

Community monitoring of conflict dynamics and food security

PUTUMAYO CASE STUDY



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hunger and Conflict line of research Colombia
Report I

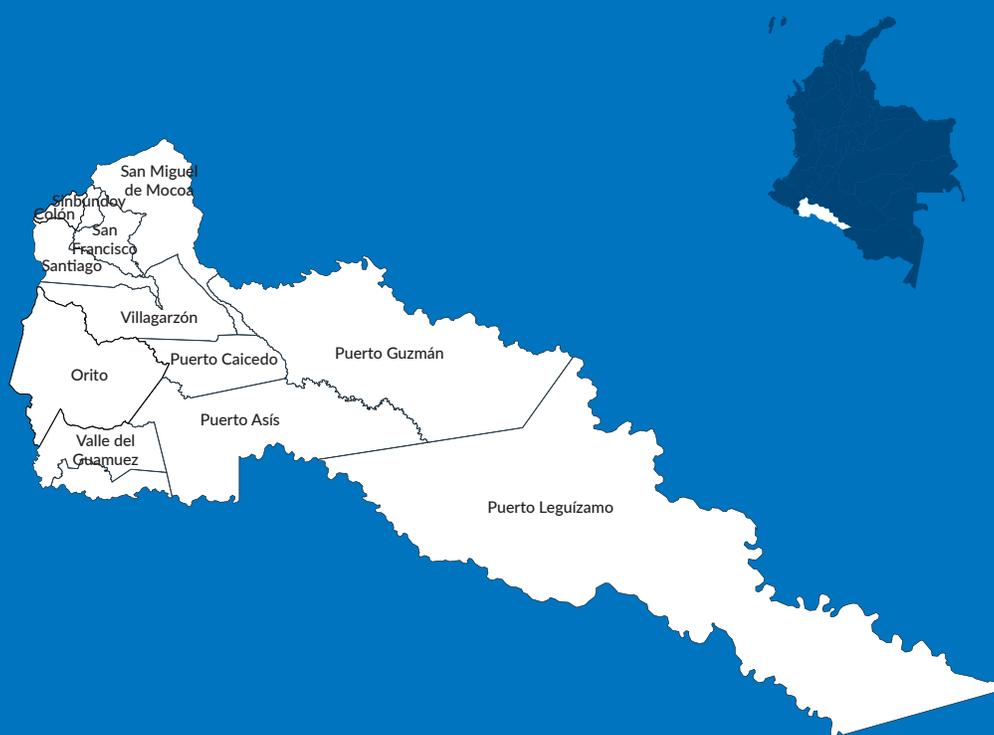
RESTRICTED CIRCULATION

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**ACCIÓN
CONTRA EL
HAMBRE**

This document presents the first report of the Hunger and Conflict for Colombia project of Acción contra el Hambre (ACH), which aims to identify impacts on food security in the context of the Colombian armed conflict, using the Monitor and Evaluate Food Insecurity in Conflicts (MEFIC) methodology, in three rural communities in the department of Putumayo.





METHODOLOGY

The methodology used mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) to identify community vulnerabilities, violent actions, and impacts on food security. Three (3) communities were targeted for analysis within the dispersed rurality of the municipalities of Puerto Asís and Puerto Leguizamo (Putumayo), where a field team of *Acción contra el Hambre* established the monitoring of the different food security variables required.

TERRITORIAL CONTEXT

The municipalities of Puerto Asís and Puerto Leguizamo, located in the department of Putumayo, have a variety of deficiencies and limitations that exacerbate the vulnerability of their inhabitants, which are structural and aggravate the effects of the current dynamics of conflict and armed violence, which includes:

1. The limited presence of land and air transportation infrastructure and transportation by waterways constitute the primary means of transportation for the communities.
2. High levels of Unsatisfied Basic Needs among the population, which increase in rural and dispersed rural areas.
3. Presence of illicit coca crops, which are a central part of the livelihoods of rural communities.
4. The presence of different Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) involved in territorial disputes.
5. Low/no state presence in many rural and dispersed territories.

FINDINGS

1

Findings regarding **armed actions with impact on food security**:

Land dispossession: The high levels of informality in land tenure generate a context of vulnerability for forced appropriation by NSAGs. Dispossession constitutes an event against food security as it deprives communities of the necessary capital to carry out productive and self-consumption activities. The imposition of restrictions on mobility, as well as threats and displacements, have deepened the phenomenon of dispossession in these communities.

2

Limited access to crops and other means of livelihood: It was found that communities strictly abide by mobility restrictions imposed by the NSAGs (limitation of movement by time or to areas). These limitations affect food security by restricting the possibility of developing their livelihoods, such as access to crops or other resources such as fishing and water collection.

3

Destruction of crops and productive assets: Destruction and theft of crops, livelihoods, and productive assets because of forced displacement was identified in the communities. Once the families return to their communities, they face the challenge of reestablishing themselves economically due to the violence experienced, and where the destruction of their productive assets jeopardizes not only the generation of income but also the very viability of their presence in the territory under conditions and guarantees of security, dignity, and voluntariness.

4

Obstruction in the supply chain operation: Entry to the territory by the river is regulated by the NSAGs. This control implies the temporary or complete closure of routes and, thus, the shortage of essential food products, inputs for the production process, and even external communication for the communities.

5

Vulnerability and instrumentalization of communities in the context of illicit crops: Families are governed by a subsistence economy based on crops for their consumption; coca cultivation gives them the possibility of selling their labor as additional income for the families and thus improve their food and living conditions, such as health and education expenses. The recent transformations of the armed conflict have meant a rupture of the past order, and the phenomena of violence in the chain have increased. Likewise, the “coca crisis”, due to a drop in demand for the purchase of coca paste, appears as a threat to the subsistence of communities that depend to a large extent on this crop.

6

Actions against the civilian population (homicide, threats, displacement, recruitment of children and adolescents): The confrontation between different NSAGs has had impacts on the civilian population (homicide, threats, extortion, etc.), which in turn instills fear in the population. This presence of NSAG prevents the existence of a complete record of acts of violence and makes them invisible; victims often prefer not to report the facts for fear of reprisals.

FINDINGS

1

Among the findings of the **impacts of the conflict on food security** in the communities:

Regarding availability: Access to land and means of production in conflict zones face challenges due to informality or environmental conditions. The control exercised by the NSAGs generates limited access to existing lands and a fear of appropriating new lands due to the uncertainty of states in the territory, which limits access to new means of subsistence and income. The characteristics of Amazonian soils and their acidity, as well as river flows, are critical factors in the productive processes carried out by the communities, which have also suffered recent alterations, including extreme variations in periods considered dry and sudden floods as part of the effects related to the climate crisis.

2

Regarding access: The population's income depends mainly on commercializing agricultural products and coca leaf collection. These have decreased significantly due to phenomena such as the "coca crisis". Given this low demand for coca paste, the community has been facing reduced incomes used to purchase food. In addition, the location of communities in dispersed rural areas, and the limitations in access that this implies, are determining factors in terms of access to food by the communities. The possibility of access to external products to complete the food basket (e.g., oil, salt, cleaning products) and productive inputs (e.g., fertilizers, chemicals) decreases considerably due to distance factors and obstacles in accessing the territories, which can be both physical and security related. It is essential to point out that violent events imply the suspension of transportation services that connect the community with the outside world and the inability to access basic food produced locally.

3

Regarding Use: The communities generally have poor access to potable water. The communities themselves identify the water they consume as cloudy and with the presence of particles, and where the quality deteriorates so much over time that its use is perceived as unfit for any consumption or domestic use. The restrictions on mobility on the part of the NSAG are also an obstacle to obtaining drinking water and access to traditional sources. Another problem is associated with the reuse of containers and other artifacts used in the handling of chemicals and those used for coca cultivation that ends up being used for the storage of water or other foods, with an impact not only on the health of the people but also on the environment due to the contamination of water sources.

CONCLUSIONS

1

Hunger continues to be a weapon of war in the context of the Colombian conflict: The exponential increase of phenomena such as displacement and confinement raises an alert in the relationship between hunger and conflict within the current Colombian conflict. The high tendency of this type of phenomenon, added to the vulnerability of the communities where they occur, makes the impact of the conflict on food security a matter of great concern.

2

Understanding the true dimension of the phenomenon of hunger and conflict in dispersed rural communities is a significant challenge due to the lack of information and access limitations: The underreporting of food insecurity continues to be high due to the very physical, communication and security limitations for access to remote rural communities, the most affected by this phenomenon.

3

The communities that have been monitored show that there is already a complex humanitarian crisis due to the conflict and hunger in Putumayo: The information obtained in the framework of the monitoring shows a population with high levels of vulnerability where consumption and livelihood coping strategies already include the reduction of meals and rations, as well as the loss of productive assets covering almost 89.5% of the population.

4

The environmental dimension of the challenges, in terms of climate change, is a factor that inevitably interacts with the food insecurity experienced by communities: The environmental factors that are affecting the Amazon such as climate change, deforestation, contamination of water sources by illegal activities, illegal mining, etc., are elements that necessarily become part of the complex equation of conflict and food security.

5

The dynamics of coca crops and the political and military decisions made about them, will be determinant for the food security of the communities in Putumayo, but also in other territories: Communities continue to actively depend on coca cultivation as a central part of their livelihoods, therefore any type of intervention on it is going to have a great impact at a social and economic level that must be considered in actions to support the population.

6

The consolidation of a perfect storm (conflict, economic shock, and climate change) regarding food security is a scenario to which communities in areas such as Putumayo are highly exposed: The presence of overlapping factors associated with the increase in armed conflict, changes in environmental cycles and the fall in supply in the coca economy and possible suspension of oil operations in the department of Putumayo, can produce multiple crisis scenarios, where communities do not have sufficient capacity for their own and institutional response to the level of risks and threats present.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Positioning on the agenda of the current relationship between hunger and conflict in the Colombian post-agreement context:

The current impact of the armed conflict and its dynamics of territorial control and confrontation of the NSAGs pose a great risk to the food security of the communities. It is necessary to make visible that hunger continues to be part of the repertoire of weapons used by armed actors and that this requires the attention of institutions, international agencies, and humanitarian organizations.

2

Call to the different actors responsible for compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and the non-use of hunger as a weapon of war as part of compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2417:

In the framework of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) recognition of the existence of six armed conflicts in the country, and based on the very definition of the actors subject to this type of obligation, recall the responsibility to respect and protect civilians and maintain a permanent zeal to protect civilian assets, including those necessary for the production and distribution of food.

3

Positioning of the interrelationship between conflict and hunger in the framework of the construction and implementation of public policies from national and sub-national levels:

It is essential to incorporate the analysis of the phenomenon of food insecurity linked to conflict factors that continues to manifest itself today, and in which the different public policy tools, at different levels, can play a fundamental role.

4

Food security as a critical part of monitoring the cessation of hostilities in the peace talks:

Incorporating the measurement of food security from indicators in the framework of the monitoring of the ceasefire with the different NSAGs is one of the critical aspects in which it can be established that a mechanism such as the one proposed can genuinely lead to the fundamental improvement of the conditions of the communities. In this framework, the beginning of the negotiation processes with the different armed groups as part of the Total Peace of the current government can integrate indicators and monitoring tools that systematically report the progress or setbacks in the food security of the communities in the context of the conflict.

5

Strengthen humanitarian assistance and protection and co-responsible work with social institutions in dispersed rural areas, where a humanitarian crisis remains invisible and with limited accompaniment by critical actors:

Strengthen the strategy of preferential accompaniment to dispersed rural areas by humanitarian agencies, boosting coordinated work with the institutional framework, which requires considerable effort in terms of human and financial resources and political will.

**FOR THE FULL REPORT AND MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE
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