED

The human security approach advances context-specific and comprehensive solutions that are embedded in local realities and address multiple and interlinked insecurities. By limiting the geographic scope to Soacha's 6th Commune, the project ensured that activities were relevant to the local needs and capacities and enabled households to participate in several of the project's activities. This led to an important multiplier effect, where interventions in one area had positive impacts in other areas, while also providing incentives for people to engage in activities that benefited the entire community. Furthermore, by focusing on the interrelation among food insecurity, poverty, violence and the influx of internally displaced people, a framework of cooperation between the United Nations and national and local stakeholders was established in order to promote a more targeted and cost-effective distribution of resources and capacities. This resulted in a comprehensive and

integrated framework that improved access to public services; reduced the indicators of violence, crime, unemployment and environmental degradation; and resulted in greater social cohesion. Lastly, through the protection and empowerment framework, the project demonstrated the importance of approaches that increase dialogue between Governments and their citizens. Through a diverse network of stakeholders that included the participating communities, local and national state actors, community-based organizations and private sector representatives, the project provided a forum for vulnerable groups, such as IDPs, indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations, women and youth to participate in community level policymaking dialogues. As a result, social policies were developed based on an improved understanding of the local situation and the project was able to tackle unaddressed issues such as land tenure and access to basic services.