

# Hope in the Face of Displacement and Rapid Urbanization

A study on the factors that contribute to human security and resilience in  
Distrito de Aguablanca, Cali, Colombia



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## **The Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI)**

The Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) is an interfaculty initiative involving multiple disciplines within Harvard University that integrate expertise in public health, medicine, social science, management, and other fields to promote evidence-based approaches to humanitarian assistance.<sup>5</sup>

## **The Urbanization and Humanitarian Emergencies Project at HHI**

The world is steadily urbanizing with the majority of the population now living in urban areas.<sup>6</sup> In many rapidly urbanizing states, the slum population now makes up over 60% of the urban populace.<sup>7</sup> This demographic transition is creating complex urban landscapes with disproportionately large slums that concentrate hazards and vulnerabilities to natural and man-made disasters.<sup>8</sup> Although urbanization is not traditionally seen as a humanitarian crisis, the humanitarian community would do well to pay more attention to the crises developing in urban areas.<sup>9</sup>

The Urbanization and Humanitarian Emergencies Program at HHI seeks to 1) advance knowledge on the chronic and acute needs of rapidly growing urban populations, 2) develop methods of understanding their vulnerability and 3) investigate programmatic and policy solutions. The program partners with community-based organizations, government authorities, international agencies and non-government organizations that have the ability to scale up the work of the program and have an immediate impact.<sup>10</sup>

The vulnerabilities that emerge through rapid urbanization are exacerbated in conflict and transitional contexts, where urban violence, psychosocial health and gender-based violence may be especially acute. Given the complexity of these environments, a human security research approach allows for a comprehensive examination of the requirements for minimum levels of survival (public health, personal safety, livelihoods and shelter), as well as basic psychosocial conditions (identity, recognition, participation, and autonomy). In

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<sup>5</sup>"Our Mission." *Harvard Humanitarian Initiative*. The President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2010. Web. 31 Aug. 2011. <<http://www.hhi.harvard.edu/>>.

<sup>6</sup>It is expected that 70 percent of the world's population will be living in urban areas by 2050. *State of the World's Cities 2010/2011: Bridging the Urban Divide*, UN Habitat, Nairobi, 2012, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup>Patel, Ronak, and Burkle, Fredrick. "Urbanization and Humanitarian Emergencies." *Harvard Humanitarian Initiative*. 2010. Web. 31 Aug. 2011. <<http://hhi.harvard.edu/programs-and-research/urbanization-and-humanitarian-emergencies>>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Patel, Ronak, and Burkle, Fredrick. "Urban Health: A 21st Century Crisis." *Health Exchange: Issue 7 Responding to Emergencies*. 6 July 2011. Web. <<http://healthexchangenews.com/2011/07/06/urban-health-2/>>.

<sup>10</sup>Patel, Ronak, and Burkle, Fredrick. "Urbanization and Humanitarian Emergencies." *Harvard Humanitarian Initiative*. 2010. Web. 31 Aug. 2011. <<http://hhi.harvard.edu/programs-and-research/urbanization-and-humanitarian-emergencies>>.

order to further human security improvements and mitigate risks, it is essential to identify and develop policies for strengthening resilience mechanisms utilized by marginalized communities.

## **Objective**

This study seeks to offer a practical examination of resilience in complex urban landscapes for the academic community and humanitarian actors at the local and international levels. Distrito de Aguablanca (Cali, Colombia), a complex settlement area with some 600,000 residents, functions as a case study in human security and resilience that can inform public policy and community level decision making in especially difficult humanitarian environments, with sociopolitical volatility, large populations of internally displaced persons, and high crime and violence rates.

## **Acknowledgements**

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Most importantly, we would like to thank the research participants for sharing their time, experiences, memories, and insight to assist in understanding the factors that contribute to resilience.

***“A pesar de tantas cosas, otro mundo es posible. La gente siempre tiene una esperanza que esto va cambiar, pero tiene que cambiar con nosotros.”***

***“Despite the challenges, another world is possible. The community always has hope that things will change, but it needs to change with us.”***

– Viviana Velasco Lava  
Coordinadora Area Mujer y Familia,  
Fundación Paz y Bien, Distrito de Aguablanca  
Julio 28, 2011

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This study sought to explore how the concept of resilience can be a useful tool to engage policy makers, humanitarian and development aid professionals as well as local community members and leaders on innovative ways to address the complex problems of marginalized communities. To ascertain the factors that contribute to resilience in the face of displacement, war, violence and economic hardship, a qualitative research project was undertaken in *Distrito de Aguablanca* in Cali, Colombia. Six relevant themes that seem to bolster resilience emerged from the study: 1) the importance of respect, 2) the significance of housing to physical and emotional security, 3) livelihood innovation, 4) role of community, 5) values, family and spirituality and 6) psychosocial welfare. Focus groups and one-on-one key informant and semi-structured interviews with men and women in professional and community roles highlighted the importance of leveraging both external and personal material and non-material resources to promote the value of supporting these themes. Of critical importance was the overwhelming emphasis by the respondents on “being heard” and respected as well as the significance of shelter as a source of informal income and physical and emotional security. While funding for psychosocial support and wellbeing would be beneficial, the role of grassroots community-led informal social networks as a source of great strength for the community should not be overlooked. Funding should be targeted at psychosocial programs and counseling for persons affected by displacement and violence, but existing community forums, resources and “spaces” should be leveraged and strengthened.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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Based on the aforementioned salient factors that emerged from focus groups, interviews and observational research, we make the following overarching recommendations:

### **Investment in Psychosocial Programs and Counseling Resources**

We recommend greater awareness, attention and investment in psychosocial programs and counseling for persons affected by displacement, as well as physical, sexual and emotional violence. Given the profound and long lasting impact that displacement, war, violence and economic hardship can have on an individual’s wellbeing and ability to survive and thrive, counseling programs (individual and/or group counseling services) would greatly enhance resilience. To this end, religious or community counseling programs and social service organizations and NGOs with proven track records of providing quality psychosocial and counseling resources should be strengthened.

### **Reliance on Existing Community-led Support Groups**

We recommend that community members leverage existing forums and community spaces for self-organized and self-run support groups with additional support from social service networks and organizations. Social service agencies and NGOs and humanitarian actors should identify community-based groups that are inclusive, participatory, and representative, and offer targeted support to enhance local capacity and empowerment.

### **Investment in Comprehensive Housing Solutions**

We recommend increased investment in housing solutions that enhance physical security, livelihoods, psychosocial wellbeing, and integration with the local and broader communities. This requires a comprehensive understanding of community needs, beyond the basic physical infrastructure and land tenure rights, and could emerge from partnerships with local NGOs and civil society organizations.

### **Support for and Respect for the Role of Spirituality and Family Values**

We recommend additional support (including recognition, funding and partnerships) and respect for spirituality and family values, and the vital role they can play in fostering hope and optimism in the future for persons affected by displacement and violence. Religious organizations can be a source of psychosocial and material support for populations under stress. They can serve to create and maintain “spaces” where individuals affected by humanitarian crises can be encouraged and motivated as well as deliver a broad array of humanitarian aid and services.

## **PROJECT AIM AND BACKGROUND**

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This research project aims to serve as a case study for improving humanitarian and development assistance to marginalized communities based on existing local resilience mechanisms. An underlying assumption is that studying challenges surmounted by community members could help unpack and foster a deeper understanding of issues of migration and marginalized populations at large. The expectation is that studying a protracted IDP crisis, like the four-decade experience of *Distrito de Aguablanca*, would yield valuable comparative insight into urban marginalized population vulnerabilities and capacities elsewhere in the world. More broadly, this project is expected to contribute to the identification and analysis of the factors and efforts that comprise an inclusive social fabric, and a better understanding of how these fabrics can be woven or torn.

## PROJECT BACKGROUND

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This research project emerged from and forms part of the Urbanization and Humanitarian Emergencies Research Program, which brings attention to the pressing challenges and vulnerabilities generated by the complex urban landscapes rapidly growing in developing countries. The key challenges identified by the program include:

- Concentration of risks and hazards to health and wellbeing;
- Overburdened health systems and public services;
- Improper basic infrastructure including water and sanitation systems, housing and transportation; and
- Inadequate security, legal and economic protections relative to the population size and needs.

The Urbanization and Humanitarian Emergencies Research Program focuses on better assessing these challenges by gathering targeted information and disaggregating citywide data. This has offered a view of urban pockets with alarming human insecurity and concentrated vulnerability to humanitarian emergencies that may otherwise be obscured. This study aims to contribute to the Research Program by delivering an integrated analysis of vulnerabilities, as well as the community-based capacities to cope with them, in a complex Latin American context: the urban margins of armed conflict.

## METHODS

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The project research team is comprised of three researchers who traveled to Bogotá and Cali, Colombia, for six weeks, to conduct observational research, focus groups, individual key informant interviews and semi-structured individual and group interviews with a broad selection of humanitarian, development and social workers, university professors and researchers, civil society leaders, and members of marginalized communities.

With a research framework of human security and resilience, the research team constructed and asked broad thematic questions on public health, shelter/housing, physical security, livelihoods and psychosocial wellbeing. Given the semi-structured nature of focus groups and interviews, research participants were encouraged to hone in on the key issues, concerns, priorities and assets within their communities, while the researchers attempted to provide limited guidance so as to minimize bias. Interviewers asked open-ended questions to further explore important issues and themes identified by the respondents, including the psychosocial components of resilience that may allow

community members to survive and even thrive in the face of displacement, acute threats, and complex humanitarian environments.

Prior to the field work in Colombia, the interviewers prepared by meeting in the Boston-area with academic experts on human security, resilience, internal migration, and urbanization. Thereafter, key informant and community interviews and focus groups were conducted in Spanish in Bogotá and Cali (Colombia) with humanitarian and development professionals, academics, civil society leaders and community members.

Research data was gathered using the following research methods:

## **1. Observational research**

Ethnographic research was conducted in Bogotá and Cali, Colombia. The goal was to use observational research to gain an understanding of key factors that contribute to resilience in the midst of displacement, war, violence and economic hardship. The research team spent most weekdays in the neighborhoods of Distrito de Aguablanca to better understand the community and gain access to NGO and public agency leaders and community leaders and members and conduct observational research. Three illustrative examples are worth noting here.

First, the research team attended and observed *Jueves de Paz* (Peace Thursdays), a weekly meeting for IDPs held at the Aguablanca Catholic church in Marroquin II and organized by Fundación Paz y Bien, a local NGO in *Distrito de Aguablanca* with 25 years of service in the community and unprecedented access to community members. The meeting hosted approximately 120 persons, of whom 95% were of afro-descendent, 70% women, and the majority over 50 years old, many with young children.<sup>11</sup> The meeting was explicitly intended to provide practical information (e.g., available social services, information on relevant legislation and local elections) and psychosocial accompaniment (e.g., motivational and spiritual messages), and community integration. During Peace Thursdays, the chapel is tightly packed by mostly elderly afro-Colombians who have either been given displaced status, are waiting on displacement status or appealing the government's ruling. The majority seek permanent housing in or on the outskirts of *Distrito de Aguablanca*. Housing is a persistent and urgent topic among the participants of Peace Thursdays. On one of the days the team attended *Jueves de Paz*, *Hermana* (Sister) Alba Stella Barreto Car, Founder and Executive Director of *Fundación Paz y Bien* and unofficial gatekeeper within the *Distrito de Aguablanca*, urged the community members to be wary of local political

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<sup>11</sup> Demographic characteristics of IDPs supported by Fundación Paz y Bien (namely afro-descendant older women, many of whom are primary or sole caretakers of children and grandchildren) are key as they highlight the special needs and potential vulnerabilities that humanitarian actors should carefully consider in their project designs.

candidates who made empty promises that they could not keep. She cautioned the congregants not to “sell” their votes for a month worth of food. As she read from the Gospels in her small bible, she reminded her audience of the teachings of Jesus on truth. According to Hermana Alba Stella, IDPs and members of the host communities look forward to attending the weekly community meetings and actively participate because they benefit from the institutional and community support.

Second, the research team listened in on a group’s music practice session with displaced afro-descendant elders from the Colombian Pacific coast. The music group, supported by *Fundación Paz y Bien* and Help Age International, performs traditional music with percussions and call-and-response vocals and serves to support cultural traditions, community integration, and is a source of psychosocial healing through mantra-like choruses such as “*Paz, Queremos Ya*” (We Want Peace Now).<sup>12</sup>

Third, Hermana (sister) Isabelle Tombolaly, Director of *El Centro de Capacitación Alejandrina Chávez* (Center for Home Management and Capacity-Building), invited the research team to sit in on a facilitated weekly women’s meeting named “*Viernes de Mujeres*” (Women’s Fridays) run by housemaids. The program specifically reaches out to female heads of households and provides job training in housekeeping and household management. Along with job training and placement, the participants receive advice and counseling regarding their employment rights and benefits; as well as assistance in obtaining the necessary legal documentation to allow them to find gainful employment. Each year approximately 220 people graduate from the Center. During the research team’s observational visit, 10 women were in attendance, 8 of them afro-descendent, and most affected by forced displacement. Most of the women had numerous children (more than 5) and seemingly limited male support. The meeting, which routinely begins with a 5-minute meditation and prayer, aims to provide community-based psychosocial support, homemaking skills and capacity building. The members also focus on developing collaborative livelihood mechanisms such as job sharing. In addition to skill-based support, the women also work on life plans and group goals such as taking an overnight trip to a vacation island off the coast of Colombia.

## **2. Informational meetings: in Bogotá and Cali**

Informational meetings were conducted in Bogotá and Cali to provide context and identify key informants and actors in *Distrito de Aguablanca*. The research team met with 38 professionals and experts from a range of social and humanitarian aid organizations.

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<sup>12</sup> Hill, Joanne. "Stories of Resilience from Aguablanca", Web log post. *HelpAge International*. 14 Sept. 2011. Web. <<http://www.helpage.org/blogs/joanne-hill-2474/stories-of-resilience-from-aguablanca-329/>>.

### **3. Key informant interviews with humanitarian aid and social workers/professionals, including civil society leaders and activists in *Distrito de Aguablanca* in Cali, Colombia**

Four interviews were conducted with key informants who were humanitarian aid and social workers/professionals and civil society leaders with work experience in *Distrito de Aguablanca*.

The Cali chapter of the Humanitarian Studies Institute also helped identify several NGOs operating in the communities of *Distrito de Aguablanca*. Security concerns necessitated that the research team work closely with local NGO administrators and community leaders to secure entry into the *Distrito de Aguablanca* communities. These NGOs assisted in providing community access and the identification of a diverse pool of research participants.

### **4. Interviews of Community Members in *Distrito de Aguablanca***

- Four focus groups, each with 3-9 individuals, were conducted in *Distrito de Aguablanca*. Focus groups included women and men ages 18 – 80 plus. A total of 23 people participated in the focus groups.
- 12 interviews of community members comprised the rest of the research in *Distrito de Aguablanca*.

### **Research Instrument**

The research instrument was made up of semi-structured, qualitative, in-depth questions, focused on human security and psychosocial elements of resilience. Two research instruments (one for community leaders/activists, and another for community members) were drafted, translated, piloted with students and research experts from Fundación Universitaria Juan N. Corpas and local community leaders as well as members associated with *Fundación Paz y Bien*. The final instrument was modified several times over the initial two weeks of research to fit the context of *Distrito de Aguablanca*. The interview questions were based on the Sense of Coherency (SOC) scale,<sup>13</sup> also known as the Orientation to Life Questionnaire, designed in an attempt to understand human adaptation and response to extreme stressors, and then adapted to fit the language and cultural context of *Distrito de Aguablanca*. The questions sought to understand the participants' ability to cope and adapt to difficult economic situations, safety threats, psychosocial trauma, health and community challenges. It also sought to understand their attitude toward the future and their source of

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<sup>13</sup> Antonovsky, Aaron. *Unraveling the Mystery of Health: How People Manage Stress and Stay Well*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987. Print.

optimism since the concept of resilience was understood in those terms, but not as a literal translation of the English word. Interviews and focus groups lasted between 45 minutes and 4 hours, and were based on the research interview guide with follow up questions based on the topics or issues identified by the participants.

### **Participant Protections**

Research participants were given the option of written informed consent, oral informed consent, or waiver of documentation of consent, which were witnessed and documented by the researchers. Participation was voluntary and participants were informed of their right to refuse to answer any question or to discontinue their participation at any time. In certain cases, due to participant illiteracy, safety concerns over documentation or general cultural unfamiliarity with consent forms and practices, participants were automatically offered the waiver of documentation of consent.

The study was approved by the Partners Healthcare Institutional Review Board (BWH IRB) through the Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School; as well as by the Social, Behavioral, and Educational Research Institutional Review Board (SBER IRB) of Tufts University.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

Two of the research team members conducted the meetings, interviews and focus groups in Spanish, while the third researcher recorded and digitized the research data. Handwritten notes and audio files were translated and the transcripts were open-coded. The research team members have collaboratively generated codes and identified a set of key unifying themes, explored crosscutting narratives, and drawn lessons that may be applicable in similar contexts.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

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### **Why the Focus on Resilience and Human Security?**

This research project sought to focus on factors that contribute to bolstering human security and resilience in complex urban environments, rather than on the sources and causes of displacement as a means of improving humanitarian and development aid to marginalized communities.

### **Human Security**

The human security framework utilized by this research drew from Jennifer Leaning, MD, SMH and Sam Arie's *Human Security: A Framework for Assessment In Conflict and Transition*.<sup>14</sup> Leaning and Arie define human security as including "the social, psychological, political, and economic factors that promote human well being through time." They argue that human security's "key components reflect not only the need to ensure human survival at any point in time, but also the need to sustain and develop a core psychological coping capacity in populations under stress." They assert that, "These dual needs provide policy guidance in two areas:

- a) how to secure minimum levels of survival (with water, food and shelter) and provide minimum levels of protection from life threats; and
- b) how to support basic psychosocial needs for identity, recognition, participation, and autonomy."

Leaning and Arie further argue that "for a human being to have human security, he or she must have a bundle of basic resources, both material and psychosocial, that constitute an indivisible set of necessary inputs and conditions for stability and well-being." In order for an individual to fully be part of ("be receptive to or capable of") a "development strategy" he or she must have access to basic resources. By utilizing this framework, this research sought to understand and compare what underlying factors displaced persons identified as contributing to human security and resilience after traumatic experiences.

## **Resilience**

Craig L. Katz, MD, in his essay *Rituals, Routines, and Resilience* illustrates resilience as "a tree that is unbending in the face of a hurricane's winds, that bends but returns upright but no less stable."<sup>15</sup>

The United States Department of Homeland Security defines resilience as:

1. ability of systems, infrastructures, government, business, and citizenry to resist, absorb, recover from, or adapt to an adverse occurrence that may cause harm, destruction, or loss of national significance
2. capacity of an organization to recognize threats and hazards and make adjustments that will improve future protection efforts and risk reduction measures

This study heavily drew from the resilience framework constructed by Astier Almedom, PhD, which defines resilience as "the capacity of individuals, families, communities,

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<sup>14</sup> Leaning, Jennifer, and Arie, Sam. "Human Security: A Framework for Assessment In Conflict and Transition." *CERTI (Linking Complex Emergency Response and Transition Initiative)*. USAID and Tulane University, Dec. 2000. Web. <<http://www.certi.org/publications/policy/human%20security-4.PDF>>.

<sup>15</sup> Katz, Craig. "A Psychiatry Perspective. Rituals, Routines, and Resilience." *Creating Spiritual and Psychological Resilience: Integrating Care in Disaster Relief Work*. Edited by Grant H. Brenner, Daniel H. Bush, Joshua Moses. 2010. Pp. 190. Print.

systems, and institutions to anticipate, withstand and/or judiciously engage with catastrophic events and/or experiences, actively making meaning out of adversity with the goal of maintaining 'normal' function without fundamental loss of identity."<sup>16</sup> Almedom finds that the most useful tool in measuring resilience is the "Sense of Coherence" (SOC-13) scale created by Aaron Antonovsky (1923-1994) to explain the theory of "salutogenesis" or a way "to explain human adaptation and response to extreme psychological stressors in terms of mobilization of Generalized Resistance Resources (GRR)."<sup>17</sup> As it relates to complex disasters, Almedom points out that "one of the most important findings of resilience research to date is that individual, community, and national resilience can be enhanced by creating the condition for people and their institutions to collectively act to prevent or mitigate disasters."<sup>18</sup> She emphasizes that resilience is "both what people can do for themselves and how they seek effective ways for external actors to facilitate and support coherence on the ground in order to meaningfully promote systems' resilience."<sup>19</sup> Under this premise, this study sought to understand the tangible and intangible ways that people withstood and engaged with a disaster and acted to "do" for themselves. We also examined the ways in which external actors can leverage internal resources – social capital, human capital and/or community strengths – to prevent or mitigate disasters and facilitate resilience within complex humanitarian and urban settings.

This research seeks to provide support for how resilience undergirds human security. In addition to how personal material and non-material resources already in existence function to support persons displaced by war and conflict, we argue that resilience also promotes healthy ways of coping and thriving after a displacement. The goal is to identify positive factors that contribute to hope in the future and optimism that things will improve in the aftermath of "catastrophic events" and leverage those factors in similar circumstances around the world. The identification of internal sources of resilience has the potential to transform the manner in which the humanitarian and development aid communities and NGO and governmental agencies view and respond to community needs.

This means that armed with data collected in *Distrito de Aguablanca*, the humanitarian and development fields can be better equipped to channel the adequate financial and human capital resources toward ideas and programs that affected persons have identified as salient. It also means that governmental agencies and local NGOs can redirect efforts and resources efficiently. More importantly, the local community itself can make use of their

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16 Almedom, Astier, and Tumwine, James. "Resilience to Disasters: A Paradigm Shift from Vulnerability to Strength." *African Health Sciences* 8.S: 1-4. Dec. 2008. Web. <<http://www.bioline.org.br/pdf?hs08057>>.

17 Almedon, Astier. "Use of 'Sense of Coherence (SOC)' Scale to Measure Resilience in Eritrea: Interrogating Both the Data and the Scale." *Journal of Biosocial Science*: 39. 2007. Pp. 91-107.

18 Almedon, Astier. "Profiling Resilience: Capturing Complex Realities in One Word." *The Fletcher Forum of Foreign Affairs*. Vol. 35:I Winter 2011. Pp. 150.

19 Ibid

own internal resources and knowledge to leverage and rally internal community-based networks and resources more precisely.

## **Urbanization**

Rapid urbanization creates communities through a chaotic process that mixes economic migrants with the displaced, concentrating them in urban slums generally marked by a lack of the two dual needs identified by Leaning and Arie above. As stated by UN Habitat,

“...the physical and social distance between poor and rich neighborhoods represents a spatial poverty trap marked by six distinct challenges: (a) severe job restrictions; (b) high rates of gender disparities; (c) deteriorated living conditions; (d) social exclusion and marginalization; (e) lack of social interaction, and (f) high incidence of crime.”<sup>20</sup>

These informal settlements collect the urban poor into unplanned informal settlements often lacking water and sanitation infrastructure, durable housing, basic city services and reliable means for livelihood. The process of rapid urbanization also strips individuals and households from their very basis of psychosocial support. Identity, recognition and participation are often rooted in a shared community and location. Urbanization uproots individuals and households from these long-standing, kinship-based communities and drops them into informal settlements with a diverse population, forming a community of strangers. In the context of an armed conflict, these informal settlements may not only congregate strangers, but also former and current enemies, victims and persecutors, thus increasing the risk of re-victimization. These community members may face additional challenges, such as psychological trauma and the disruption of the social fabric, high rates of crime and violence, gender-based violence (GBV), and inter-group tensions.

Similarly, Almedon’s theory of resilience relies on the capacity of these units, from the individual up through institutions, to withstand adversity. Without a sense of community built on something greater than the individual and family, this resilience remains weak.

Accordingly, urban slums that have achieved the highest levels of human security and resilience have been those that have drawn on the human capital within these settlements by creating communities. These slum residents have become the agents of change by working with each other through collective action and engaging the state as a community. This process has thereby led them to achieve the two needs identified by Leaning and Arie; developing the elements needed for psychosocial support by forming a community itself

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<sup>20</sup> *State of the World's Cities 2010/2011: Bridging the Urban Divide*, UN Habitat, Nairobi, 2012, p. XIII

and utilizing this collective action to obtain basic resources and services. The process has also generated community resilience to an array of natural and man-made adversity.<sup>21</sup>

## CONTEXT

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Latin America's complex urban landscapes present some particularly critical hazards and vulnerabilities to man-made disasters and disasters of natural origin. This is in large part due to the relatively high rates of socioeconomic inequality,<sup>22</sup> crime and violence in the region. In Colombia, violent deaths still hover over 40 per 100,000, making it one of the 14 most violent countries on earth.<sup>23</sup> The department of Valle del Cauca, of which Cali is the capital, presents a serious and seemingly intractable homicide crisis.<sup>24</sup> Its homicide rate is not only among the highest in the country, but has also been creeping upwards to 81.36 per 100,000 in 2011.<sup>25</sup> Eight out of the ten municipalities with the highest homicide rates in Colombia are in Valle del Cauca.<sup>26</sup>

Income and land distribution inequities nationwide continue to rise, with two million small landholders (owning less than 1 hectare each) controlling 1.3 million hectares while the top 2,200 landholders control nearly 40 million hectares.<sup>27</sup> In other words, 0.1 percent of landowners own 97 percent of the privately held rural territories.

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<sup>21</sup> "Community-Driven Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation in Urban Areas". *Environment and Urbanization*. International Institute for Environment and Development. Vol 23(2). Oct. 2011.

<sup>22</sup> An examination of 24 Latin American cities, yielded Gini of 0.52, not far behind Africa (with 0.57) as the highest in the world. *State of the World's Cities 2010/2011: Bridging the Urban Divide*, UN Habitat, Nairobi, 2012, p. XIII.

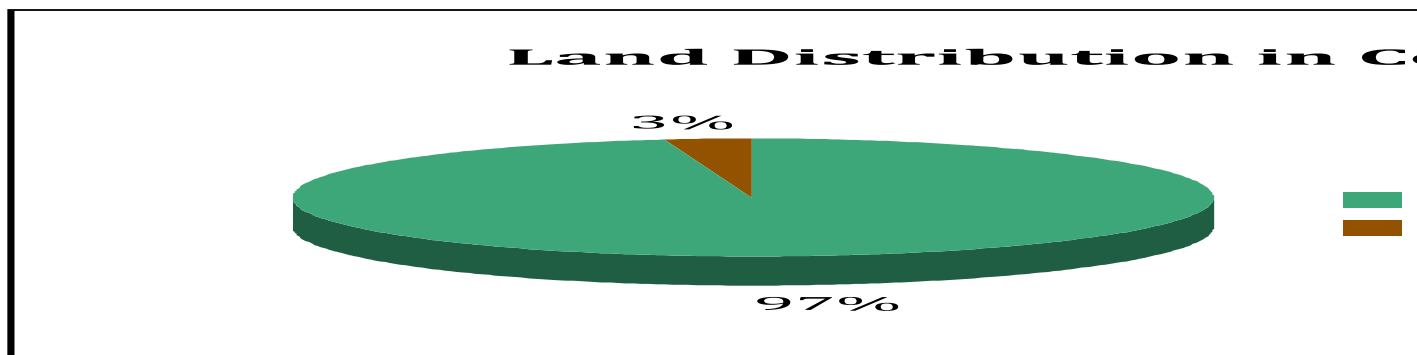
<sup>23</sup> *Global Burden of Armed Violence 2011*. Rep. Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development. Web. <<http://www.genevadeclaration.org/measurability/global-burden-of-armed-violence/global-burden-of-armed-violence-2011.html>>.

<sup>24</sup> *Memoirs of the Third Anniversary of HSI – First Regional Conference: Challenges of the Armed Conflict in Colombia*, Institute for Humanitarian Studies, Bogotá, June 2012.

<sup>25</sup> DRIP INML: División de Referencia de Información Pericial (DRIP) Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses (INMLCF). Cutoff date: 31 December, 2011.

<sup>26</sup> These municipalities are: Pradera, La Victoria, Roldanillo, El Dovio, Caicedonia, Ansermanuevo, Zarzal and Bolívar. Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Posada, Alejandro R. "Guerreros Y Campesinos. El Despojo De La Tierra En Colombia." *Estudios Socio-Jurídicos* 12.2. Dec. 2010. p. 367. Web. <[http://www.scielo.unal.edu.co/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0124-05792010000200012&lng=es&nrm=iso](http://www.scielo.unal.edu.co/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0124-05792010000200012&lng=es&nrm=iso)>.



In addition, Colombia is highly prone to earthquakes and increasingly intense and frequent torrential rainfall. The 2010-11 winter floods were the worst natural disaster in the country's history, affecting over three million people and costing the government about \$6.6 million in assistance and reconstruction.<sup>28</sup> In the department of Valle del Cauca, of which Cali is the capital, the floods affected over 35,000 persons.<sup>29</sup> As noted by Oxfam, these floods revealed chronic and structural vulnerabilities of millions of Colombians and stressed the necessity to build more resilient communities that can reduce risk and better adapt to climate change.<sup>30</sup>

The floods expanded the ranks of the estimated 3.6 million IDPs and further exacerbated their economic vulnerability.<sup>31</sup> In the conflict-affected southwest of the country, many of the most vulnerable persons, migrate to impoverished neighborhoods in the regional capital of Cali, especially the *Distrito de Aguablanca*. This is a rapidly growing complex urban landscape with 592,092 residents, who make up 26.2% of the total city population of Cali.<sup>32</sup> The area is developing rapidly, in large part through "invasions" and pirate settlements. Such inadequate urban planning has been accompanied by the depletion and misuse of natural resources, resulting in environmental problems and increased humanitarian vulnerability. In fact, much of *Distrito de Aguablanca* is not considered suitable for dense settlement due to its harsh topography in the floodplains and below the

<sup>28</sup> "Floods in Brazil and Colombia: Inundated." *The Economist - World News, Politics, Economics, Business & Finance*. 13 Jan. 2011. Web. <<http://www.economist.com/node/17906077>>.

<sup>29</sup> "Briefing on Cauca and Valle Del Cauca." UN OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs). Colombia, Bogotá. 21 June 2011.

<sup>30</sup> ¿Cómo Evitar Otro Desastre? *Lecciones De La Ola Invernal En Colombia*. Rep. Oxfam, 29 Apr. 2011. Web. <[http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/bp148\\_colombia-lecciones-aprendidas-final\\_spanish1104292.pdf](http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/bp148_colombia-lecciones-aprendidas-final_spanish1104292.pdf)>.

<sup>31</sup> "2011 UNHCR Country Operations Profile - Colombia." *UNHCR*. Web. <<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e492ad6>>.

<sup>32</sup> Gómez, Jorge Iván Ospina, and López, Juan Carlos López, and Henao, Juan Manuel Mejía. *Cali En Cifras 2010*. Rep. Alcaldía De Santiago De Cali, Departamento Administrativo De Planeación, Dec. 2010. Web. <[http://planeacion.cali.gov.co/Publicaciones/Cali\\_en\\_Cifras/Caliencifras2010.pdf](http://planeacion.cali.gov.co/Publicaciones/Cali_en_Cifras/Caliencifras2010.pdf)>.

levels of the Cauca River.<sup>33</sup> This exemplifies the paradoxical case of many urban slums worldwide, which are comparatively accessible for new migrants because of lower desirability due to greater hazards posed by the terrain.

According to the mayor's office in Cali, 45% of the population in *Distrito de Aguablanca* is afro-descendent,<sup>34</sup> though local social workers like Martin Vergara of *Fundación Solivida* assert that the proportion is closer to 60%. In addition, with half the residents under 18 years of age (70% under 26 years of age) and a high fertility rate (39% of women bear their first child before they reach 18 years of age), the population is very young and expected to remain that way. Regrettably, such demographics fuel social stigma and marginalization from the rest of the city.

Today, *Distrito de Aguablanca* exhibits about double the population growth rate,<sup>35</sup> population density,<sup>36</sup> unemployment level,<sup>37</sup> and homicide rates<sup>38</sup> relative to the city of Cali as a whole. This complex set of circumstances merits an integrated examination of conditions for human survival, principally the psychosocial resources and services that generate and sustain community resilience. Ultimately, it is expected that a more in-depth understanding of human security and resilience within this community will enable a broader grasp of emerging humanitarian challenges of global urbanization, as well as the community assets to mitigate them.

## **How do Resilience and Human Security play out in *Distrito de Aguablanca*?**

Our research in *Distrito de Aguablanca* points to six unique themes that undergird resilience and human security in very unique ways. These include the importance of respect, housing, livelihood innovation, role of spirituality and community and psychosocial welfare.

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<sup>33</sup> \_\_\_ "Comuna 13: Panorama Ambiental." *Principal - Alcaldía De Santiago De Cali*. Web. <<http://www.cali.gov.co/publico2/gobierno/dagmaweb/comuna13.htm>>.

<sup>34</sup> Gómez, Jorge Iván Ospina, and López, Juan Carlos López, and Henao, Juan Manuel Mejía. *Cali En Cifras 2010*. Rep. Alcaldía De Santiago De Cali, Departamento Administrativo De Planeación, Dec. 2010. Web. <[http://planeacion.cali.gov.co/Publicaciones/Cali\\_en\\_Cifras/Caliencifras2010.pdf](http://planeacion.cali.gov.co/Publicaciones/Cali_en_Cifras/Caliencifras2010.pdf)>.

<sup>35</sup> "Perfiles Por Comunas." *Principal - Alcaldía De Santiago De Cali*. 23 Feb. 2011. Web. <<http://www.cali.gov.co/observatorios/publicaciones.php?id=2932>>.

<sup>36</sup> Gómez, Jorge Iván Ospina, and López, Juan Carlos López, and Henao, Juan Manuel Mejía. *Cali En Cifras 2010*. Rep. Alcaldía De Santiago De Cali, Departamento Administrativo De Planeación, Dec. 2010. Web. <[http://planeacion.cali.gov.co/Publicaciones/Cali\\_en\\_Cifras/Caliencifras2010.pdf](http://planeacion.cali.gov.co/Publicaciones/Cali_en_Cifras/Caliencifras2010.pdf)>.

<sup>37</sup> *Primera Socialización De Los Resultados De Lineas De Base De Las Comunas 13, 14 Y 15 De Cali*. Rep. Visión Mundial, Colombia. Print.

<sup>38</sup> Gómez, Jorge Iván Ospina, and López, Juan Carlos López, and Henao, Juan Manuel Mejía. *Cali En Cifras 2010*. Rep. Alcaldía De Santiago De Cali, Departamento Administrativo De Planeación, Dec. 2010. Web. <[http://planeacion.cali.gov.co/Publicaciones/Cali\\_en\\_Cifras/Caliencifras2010.pdf](http://planeacion.cali.gov.co/Publicaciones/Cali_en_Cifras/Caliencifras2010.pdf)>.

## THE SIX RESILIENCE AND HUMAN SECURITY THEMES

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### What contributes to resilience and human security in *Distrito de Aguablanca*?

#### Theme 1: Respect

- Discussions with respondents highlighted the importance of respect as a source of resilience.
- Listening to and respecting the individual is a first and vital step to protect and strengthen an individual's sense of dignity and his or her ability to recover from a complex humanitarian emergency.
- Respect can create bonds of trust and encourage sustainable psychosocial strengthening.

#### Theme 2: Psychosocial Wellbeing

- The importance of being heard is a critical factor that can contribute to an individual's sense of psychosocial wellbeing.
- "Being heard" can facilitate catharsis in cases of trauma and in some cases contribute to the autonomous development of a "life plan."
- Psychosocial support and/or a community space in which to be heard are important components in addressing human security needs.
- Governmental and grassroots institutions would benefit from understanding the importance of respecting, bolstering and partnering with community members. The success of projects and coordination of services could be improved by taking the time to listen to the community's needs.

Richard Williams, Professor of Mental Health Strategy at the University of Glamorgan, further highlights the importance that respect and psychosocial support play in an individual's ability to be resilient. On July 2, 2008 while speaking at a symposium on conflict and mental health at the Annual Meeting of the Royal College of Psychiatrists at Imperial College London, he defined resilience "as a person's ability to adapt psychologically, emotionally and physically to the situation 'reasonably well' and without lasting detriment to themselves, or their relationships."<sup>39</sup> He believes that resilience is not simply the avoidance of short-term distress since resilient people also include those who may show great distress. Resilience can also be "about adapting to a situation and being realistic about the recovery."<sup>40</sup> Like Almedom, Williams argues that "resilient people may experience a period of distress and then recover with the support of their families and

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39 Williams, Richard. The Annual Meeting of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Imperial College, London. 2 July 2008. Speech.

40 Ibid

friends.”<sup>41</sup> At the root, Williams argues that resilient people can be characterized as 1) having strong relationships, 2) an ability to receive help and social support in the midst of a crisis, and have a belief in their own competence and strong self-esteem. Williams is a strong proponent of psychological first aid for survivors of disasters through well-established NGOs and community-based programs and emphasizes the importance of programs that incorporate counseling and listening.

### **Theme 3: Housing**

- Respondents in the focus groups and individual interviews highlighted the importance of housing as a source of physical, emotional, and economic security.
- Female respondents often viewed housing as a source of income generation.
- Housing can be seen as having a profound impact on sense of dignity, peace and belonging.
- The urban housing space also plays a determining role in child development, safety and welfare of the family, community identity and sense of belonging and urban integration.

### **Theme 4: Livelihood Innovation (Informal Income Generation)**

- Individuals facing displacement, war, violence, and/or economic hardship showed great ability to identify and leverage creative and unorthodox mechanisms of financial support, often times based on the housing status and nearly always in the informal sector. While the informal work sector provides minimal income generation, these mechanisms are essential to alleviate crisis situations and support families living in chronic poverty.
- A threat to these informal income opportunities without alternatives can be extremely destructive to the survival of vulnerable people, particularly the elderly.

### **Theme 5: Role of the Community**

- “Established” friends and family members living in the local community are viewed as the initial source of aid when individuals are first integrated into the community. In Aguablanca, many afro-descendant families are highly supportive of their extended family and friends as they become established.<sup>42</sup>
- The community continues to be a source of ongoing support that mitigates and addresses the gaps that institutions cannot fill.
- The community is viewed as a basis of income generation and potential livelihoods.
- Respondents both acknowledge and underestimate the high capacity of the community as a source for resource mobilization and empowerment.
- The inconsistency in the quality of leadership in the community can create serious problems (e.g. division/internal conflict, corruption, lack of representation).

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> "Research Interview at Fundación Solivida." Personal interview, Cali, July 2011.

The role of the community was clearly evidenced through a focus group with four female IDP community leaders, who themselves had been repeatedly displaced.<sup>43</sup> These women became deeply familiar with the relevant legislation and government aid and developed community-based problem-solving strategies for issues such as housing, protection, and sexual gender-based violence. These women formed a municipal collective of IDP women that expanded regionally and nationally to serve 600 families. Through collaboration with the International Organization for Migration, these women facilitated the delivery of housing subsidies to IDPs by acting as intermediaries between local and national governments, international organizations and community members. However, they also spoke about the stiff opposition and disrespect from government officials, as well as death threats and assaults from new non-state armed groups, paramilitary successors and demobilized paramilitary fighters. The combination of government disrespect and threats from non-state armed actors results in acute fear among community leaders.<sup>44</sup>

A focus group with Communitarian Mothers at Fundación Paz y Bien highlighted critical community tasks, such as child rearing, capacity-building and livelihood generation. These women are tasked with assisting young mothers; many of who are underage IDPs from the Pacific coast who have been affected by the armed conflict. The Communitarian Mothers are integrated in the community and some arrived at the foundation in similar conditions, equipping them not only to deliver basic child care services, but also more comprehensive accompaniment and community integration support. Moreover, some of the young mothers receive job placement in the foundation or partner organizations as cooks, janitors, childcare assistants or substitute mothers. The resulting social network of Communitarian Mothers and young mothers presses empowerment, cooperation, and relentlessness.<sup>45</sup>

## **Theme 6: Sources of Hope: Values, Family and Spirituality**

- The sense of hope and optimism in the future is closely linked to values, spirituality and family.

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<sup>43</sup> Re-victimization highlights how the guarantees of non-repetition within the Victims' Law and Land Restitution are often going unmet. These guarantees include a set of measures are established to prevent human rights violations. See "Ley De Víctimas Y Restitución De Tierras: Título IV, Capítulo X." Ministerio Del Interior Y De Justicia. República De Colombia, 2011. Web.

<<http://www.mij.gov.co/Ministerio/Library/News/Files/CARTILLA%20LEY%20DE%20V%C3%8DCTIMAS%20Y%20RESTITUCI%C3%93N%20DE%20TIERRAS70.PDF>>.

<sup>44</sup> "Focus Group with Community Leaders." Focus Group. July 2011.

Cali, Colombia. See the CODHES (La Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento) 2010 report that declared that 44 IDPs who have participated in the Land Restitution process were assassinated between 2002 and 2011.

<[http://www.codhes.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=blogcategory&id=32&Itemid=46](http://www.codhes.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=32&Itemid=46)>.

<sup>45</sup> "Focus group, Fundación Paz y Bien." Focus Group. August 2011. Note: Communitarian mothers proudly state being "aguerridas" (fighters) who push forward for the sake of their families and communities, overcoming obstacles along the way.

- Respondents pointed to the values that have been ingrained and taught at home and shared among family members and community members.
- The role of spirituality is almost universal as a source of hope and optimism.
- Values, family and spirituality were identified as sources of motivation for personal development and community support (the value of the Good Samaritan).
- Extended family is not only viewed as the first aid in case of crisis/displacement, but also a strong source of motivation to succeed.

## COMMUNITY PROFILES

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Extensive interviews and focus groups were conducted with community members and leaders. The direct testimonies of the participants offer an unparalleled window into how individuals cooperate to satisfy their essential needs and overcome adversity in the urban margins of armed conflict. The following community profiles are composed of verbatim excerpts of longer interviews, translated with minimum edits. The six themes discussed above, especially the psychosocial factors of resilience, the strong sense of community, home and hope, are evident in the words of community members.

“Juana” is an IDP in her fifties from the coastal city of Buenaventura (Valle del Cauca). Her husband was killed in 2001 and her son was killed thereafter in Tumaco (Nariño) at the age of 17. She has two children and is the head of household. Her interview helped crystallize many of the themes. Housing clearly plays a dominant role as a vehicle for livelihood generation. The perception of God helps give meaning to challenges and offers a sense of security towards the future. Finally, the expectation of reciprocal respectful treatment was highlighted numerous times as bolstering resilience.

*I feel safe in my neighborhood because there are some “muchachos” (adolescents), who we pay \$1 USD weekly per house to do surveillance. If we didn’t have this surveillance, we’d have a lot of problems. But I’m still worried about gangs fighting each other, being assaulted on the street, or lost bullets. To stay safe, we stay in the house, and [when there are problems] gather everyone on the same side. Fortunately, my last [living] son doesn’t spend time on the streets.*

*What worries me most about my house is that it’s not registered in my name. (...) What happens to the community and me affects me a lot. I have a lot of support because things always turn out well for me; my family and neighbors support me; everyone loves me. (...) I don’t have problems with anyone where I go.*

*As soon as they selected me to have my own house I felt that my life had meaning and I was very important. Plus, it’s going to be in a good location where people are very good.*

*I see that I am treated with respect. I treat others well so I think that’s why they also treat me well. I wish others had my heart so they’d see that it’s a good one; I don’t have bad thoughts or things, everything I have is good.*

*I feel that I can solve problems because with the power of God everything is possible. The only thing that has no solution is death. But when one is almost dead, God comes and resuscitates you.*

*But I feel very sad when time comes to pay rent I can't... and then the thinking grabs me. I also worry when my kids don't call me on time, and that my grandchildren are over there [Buenaventura].*

*My grandchildren and my shop, which God helps me stock, are what give me hope in the future. God will help me pay my rent, my food, and expenses, and He will help me reach a goal I have of building a second floor to rent.*

*Sometimes I've been able to maintain control over my life, because I start thinking that things won't turn out well, but then they do. I think God helps make sure everything turns out well. He's the only one that can do everything. I commend myself to God to give me strength to move forward, and through him I push through everything.*

*Life goes on.*

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"Alba" is an IDP in her fifties from the coffee region of Satia (Huila). She reports that paramilitaries killed her husband. She lost her leg from a glass injury during the same paramilitary attack. The guerrillas forcibly recruited three of her sons, but one escaped after the guerrillas severed his arm and now lives with her. "We can't go back to Satia", she says.

*I can't get work because I'm disabled. I get a little help from Acción Social every four months, but I pay rent and utilities and I don't have anything left for my family to eat. Sometimes my neighbors give me potatoes and rice when they can.*

*What worries me most about my house is that when it rains we get wet. The house is not good; it's bad, very bad. But I'm not on the streets. A house is very important so I can live with my family, but I beg God to give me one, because their father left my children a hut but we couldn't live there because of the violence. To get my house I work, I sell... I do whatever. I buy a case of sodas, transport it across town, store it in a little fridge and sell them from home.*

*I feel I have people in whom I can trust because if there's a problem I go to a neighbor and she tells me to do this and that. I beg God to help me move forward, because I am with him and he with me. What my dear God doesn't give me today, I know he will give me tomorrow. Something always works out, and as little as it is, it's a blessing from God.*

*What makes me sad is when I don't have anything to give my children, when one has to do something but there's no money, and I think and think where do I go, how do I go. Sometimes I feel hopeless when I can't buy a pound of rice, when I owe 5 cents USD and can't pay them.*

*But when I am waiting for something and it turns out well it gives me hope. The heart tells you that things will be fine and I become so joyful. Someday my dream will come true that they'll tell me: "today, we will give you a little house. That would be such a great joy.*

*Someday my dream will come to fruition.*

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"Consuelo" is an IDP in her forties from rural Nariño. She lives with her husband and six children. "We pay rent in Potrero Grande because we're not from here," she states. "We're displaced." The interview with her highlights the importance of community-based psychosocial support and accompaniment. Over the course of the interview, she goes from being distraught and resigned to her situation to exhibiting genuine joy. She was referred to the psychological counseling services of Fundación Solivida for consultation.

*First I lived with my cousin because I was forced to leave because of the violence when I was pregnant, but you know it's very difficult to live with six children in a city like this. In the countryside it's easy. I've spent five years like this. Plus, my husband lost his job and Doña Flor (employee at Fundación Solivida) was the one who helped us with our small lunch and to put our children in daycare.*

*Armed groups came to the house [in Nariño] looking for my husband and they were going to kill him and I had to tell them that he had gone to the town to buy groceries. They came several times and never found my husband, so they told me that if they didn't find him, they'd kill me. So I left one morning at about 5am while the groups were shooting between themselves and I hid with my children until a boat passed by the river and picked us up. Otherwise I would have been dead.*

*When I left the farm I had 200 chickens but now that I am here I have to suffer hunger. Later I went back to my land to see what had happened to what I had and the locals there thought that I had gone to give intelligence to the guerrillas so they grabbed me and tied me, the paramilitaries did. I still need medical care to remove a cancerous cyst, but I can't go to the doctor because I can't pay the transport. He [paramilitary] took me to a mountain and tied me by my arms to a tree. He shot to the air and told me to "sing," or otherwise he'd get my children. He asked me if I wanted my children to live without their mother, and shot to the ground and the dirt landed against my face... I had 10 pigs there. I was saving one for my son's birthday, but I couldn't bring anything because of how we were thrown out... I was tied up for two and a half hours.*

*My brother was killed there in Pasto. It hurts me a lot because he was my only little brother. Since my father lives with another woman, I had to raise my brother on my own.*

*My husband gets very stressed. He says that even if we must die we should go back to our land, but I tell him that we've already lived our lives, but what about our children? They need their parents.*

*I may be in my room, but I'm stressed, thinking about my children and everything bad. Now we're in Potrero Grande, but the gangs there were fighting with the government, so you don't have security, because you just need one of those people to know you.*

*I believe very much in God and always go to church, asking him to protect me. We always pray.*

*I was very nervous when I escaped from the armed group. When they [paramilitaries] called me, I felt like I had no blood or heart, and I was happy that day because it was my daughter's birthday. Sometimes we feel shots and bullets fly by in the neighborhood, because it's a tough neighborhood; I stay so nervous, but I place my trust in God. I'm alive for a reason. Otherwise, with what I've lived I should be dead by now.*

*I don't know anyone in Cali so there's no trust; I just trust the people that I know from my village.*

*God always touches my heart and I think that things will turn out well. I go to church and God touches my heart despite all the bad things, so I pray with all my faith. For example, last month we prayed so we'd get help for the children, because they didn't have socks or shoes, or a way to get to school. So I got on my knees to ask God for my children if it was of his will, and the little help came through so we could send them to school.*

*Sometimes I don't have enough to give my children lunch so I asked my aunt to lend me \$15,000 [\$7.5 USD]. It may not seem like it, but my heart aches so when my children go hungry it makes my husband and I suffer. He is in anguish because he needs to provide for our children, but we're a couple, and if only one of us can help the children, the other has to support them. That's how we are. And my children are what give me hope because they make me laugh when they tell me about school and bring happiness to my life.*

*What gives me the greatest sadness was being forced to leave my home. There, we could always eat plantains, yucca and chickens. There we could have everything we wanted. We raised fish. But now we don't have money to buy things so we have to go hungry. Before we grabbed a chicken and made a good lunch, or my children would pick a guava and that would be it.*

*But we never lose our hope because God is with us. God has not died with us. God is alive. God will take us and carry us to a paradise where we have everything we had.*

*At least right now I feel good here with you and treated with respect. It made me feel good to talk to you because I've been able to vent and now I feel happier and with new hope. I thank you for being here, because I hadn't had a person with whom I could speak.*

## LIMITATIONS

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Although some selection bias exists as a result of the selection and participation of respondents through local NGOs, access to *Distrito de Aguablanca* could not have been possible without the assistance of the local NGOs. A simple random sample of community members was not feasible due to security concerns. Thus, the selection methodology used was the optimal way to balance research goals with community access. Additionally, working with a diverse array of NGOs, UN organizations, and university researchers helped mitigate the selection bias.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

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Based on the six salient themes that emerged from focus group and interview respondents, we make the following recommendations:

### **Greater Investment in Psychosocial Programs and Counseling Resources:**

We recommend greater understanding, attention and investment in psychosocial programs and counseling for persons affected by displacement and violence, given the serious and long-lasting impact that displacement, war, violence and economic hardship can have on their wellbeing and ability to survive and thrive. To this end, community networks and social service organizations with proven track records should be strengthened.

### **Reliance on Existing Community-led Support Groups:**

We recommend that community members take advantage of existing forums and community spaces for self-organized and community run support groups with additional support from social service networks and organizations.

### **Investment in Comprehensive Housing Solutions:**

We recommend increased investment in housing solutions that enhance physical security, livelihoods, psychosocial wellbeing, and integration with the local and broader communities. This requires a comprehensive understanding of community needs, beyond the basic physical infrastructure, and likely benefits from partnerships with local NGOs and civil society organizations.

### **Increased Support for and Respect for the Role of Spirituality and Family Values:**

We recommend additional support and respect for spirituality, family values and the vital role they can play in fostering hope and optimism in the future for persons affected by displacement and violence. Religious organizations can be a source of personal support for

populations under stress. They can also create and maintain “spaces” where individuals affected by humanitarian crises can be encouraged and motivated.

### **Potential Next Steps:**

1. A reflective exercise with the community. These findings can be presented to the community for discussion amongst themselves. This process of self-reflection may lead a refinement of these findings and even greater insight into original goal of understanding human security and resilience.
2. A work-plan exercise with the community. Working with the community to identify concrete actions necessary to achieve the recommendations above can further empower the community. This can be developed as a multi-year plan outlining the specific actors, their roles and activities. These activities can be separated into activities the community can take for self-help and tactics to leverage and engage the government and NGOs.
3. A joint meeting between the government, aid organizations and the community to operationalize some of these ideas. A facilitated meeting between these three groups could help achieve the respect and sense of being heard in and of itself but also identify strategies for helping this community.
4. Cross-learning from other slum communities. Arranging a visit by a slum community that has had success with self-organizing to achieve greater human security and build resilience to meet with this community may help develop its capacity to affect change.

### **Possibilities for Further Research**

Future research can build on these findings. Comparative studies could diversify the understanding of how human security and resilience play out in similar communities. While understanding the microenvironment of each slum and even specific populations within slums is important to generating solutions specific to that community, developing a larger scale understanding of human security and resilience also serves an important role. Simply expanding this study to neighboring slums to develop a citywide model may be a better guide for policy-makers and NGOs looking to implement large scale efforts to aid these communities. Finally, these qualitative findings may be incorporated into the development of an instrument to measure household human security that can be used to identify the most vulnerable households or communities and prioritize limited resources.

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