

LESSONS OF THE TERRITORIAL PEACEBUILDING PROCESS IN COLOMBIA IN THE MIDST OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

What lessons can be learned from the peacebuilding process in Colombia at the local level amidst the COVID-19 pandemic? The UN Business and Human Security Initiative at LSE IDEAS in collaboration with Universidad Rosario of Colombia, UNDP, UNHCR and Peace Startup held a four-day conference in the format of dialogues that sought to facilitate the development of innovative solutions for the construction of peace in Colombia, four years after the historic signing of the 2016 peace accord with the FARC.

Four dialogues/ working tables were implemented remotely between the 23rd and 27th of November 2020 with the participation of more than fifteen panellists representing the business sector, public institutions, local communities, as well as national and international academic institutions.



Each session focused on different aspects of the peacebuilding processes that are often overlooked by politicians and academics despite their importance at the local level and their impact on the integrity of territorial peace overall. The first session drew attention to the role of the private sector in developing innovative responses to the COVID-19 crisis and the sector's contributions to the peacebuilding process in Colombia. The second session explored the use of technologies to discover innovative solutions for education and local development processes. The third session emphasised the strategies promoting innovation at the local level in peacebuilding processes. Finally, the last session featured a an academic presentation on the connection between territorial peace and Human Security and a summary of the main highlights and conclusions of the previous sessions by the rapporteurs of each dialogue.

Session 1: The role of the private sector in developing innovative solutions to the COVID-19 crisis and the peacebuilding process in Colombia

Panellists:

1	Eliana Villota is Co-Founder and Director of MinkaDev	2	María Lucía Méndez is Director of the Business and Peacebuilding division at FIP	3	Marcela Aragón is Director of Escuela de Taller Tumaco
4	Ana Carolina Rojas is a Youth Community Leader in Ituango, Antioquia	5	Sergio Tobón is Director of Social Development at ProAntioquia	6	Juan Felipe López is Social Entrepreneurship Executive at INNpalsa

Moderator: Mary Martin, Co-Director of the UN Business and Human Security Initiative at LSE IDEAS

Rapporteur: Janine Aguilera, Researcher at LSE IDEAS

Synthesis of the presentations:

During this dialogue panellists affirmed the relevant role that the business sector plays in generating innovative responses to crises and peacebuilding processes at the local level by referencing real-life examples in different regions of the country.

Eliana Villota explained that large companies can contribute to economic development by partnering with nascent community businesses sprouting in fragile municipalities historically affected by the war. This has been the principal achievement of MinkaDev in Colombia. MinkaDev is an organisation that connects large businesses with local businesses to build commercial relationships that guarantee higher returns while simultaneously transferring knowledge, building capacity and collaborating to address the lack of resources in these territories.

Eliana demonstrated the outcomes of these alliances by citing a corporate-local partnership that started in 2016 in Vigia del Fuerte, a municipality located in the region of Antioquia. ALSEC Colombia, a large company providing ingredients and raw food materials to all corners of the food industry, started a commercial partnership with Planeta, a small community business that produces raw açai berry pulp.

Through the alliance, Planeta has been integrated into the value chain of ALSEC as a supplier of frozen fruit pulp that ALSEC subsequently processes and sells as a superfood powder. This partnership has allowed the transfer of ALSEC's knowledge to improve and adjust Planeta's input according to the market requirements. Furthermore, both businesses have collaborated to tackle the transportation costs and the lack of electricity in Vigia del Fuerte, which highly impacts the capacity of Planeta to keep their product refrigerated. As the main outcome, Eliana highlighted the integration of two business

Ciclo de diálogos

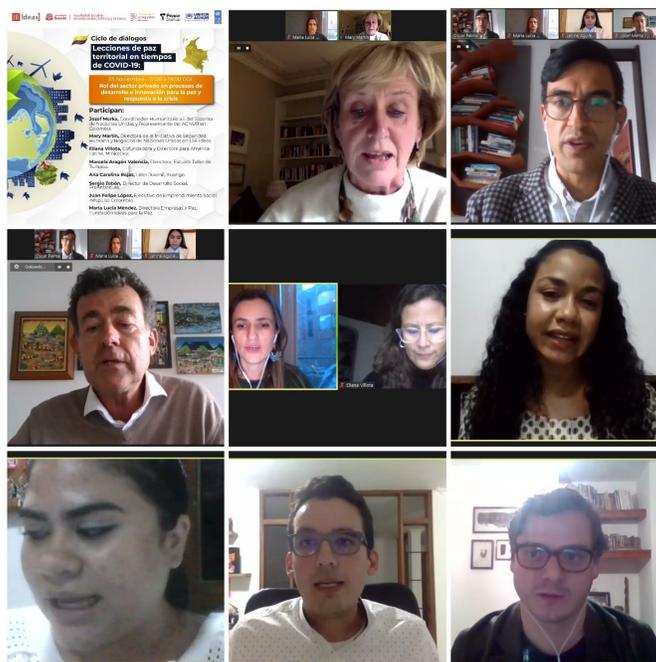
Lecciones de paz territorial en tiempos de COVID-19:

Sector privado, uso de tecnologías y estrategias de innovación territorial para la paz

zoom

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Tres mesas de trabajo ◇ Sesión plenaria 	<p>Fecha: 23, 24 y 25 de noviembre</p> <p>27 de noviembre</p>	<p>Hora: 17:00 a 19:00 COL</p> <p>16:00 a 18:00 COL</p>
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chains and shared objectives to develop and commercialise a product while building local capacity and fostering local economic development in a fragile context.



María Lucía Méndez discussed how the academic sector in Colombia has shown the different ways that large and small companies can contribute to peacebuilding and development through tangible and intangible methods. The FIP think tank has more than 20 years of expertise in this research field. Recent studies published by Fundación Ideas para la Paz (FIP) attest how little Colombians trust private companies that operate in the country, though paradoxically most Colombians do believe that the private sector has an important role as a positive agent of change. The lack of trust in this sector, however, hinders the possibility of collaboration—and with it the prospects for reconciliation in the country.

As a result, FIP launched an innovative tool named “*Yo Confío*” (“I Trust”, in English), which aims to measure the levels of trust between companies, local authorities and communities located in territories in which companies operate. This tool was strategically designed to provide an index that ranges between 0 and 1, based on five variables that influence an individual’s decision to trust. The index enables to determine how each actor’s perception of trust according to five indicators. Similarly, cross-regional analysis of the index allows researchers to understand those variables which most weaken or strengthen trust in each territory. María Lucía proposed that trust was a crucial intangible element to achieving cooperation between communities and companies, hence the importance of studying and measuring it to identify how it may be strengthened across Colombia.

Marcela Aragon and Ana Carolina Rojas called attention to the mechanisms in place to invest corporate resources in educational programmes, technical skills trainings and scholarships. This social investment contributes to human development and increases the employment rate at the local level. Marcela, representing the public institutions of Tumaco, and Ana Carolina, representing the community of Ituango, both highlighted the effectiveness of investment in education as a key strategy to contributing to local social and economic development, and through it peacebuilding. Through various examples they

illustrated how investment in education has increased young people's ability to recover psychologically from the experience of war in the hopes of providing a better future through employability or entrepreneurship.

Marcela also highlighted the importance of promoting and recognising monetary contributions from the corporate sector as a driver for capacity building. As rural areas have been historically ignored by private interests, it is therefore vital to restore ties of trust with local stakeholders.

ProAntioquia is a social organisation created by the private sector in Colombia to generate initiatives and programmes for peace and sustainable development, and as its Director of Social Development Sergio Tobón shed light on the value of this type of organisations as private companies' direct link to engaging in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes in the country. In 2016, under the representation of a business leader of ProAntioquia, the private sector joined the negotiation table and provided recommendations during peace talks between the Government and the FARC. This example provides a valuable lesson in the positive social and political impact that the private sector can generate. Aware of this responsibility, ProAntioquia has promoted the participation of the business sector in the Transitional Justice mechanisms, particularly as it is believed that companies can contribute to the truth-finding process.

Moreover, through ProAntioquia, business leaders were able to purchase 270 hectares of land to launch the programme named "Taparales" through which demobilized combatants of the FARC could gain access to land and develop productive enterprises to facilitate the return to civilian life. This example, provided by Sergio, further underscores the constant challenge: how to integrate business know-how with the local skill of ex-combatants. This quandary again re-directs us back to the distrust between the private sector and local communities in Colombia.

Finally, Juan Felipe López affirmed that the government of Colombia supports social entrepreneurship, pointing to his own initiative, INNpulsa, as an example. Its objective is to fund the business ideas of conflict victims, combatants and other vulnerable populations. Helping local entrepreneurs is a powerful strategy to tackle geographical barriers in the country given that the growth of their businesses at the local level could spread motivation and eventually stimulate local economic development. Ultimately, the core idea is that Colombian entrepreneurs must act as agents of change at the local level.

Main conclusions of the working table

There are various strategies that can be implemented to bring companies closer to communities. Firstly, it is fundamental to understand the commercial interests of companies relative to the capacity of local businesses so that the two can be integrated into a value chain. Secondly, companies' mindset should change in terms of what constitutes their 'area of influence'. They need to understand that they have the potential to impact territories beyond just those in which they operate.

Thirdly, companies should understand their responsibility is not only a financial responsibility to their shareholders, but also a social responsibility to the local populations located in territories where they work. Finally, we should expand our understanding of "innovation", namely that companies can also innovate through generating new types of value, such as public value, or modifying their methods by engaging new actors.

Session 2: The use of technologies to find innovative solutions for education and local development processes.

Participants

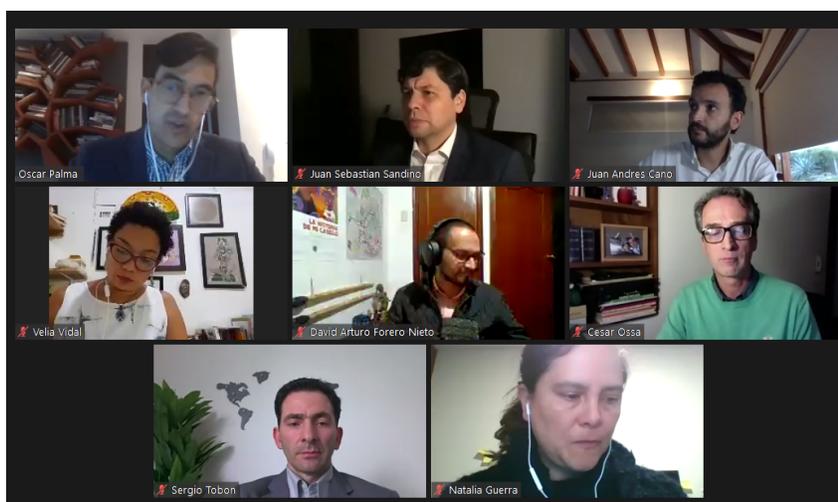
- 1 Natalia Guerra is Director of Public, Regulatory and Wholesale Affairs at Telefónica Movistar
- 2 Juan Sebastián Sandino is Director of Prospective at Pacte.co
- 3 Velia Vidal Romero is Director at Motete Colombia and FLECHO (Festival of reading and writing in Chocó, Colombia)
- 4 Sergio Tobón is lecturer at CIFE University Center
- 5 César Tulio Ossa is Director of Continuing Education at Universidad Javeriana

Moderator: Juan Andrés Cano, Founder and CEO at PeaceStartup

Rapporteur: David Forero, Coordinator of the Programme in Social Innovation at Universidad Nacional

Synthesis of the presentations:

During the second session, panellists discussed how technology plays a decisive role in the search for innovation vis-à-vis education and development, particularly in the rural areas of Colombia. Greater complexities brought by the COVID-19 pandemic shed light on the need to understand how rural communities face today's challenge of virtual education. Have the gaps in education deepened? Or have new opportunities emerged in the midst of the pandemic?



Natalia Guerra focused on the importance of telecommunications and connectivity in rural areas and their benefits as tools to increase local economic growth through better employment and development opportunities. The provision of Internet, digitization and technologies can generate savings, jobs, better income and self-sustainability at the local level. However, both panellists mentioned the need to understand that a digitization improvement is not enough if rural communities remain anchored in the same social and historical conflicts that have hindered development for decades. It is thus important to generate joint efforts from different approaches that build on local knowledge and integrate local visions.

Velia Vidal highlighted the existence of digital gaps throughout the national territory, some of which can be wider depending on the sector and the context. She explained that beyond this reality, it is important to visit these territories to better understand the daily challenges faced by Colombians living in rural territories. This population has to overcome obstacles of poor connectivity and barriers to knowledge

while simultaneously confronting the dearth of infrastructure typically associated with these areas: a deprivation of basic services such as electricity, water, housing, access to education, displacement and violence, adverse geographical conditions, illiteracy and structural racism.

Sergio Tobón followed up on this point by emphasizing the need to strengthen technology through alliances between a variety of actors in Colombia such as private, public and academic institutions, international organisations, and community leaders. He stated that the country must not set aside the importance of strengthening personalized educational approaches according to local contexts and the needs of students in each territory. Under his view, Colombian society must be aware of the need to transform educational approaches in the country so that they may be further developed and complemented by technology. This will be the key to sustainable development in each community.

Cesar Tulio Sossa explained how University Javariana and other academic institutions in Colombia have adapted to the challenges posed by the pandemic by leveraging technology. Universities have reinvented themselves by implementing new training processes and offering quicker learning paths. Universities have begun to offer short, six-month online courses to train people in digital skills and other related topics that provide practical tools to populations in remote areas. Given the pandemic, processes that universities were planning to develop for the future have been accelerated to the present by necessity.

Lastly, David Forero summarised some challenges to be considered in this regard. Beyond unilaterally delivering technology or development to regions, diverse institutions and actors must learn to build cross-sector partnerships. The only way to embed technology and knowledge in everyday life at the local level is to find a productive social and commercial utility for generating concrete opportunities in the community. David emphasized the importance of promoting and supporting such processes that arise in local communities.

Main conclusions of the working table

- Now more than ever Colombian universities must rise to the occasion to ensure that rural territories are afforded the opportunity to obtain a practical quality education;
- Rural territories contain valuable local knowledge that demands recognition in order to showcase the great potential for cross-sector partnerships with rural populations; and
- Communities are empowered when they are given the power to determine which technological processes best suit their needs, paving the way for local innovation.

Session 3: Strategies to promote innovation on territorial peacebuilding processes

Participants:



Moderator: Michael Lerner

Rapporteur: Pablo Angarita is part of the Human Security Observatory at Universidad de Antioquia.

Synthesis of the presentations:

During the third working table in the cycle of dialogues, the six panellists shared best practices on how to promote diverse stakeholder partnerships to generate innovative solutions for obstacles to development and peace in rural territories, particularly innovation aiming to close the socioeconomic gaps in access to science, technology and education.

Franklin Jaraba began the session with a description of the main issues affecting Colombia's Caribbean coast, stressing that solutions to address these problems must come from local communities. According to his view, it is fundamental to generate spaces in which strategic actors, from both the public and private sectors, commit to supporting start-ups and regional businesses and find solutions to the systemic issues of the region. These efforts must always respect the local vision and concerns.

Julián Vargas Jaramillo focused on the relevance of building strong links between the Colombia's academic institutions and the Colombian people at the local level. According to his view, universities have the potential to bridge the gaps between the population and the government. Such linkages can help guarantee minimum living conditions for communities in Colombia's remote regions.

Federico Montes raised awareness on the need to define two concepts: "territory" and "identity". Under his view, the concept of territory cannot be understood as a rigid geographical concept, but as a dynamic process of cultural identity construction that is in constant flux. Subsequently, he pointed out the need to understand how "identity" and "territory" interact with one another in Colombia. He concluded that this constant process of identity change in the country must be nationally recognised and accepted to generate innovative strategies for peacebuilding.

Marius Døcker highlighted the relevant role of the private sector in the process of peace construction in Colombia through a brief description of the B4P's work. The purpose of B4P is to create collaborative economies in countries affected by war. This means that the economic system, besides generating economic profits, must generate a holistic welfare for society. This social good must stem from alliances between public and private institutions that cooperate with businesses generating positive impacts on communities.

Julialba Osorio explained different initiatives that UNAD is implementing in a vast majority of Colombian municipalities. The central objective of these initiatives is to establish processes of innovation for territories and implement derived solutions by engaging local populations and recognizing their interests and needs. UNAD has succeeded in these objectives by creating and delivering numerous virtual courses for people of various backgrounds.

Lastly, Ángela Patricia Bonilla explained different strategies that the Colombian Ministry of Sciences, Technologies, and Innovation is implementing in the territories. She emphasised the practical workshops that the national government is delivering to former combatants of the FARC. Ángela highlighted, however, that working with the community can be difficult because the people are not accustomed to working directly with a state ministry. For her, the main challenge is to foster trust between communities and state institutions.

Main conclusions of the table

The six panellists agreed on the necessity of directly involving local communities in the process of thinking, creating and implementing innovative solutions for peacebuilding. Similarly, the panellists emphasised the need to work on the development and strengthening of cross-sector alliances to support the peace process, particularly in regard to the implementation of human rights and

reconciliation practices. The panellists also highlighted the need to use innovative tools, supported by science and technology, to generate economic growth and consolidate peace in the territories most affected by the armed conflict.

Despite agreement among these common themes, the panellists' perspectives on the presented issues differed according to the sector in which they work. The analysis presented by the representative from the Ministry of Sciences, Technologies, and Innovation and the Vice Rector of UNAD was made from a top-down approach, presenting different practices that national and international governmental institutions are developing to consolidate territorial peace. The Managing Director of Business for Peace analysed the topic of the working table from a systemic level of analysis, focusing on different examples around the world on how business can help in the process of peace construction. A different approach was taken by Franklin, Federico and Julian, who focused on the idea of applying innovative solutions arising organically from the people residing within the territories in question, with assistance from universities, companies and public institutions.

Plenary session

Panellists:



Moderator: Arlene Tickner is Lecturer at Universidad del Rosario

Synthesis of the session:

Karlos Pérez kicked-off the session with a presentation on the connection between territorial peace and the concept of human security. Karlos contributed key ideas that can advance the understanding that human security concept can play in post-conflict environments such as Colombia:

- Peacebuilding processes are processes aimed at a reconstruction of the overall “space” that the war had previously shaped. These spaces may be composed of different actors, agendas, objectives and understandings of the territory itself.
- Peacebuilding processes involve material changes but also transformations in socioeconomic power relations. It is particularly important to overcome the urban-rural division which is pronounced in Colombia.
- Enhanced human security has the potential to contribute to a better understanding of these spheres and aspects of the peacebuilding process and the transformations needed at the local and individual level through the following three dimensions:
 1. Power-relations transformation;
 2. Identity building
 3. The importance of the local “space”.

Following the presentation, the rapporteurs of the previous working tables participated as panellists presenting key highlights, lessons learned, unresolved challenges in the field, and conclusions of the sessions.

As rapporteur of the first working table, Janine Aguilera highlighted that the business sector in Colombia currently has the opportunity to harness the capacity of local youth and pave their way towards employment or entrepreneurship while helping them minimize feelings of resignation, resentment, and demotivation developed during the war. She also explained that the business sector must go beyond commercial incentives to invest in Colombian society by supporting the peacebuilding process in Colombia. A concrete step the business sector could take to add to public value is contributing to transitional justice mechanisms by getting involved in the truth-telling process led by the Truth Commission.



Aguilera emphasized the importance of restoring trust relationships between the private sector and local communities in Colombia. Without trust, any attempt at promoting collaborative efforts between different types of actors across sectors will be unsuccessful. She concluded that, according to the panellists of the first working table, the business sector is a fundamental actor that has the potential to break down the youth's feelings of resentment and the geographical barriers they face around. They can do so by reaching out and engaging small businesses, entrepreneurs, community leaders, and the youth of remote areas through greater investment in education, infrastructure and capacity building to facilitate youth employability and entrepreneurship.

David Forero, the rapporteur of the second table, stated that the main lesson learned was the importance of implementing a perspective of “common languages” when approaching local communities in Colombia. The introduction of new technological and digital tools must be done carefully, respecting the local language, knowledge and leaderships. It should not diminish or replace the skills and ancestral knowledge of local population—it should instead complement it.

Forero explained that the pandemic made Colombia discover how misleading the official data on digital coverage was in the country. It also showed how unprepared the country was to face the challenges of quarantine measures. He affirmed that the digital divide in Colombia is marked by the rural and the urban: there is no point in delivering technology to people who do not know how to effectively use it and are unfamiliar with its functions. There is a 20-year pedagogical gap in rural areas in Colombia, and the dearth of technology is yet another barrier to bridging that gap. He concluded that in order to

generate technological appropriation in Colombia, it is necessary to see digital tools as a means and not as an end.

The rapporteur of the third session, Julian Muñoz Tejada, stressed that in Colombia it is still necessary to define who the actors that guarantee human security in the country should be. Tejada also explained that there are three aspects of innovation in the peacebuilding strategies in Colombia, according to the panellists of this roundtable. First, it is important that innovation responds and builds on the modes of “thinking” and “doing” that communities already possess. Communities know what is best for themselves, and therefore the construction of a “standard” peace program would be a failure in Colombia. Second, Colombians must innovate in a way that businesses generate profits for everyone involved, not just for corporate shareholders. Third, such innovation must be channelled through the social appropriation of knowledge by introducing gender approaches and other methods that are understandable by former FARC combatants, for example.

Mary Martin closed the conference, highlighting some key lessons which had emerged from the cycle of dialogues and the plenary. These include the importance of identity as a component of sustainable peace: the conference had made audible and visible voices from all over Colombia, and from different sectors and perspectives. Their distinct experiences needed to be recognised and acknowledged in strategies to build a durable and territorial peace. Knowledge, learning and training had also featured strongly as a form of intervention that had considerable traction in generating positive transformations.

Dr Martin hoped that the testimonies and insights given would inspire more academic work in the area of territorial peacebuilding. She drew attention to the academic network co-ordinated by Rosario University as part of the UN programme, funded by the UN Trust Fund for Human Security, and called on academics and practitioners to engage with the work of the programme via this network. Future events were being planned including dialogues in Colombian regional locations as well as an international conference for spring 2021 to share the lessons from Bogota with international academics and practitioners.