



LSE IDEAS

United Nations at LSE

Briefing Note

Human Security Business Partnerships in Colombia

An LSE & Peace Startup case study

Project Summary

UNDP, UNHCR, LSE, PeaceStartup and Colombian government agencies dealing with victims and rural development sought to generate sustainable solutions for five municipalities most affected by the country's armed conflict in the context of the post-2016 peace process, through establishing **human security partnerships**. The 2.5-year programme from 2019 to 2022 used the novel Human Security Business Partnership Framework (HSBPF), developed by LSE IDEAS and supported by the UN Trust Fund for Human Security, in order to provide guidance and structure for a new kind of interaction and long-term dialogue between local communities, the government, companies and investors.¹

The programme focused on three communities in Antioquia: Bello, a semi-urban location near Medellin, and two rural communities, Dabeiba and Ituango; and two remote communities in the coastal province of Nariño: Tumaco and El Charco.

Each municipality faced distinct challenges and varying levels of historic engagement with private sector actors. Cross-cutting problems included a lack of licit and stable livelihoods, low levels of inclusion and social cohesion caused by internal displacement, the need for integration and reconciliation efforts in the wake of the civil war, and immigration flows from Venezuela during the period.

Political challenges included changing government and policy priorities during the course of the programme and a shift in public and government attitudes towards the 2016 peace agreement and its associated prescriptions and institutions for rural development. The

¹ See Annex 1 for the HSBP Framework.

security situation in all the municipalities significantly deteriorated during the period, with a number of homicides of social leaders in the territories covered.

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced a new category of economic problems and added issues such as health and access to services. Furthermore, government priorities expanded to include digital transformation of rural areas in response to the pandemic. Combined, these challenges represented a matrix of inter-connected human security needs from livelihoods to education, environment, personal and community safety, and cohesion.

The programme focused on establishing new relationships and stimulating a mutually beneficial dialogue between the targeted communities and different private sector actors, from large national corporates to financial investors and lenders, to local businesses and entrepreneurs. These relationships were commercially grounded but also took a holistic view in recognising the threats and opportunities that partners faced and sought ways to resolve these together. The activities within this partnering process were also mediated and facilitated by public sector organisations, both local and national. The aim was a co-construction of key drivers of development and peacebuilding between business and local actors.

The immediate goal was to build value chains in existing sectors such as coffee, bananas and beans, thereby targeting economic security and legitimate livelihoods. The programme also provided an opportunity to explore the potential of new value chains as the country sought to open up previously inaccessible rural areas following the cessation of hostilities between the government and the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) guerrilla movement in 2016. Criteria such as environmental impacts, inclusion, reconciliation and social innovation were applied in order to identify private sector participants, ensuring that the project was perceived as more than just a conventional intervention to stimulate trade and investment in the target municipalities.

While engaging large enterprises in this process was challenging unless they perceived alignment with pre-existing interests in development and peacebuilding, a significant number of alliances (19) were achieved as a result of more than 160 connections made between local producers and external companies and investors. In these alliances, not only commercial interests but wider social, development and peacebuilding goals could be addressed. For many communities, the programme represents an initial 'socialisation', helping to break down barriers, including a legacy of mistrust between different actors, particularly those from the private sector, and establish the value of multistakeholder co-operation to address a wide range of local challenges. For larger businesses, the HS partnership approach provided a framework to realise their social impact objectives alongside business goals such as market growth and business development.

1. Programme activities

- Orientation and Baseline Analysis: Time was allocated at the outset to laying the groundwork for establishing human security partnerships (*Allianzas para la Seguridad Humana/ ASH*) in each locality. LSE and its local partner, PeaceStartup delivered

training workshops to UN teams and local civil society organisations to introduce the methodology of human security partnering and demonstrate how the concept of human security could facilitate the resetting of interactions and relationships between communities and the private sector. A baseline assessment of human security in all its dimensions (economic, environment, food, health, community, personal, political) was established through desk research supplemented by roundtable discussions and conversations with community participants.

- In parallel to understanding the specific needs and challenges of communities in seeking to improve livelihoods, physical safety and social cohesion, PeaceStartup, assisted by LSE, explored the perspectives of companies and investors in order to analyse their views on investing and operating in the project locations. These conversations assessed the potential demand for deepening commercial/investment contacts in these communities and for contributing to social transformation. Roundtable discussions on investment helped to identify particular motivations, challenges, and the most promising segments for increased engagement by the private sector.
- In initial stages, conversations facilitated by the UN Colombia country team and PeaceStartup were held separately with business and community groups in order to ensure confidence and approach the socialisation aspect of the partnering process with caution. The inclusion of local academics (for example from the Human Security Observatory in Medellin) played a significant role in improving the legitimacy and trust-building aspects of the initiative.
- An important characteristic of the project was an extensive and detailed mapping process aimed at establishing compatibility between the requirements of buyers (e.g. large Colombian enterprises) and identifying local businesses and entrepreneurs capable of meeting those needs of buyers to establish a commercial relationship. This involved a matching process, allowing local producers to meet potential buyers and vice versa. Accompanying the matching process, as well as establishing technical criteria (correct product, quality checks, capacity to produce etc) the pre-selection by PeaceStartup of buyers who were interested in social impact, reconciliation, inclusion etc was an important step in facilitating the kind of dialogues needed to initiate the human security partnering process.
- The programme leveraged physical gatherings and cultural events, such as business fairs or local music performances, as platforms to trigger dialogues and forge alliances. The 'wheels of business' [*ruedas de negocio*] process was a distinctive event mechanism which identified participants, offered initial training workshops and more targeted capacity building, subsequently accompanying each encounter before, during and after the event. These platforms served as a means to expand alliances to include public sector participants, such as mayors' offices and local development agencies who were involved in organising the events. A pre-selection process overseen by PeaceStartup of those invited to the events was a means by which the peacebuilding criteria of this new engagement dynamic, as set out in the HSBPF, were achieved: sustainability, contribution to reconciliation, attention to gender gap,

poverty and inequalities. The process sought to ground business-community interactions in local realities while considering private sector motives and their own business goals, as well as aiming to support local government development plans. In doing so, human security partnerships could be seen as not only bringing benefits to all the participants in a way which would ensure their continued participation, but also as an important link in a chain of connection between national and international policy objectives, and local outcomes.

2. Use of the HSBP Framework

Early stages: Training in the Framework and HS approach was delivered nationally and regionally to programme staff in UN and government agencies. This training was reinforced by the creation of an academic network and discourse focusing on HS and territorial approaches to post-conflict development in the Colombian context.

HS emerged as a resonant concept due to its holistic nature, multiple dimensions and locally specific characteristics, which were regarded as relevant to the complex challenges that existed in the communities. The response of programme teams tended towards a sentiment of familiarity [*'we already do this'*], expressing that they were already engaging in similar practices. The challenge was to ensure that the Framework was implemented as a distinctive methodology, and to integrate it into existing programme approaches, rather than compete with them, such as those centred on human rights and capacity-building. The goal was to demonstrate the novelty and value-added of using HS to deliver sustainable development and peacebuilding initiatives involving multiple, highly diverse actors.

At the outset human security was received and understood more as an objective than a methodology. It was appreciated for encapsulating the threats and challenges communities faced. The 'protection' element of HS was more salient and easier to communicate than 'empowerment.' Although the concept was associated with prevention not just reactive interventions, there was a tendency among international partners to rely mainly on traditional interventions such as capacity-building rather than test the transformative potential of using HS to generate improved participation, inclusion and local agency, in other words enacting a real empowerment strategy.

On the other hand, the programme theme of HS Partnerships, and an emphasis on collaboration and interaction, meant that the active participation of community actors including normally marginalised groups was achieved.

Partnering was a dominant motif in articulating the project and guiding subsequent intervention. However, the use of the Spanish term 'alliances' meant that this was translated as meaning initially looser configurations of diverse actors who exchanged assessments of needs and recognised the need for multi-stakeholder engagements to address them. While no actual partnership around a distinct set of shared risks and reciprocal responsibilities has been established to date, it was recognised that in many of the programme communities, either the lack of prior interactions between business and communities or a history of abusive

relationships (as observed in Ituango) meant that establishing strong forms of partnership would take time to emerge.

Later stages: The Framework was explicitly used by key programme implementers, for instance PeaceStartup. They drew upon all three pillars, with a particular focus on principles (Pillar 1) in terms of local, inclusive, forward looking, trust and transparency and sharing, to open conversations between actors and create a structure for dialogues and interactions between communities and the private sector. The principles were also instrumental in mobilising business interest as reflecting priorities for social impact already identified by some companies and investors.

See table 1. for how the principles were implemented and the difficulties faced.

<i>PRINCIPLE</i>	<i>HOW IMPLEMENTED</i>	<i>COMMENTS</i>
Local	The start of each project was marked by drawing up a baseline of human security to reflect the needs, interests and capacities in each locality. This initial step was followed by tailoring training or investment activities to the localised diagnosis of needs and opportunities, provided by all the partners (business, government and local suppliers).	There were relational difficulties which impeded collaboration between organisations. The project had to develop mechanisms to overcome traditional barriers between public, private and local groups, including a lack of familiarity and trust. Physical spaces were important in helping positive interactions.
Inclusion	Used to involve multiple actors – not just business and community leaders but universities, local government. In Tumaco, this included the local mayor, chamber of Commerce and UNDP.	Security restrictions made it impossible to conduct some meetings specifically in Dabeiba and El Charco – in these cases, virtual meetings were organised or guidance provided remotely. The financing as part of the project of transport for beneficiaries was important to assure their participation.
Forward looking	The activities sought to propose novel solutions and the idea of innovation (social, financial and commercial) was an important theme in motivating people to partner. The project began with the challenge of ‘closing gaps’ in order to make markets accessible, and helping communities understand what buyers needed.	Some of the connections revealed structural challenges which could not be resolved in the duration of the project, sometimes related to production volumes, transport logistics and cost of products.

Trust and Transparency	The selection of 'partners/allies' was based on a criterion that business partners and potential customers should have a vision of positive social impacts, so that the development of value chains was based on a willingness and sensibility to overcome challenges jointly.	Some of the connections made did not have sufficient time within the project to really build relationships of increased trust.
Sharing	In each connection established, attention was paid to what each of the parties would contribute in terms of a real benefit to the other.	Not all of the private sector organisations had resources to underpin their role as counterparty or partner. In some cases, finance for transport or purchases had to be provided externally in order to guarantee the participation of some organisations, for example in the Tumaco 'business wheels' forums.

The suggested processes of the Framework were partially followed. However, these were largely ad hoc rather than systematised. PeaceStartup deployed a process of identifying possible bottlenecks as part of its role overseeing the creation of alliances; the NGO's accompaniment of steps taken by the different actors (such as training and dialogues with buyers) was an important element ensuring reciprocal commitments by the business and community groups.

Actions by the partners to implement their co-operation were channelled along two main lines – here there is an overlap with Pillar 3 of the Framework: Tools.

- A focus on capacities – particularly identifying and closing gaps that affected beneficiaries (community actors) and the commercial 'offer' that they could present to buyers and investors. This approach led to designing plans for training that were tailored to local realities. There was a role here, particularly in Antioquia, for 'dynamiser committees' to oversee different themes of the training plans [in each case the framework also allowed for adaptation of initial plans]. The circle of allies was also widened to include different public sector organisations (government bodies and the UN) who were most capable to deliver different aspects of the training. For example, in Antioquia, entities such as the Chamber of Commerce, the University of Antioquia, and other local CSOs also played a supporting role.
- A focus on commercial connections. Here different opportunities were identified and then matched to an initiative as a way to realise and strengthen connections between business and communities in each locality.

Difficulties and overcoming them

- Training activities were difficult to synchronise; often there was a logistical mismatch between the capacity and availability of trainers with training needs. Lack of funds to ensure that local actors could travel to training.
- ➔ Potential solution: more e-training to maintain a consistent relationship via the training tool
- The initial imbalance in interests and capacities was a marked feature of the initiatives aimed at establishing long-term trust and partnership based on equality and benefit sharing. With a short duration project these alliances of trust and sharing will take longer to embed. Although buyers were committed a priori to societal objectives, they still found it costly in time and other resources to access those supply chain actors who could fulfil their requirements and were also interested in partnering long-term.
- ➔ Potential solution: involving other actors and participants to smooth these differences and make the connections work – through training, accompaniment and encouragement.
- The definition of Human Security Partnerships and the translation of the concept of human security into a practical methodology and a systematic theory of change needed to be sharper.
- ➔ Potential solution: more active engagement on a continuous basis by academic or other third party ‘facilitators’, to reinforce and validate or adjust the application of the Framework. Also, a plan of action that avoids confusing different agendas and institutional objectives by multiple programme implementers.

3. Results of the programme

A total of 19 preliminary alliances were made as a result of 164 different interactions between producers and potential buyers. 18 were in coffee and 1 in beans. Large chains such as Frisby and Crepes and Waffles were among the buyers who participated in this partnering process. As a result of initial encounters some buyers expanded their interest beyond the initial products they were seeking. Five contracts have been agreed and Urbania, a large coffee chain, is one of the buyers who intends to maintain a long-term presence in the region. As explained by both companies’ managements, the human security, multi-stakeholder partnering approach was a way for them to combine both commercial goals and social impact objectives.

The multi-actor and alliance aspect of the programme suggests that this approach can be useful in bridging national and local levels of policy. The use of the Framework principles established an ethos for interaction and created a basis for co-operation through particular processes and tools such as training and capacity improvements, which brought together multiple actors from government policymakers to entrepreneurs on the ground. The bottom-up approach of focusing on community needs and capacities to address aspects of human security was connected to policy initiatives such as the government’s territorial development plans. Rather than simply a localised, and isolated intervention, the programme brought together actors from different spheres and levels: national businesses, local entrepreneurs, national and international policy actors and local politicians and administrators, creating a structured dialogue and co-operation, with identifiable (and potentially verifiable) goals.

PeaceStartup is now working to create an impact fund, based on the pipeline of projects identified during the human security project, and in order to provide finance for entrepreneurs in post conflict areas. The project helped reveal a significant gap in the availability of suitable funding that avoids high rates and high risks for producers/entrepreneurs, (and for lenders) if they only have access to traditional credit markets. As a result of the project, PeaceStartup is also working on establishing a blended finance fund with UNDP and Essentia (a subsidiary of Ecopetrol) to finance the creation of a synthetic wood company. The fund will be called a "Human Security Partnership for El Charco".

Implementing human security partnerships in rural Colombia, with diverse actors, particularly from the private sector, at a time of post-conflict and unstable politics addressed key vulnerabilities in the ecosystem for good governance and a productive business climate. The partnering process helped to counter fragmentation of community ties, a lack of social (alongside financial) capital, and the erosion of institutions and formal processes. The project unfolded amidst a chronic distrust among parties, fragile productive forces, and a weak presence of many of the key actors, such as government and private sector.

The value added of the HSBP Framework was to kick-start the rebuilding of those gaps and deficits of community cohesion and a productive economy. Using human security as the articulating concept, the partnership framework enabled a bold, comprehensive, highly localised and multi-actor response to challenges on the ground.

The risk that such an initiative might be premature in the context of some of the locations, given the deteriorating security situation, highlights the ability of the Framework to operate where traditional development interventions might either not occur or would fail. For some of the implementation teams in UN and government agencies, the focus on human security and co-construction with other actors represented a marked difference from what they could or would normally do at a similar stage in the post-conflict/post-crisis situation.

Without the normative underpinning of human security and the ethos of co-responsibility, albeit not yet fully developed as the project stands, the traditional tools of community-led dialogues, and business-government interactions, let alone durable coalitions of the key actors present in the project locations, would have been more risky and less likely to endure. and. At the end of the day, any development initiative will depend on some form of broad coalition. The Framework was able to expedite this process of coalition forming.

The programme succeeded in piloting a novel form and process of interaction between the highly differentiated needs and capacities of business and local producers. This initiative revealed a deeper set of criteria for fostering long-term sustainable and social interactions, which can serve as a blueprint for guiding future early-stage interventions and use of the Framework in similar post conflict or post-crisis contexts.

In the absence of key elements such as social cohesion, technical expertise, and start-up financing, which are required for both businesses and local communities to thrive, the structured governance basis of the Framework filled important voids and deficits in the local development and security ecosystem. It also helped to address specific local challenges more effectively. The 'guardians' of the HSBP Framework and the HS approach were undoubtedly PeaceStartup, who maintained a heavy accompaniment and mediation role to facilitate interactions between stakeholders. The programme has also highlighted the necessity for new types of finance to meet both community entrepreneur needs and address local risk factors for investors.

Annex 1: The Human Security Business Partnership Framework

