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Expanding Opportunities Worldwide

PEACEBUILDING IN COLOMBIA:

# A YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

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Results of the *Jóvenes por Jóvenes* youth mapping exercise for the Program of Alliances for Reconciliation, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

# YOUTH MAPPING IN NUMBERS



**21**

MUNICIPALITIES



**8**

DEPARTMENTS



**391**

YOUNG LEADERS  
INVOLVED



**348**

RESPONSES  
ANALYZED

## YOUTH LEADERS MAPPED...



**7 OUT OF 10**  
ARE MEN



**5 OUT OF 10**  
ARE OVER 20 YEARS OF AGE



**9 OUT OF 10**  
ASSOCIATE RECONCILIATION WITH  
FORGIVENESS, PEACE, RESPECT,  
ACCEPTANCE AND DIALOGUE



**5 OUT OF 10**  
FOLLOW ARTISTS ON SOCIAL  
NETWORKS



**4 OUT OF 10**  
FOLLOW POLITICIANS



**5 OUT OF 10**  
WANT YOUNG PEOPLE TO BE MORE  
DRIVEN

## YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS MAPPED...



**5 OUT OF 10**  
ARE INFORMAL



**4 OUT OF 10**  
ARE INVOLVED IN SOCIAL ACTIVITIES



**4 OUT OF 10**  
ARE INVOLVED IN CULTURAL  
ACTIVITIES



**4 OUT OF 10**  
VOICED TO BE FACING CONFLICTS  
WITHIN THE COMMUNITY



**5 OUT OF 10**  
RECOMMEND EXTERNAL SPONSORS  
TO VALUE EXISTING YOUTH-LED  
INITIATIVES



**5 OUT OF 10**  
REQUIRE MORE INFRASTRUCTURE  
AND MATERIALS TO OPERATE

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The present study gathers quantitative and qualitative results from the *Jóvenes por Jóvenes* Mapping. This research was led by 41 young people between 18 and 29 years of age in 21 of the 24 municipalities where the Program of Alliances for Reconciliation (PAR) from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) operates, designed and supervised by Search for Common Ground in Colombia. The youth mapping's results highlight the importance and role of youth in peacebuilding in Colombia. They provide guidelines and recommendations to PAR and its partners on how to undertake collaborative work with youth-led organizations in the territory, and serve as a starting point for both Search and PAR in the design of an awareness and mobilization strategy of young people towards peacebuilding and reconciliation in their communities.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Rebuilding a society after an armed conflict requires the mobilization, action and appropriation of all the stakeholders in the society, especially those who are marginalized as a consequence of violence. One of these groups is youth, traditionally excluded from formal peace negotiations processes. In order to raise the voice and importance of youth for global security and stability, in December 2015 the United Nations Security Council approved resolution 2250 on youth, peace, and security, constituting a milestone in the recognition and the prioritization of young people in peacebuilding. This study is framed within the guidelines of this global public policy framework and contributes to its local approach.

On the other hand, within the framework of international cooperation for peacebuilding in Colombia, the Program of Alliances for Reconciliation (PAR), financed with resources from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), seeking to promote transformative alliances that provide economic and social opportunities and support awareness and mobilization actions in the territories, prioritizes youth as one of their key stakeholders to engage with. In this sense, identifying, understanding and valuing youth's initiative for peacebuilding is the first step to approach and effectively involve this group.





The mapping exercise was guided by the Search for Common Ground methodologies: The Youth Mapping Methodology, which guided the design, implementation and monitoring of the *Jóvenes por Jóvenes* Mapping, and the “Listening & Learning” methodology, a tool which uses conversation and mutual learning as a method of data collection. The mapping process was led by 41 young leaders, between 18 and 29 years of age, in 21 municipalities from eight (8) departments, who researched and processed the data collected. This report analyzes 348 responses from young people head of organizations and youth groups in these territories.

## KEY RESULTS

Young people and youth-led organizations mapped in this study provide evidence of the contribution of young people to building peace in their communities based on their own interests and experiences. The main findings of the *Jóvenes por Jóvenes* Mapping are summarized as follows:

1. Youth leadership in PAR territories is predominantly led by males older than 20 years of age, with young people in the middle youth, between 25 and 29 years old, holding most leadership roles.
2. Artists (especially musical), politicians and athletes have the biggest influence on youth leaders in social networks.
3. WhatsApp and Facebook were reported to be the preferred means of communication between young leaders and those they influence. However, traditional means of communications such as holding meetings and telephone calls are also highlighted. There are regional differences that must be taken into account when communicating, such as the high relevance of telephone calls in Choco, or the use of other media in Bolívar and Caquetá.
4. The organizations' and youth groups' ecosystem is a mixed one in terms of formality, with only a little more than half of the organizations mapped being formal, and almost half of the groups being informal. Structural challenges are evident in Meta, Tolima, Bolívar (Cartagena) and Arauca.

5. The diversity of approaches and activities of the mapped groups and organizations not only shows a dynamism in the youth-led organizations' ecosystem, but a clear intention from young people to protect each other, as well as children, from violence and bad habits in their communities. Moreover, it shows a will to fill the gaps that parties such as family, the state or the community do not currently occupy in their development. This represents a clear opportunity to involve youth groups in peacebuilding programs, even if this is not their fundamental purpose.
6. Mapped groups and organizations are mainly composed of men. Low representation of women and especially LGBTI youth in the groups is alarming, suggesting that there is little social integration of these subgroups, even among their peers.
7. Moreover, only one sixth of the organizations say they carry out activities with a focus on gender, ethnicity and/or disability. It is essential to accompany and support these groups in the communities where they exist given the fragility of the contexts and the high risk of re-victimization for these populations.
8. Although most urgent needs among youth-led organizations are material in nature, there is also an important concern for the acquisition of technical knowledge and communications skills to strengthen their management and scope. This finding is aligned with the main internal challenge identified by youth-led organizations: sustainability over time.
9. The main obstacles identified by youth groups are related to conflicts and tolerance within the community, state support for their initiatives and physical security to operate. However, regional differences show that in Chocó, insecurity is very important. Bolívar, Magdalena and Caquetá report issues on peaceful coexistence; and Arauca lacks state support.
10. Half of the young people mapped advise those who wish to support their initiatives to better understand the local context and youth-led processes. Their recommendations show that youth empowerment goes through establishing mutually beneficial relationships based on respect, trust and collaboration.
11. The most important challenge that young people face in these territories is internal in nature. A lack of hope about their lives and their futures acts as an obstacle to pursue healthy paths. However, regional differences show different challenges across local contexts reflecting additional obstacles in youth's development and participation. Besides hopelessness, in Antioquia youth see a great obstacle in local violent environments; in Arauca, unemployment is a key challenge; in Bolívar, lack of state support; in Caquetá and Magdalena, community conflicts; in Chocó, violence and unemployment; in Meta, access and permanence in the educational system; in Tolima, the abuse of psychoactive substances and coexistence; and in Valle del Cauca, unemployment and violence.
12. Young leaders wish to see their peers more motivated and better educated. In terms of gender differences, young men place more emphasis on having more economic opportunities and employment for young people, women aspire to have greater political participation, while LGBTI youth wish for more cultural spaces for youth.
13. Cogently, 91% of mapped youth associate reconciliation with accepting and forgiving mistakes of the past, learning to live with others' differences and building community together with other people. The results show that young people want to leave the past behind, that they are open to dialogue in the midst of differences, showing a desire to live in peace. This represents an immense capital for peacebuilding through youth active engagement.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations correspond to the general findings of the *Jóvenes por Jóvenes* Mapping exercise. However, PAR's regional and programmatic peculiarities must guide their total or partial adoption.

### Recommendation 1: Value young people's contribution to peacebuilding in their communities

- To local, regional and national governments, increase access for young people to political participation mechanisms, as well as to peacebuilding, violence prevention, reintegration and citizen security programs. In the instances where mechanisms already exist, such as municipal youth platforms, strengthen their scope and promote their access among marginalized groups.
- To PAR, work on a youth mobilization campaign and visibilization of youth initiatives that contribute to peacebuilding in the territory.
- To PAR's regional offices, create inter-agency spaces with youth secretariats and social secretariats to share this study's findings and link mapped organizations to programs supported by local and departmental governments.
- To PAR, support initiatives that promote youth participation in the program's territories, especially those led by young women and LGTBI youth.
- To PAR, communicate to young people through platforms, languages and imaginaries recognized and valued by them, such as social networks, urban language, or through national and local artists and heroes.
- To PAR, promote with partner media the inclusion of perspectives, life stories and opinions of young leaders on issues of national, regional and local interest, and position youthful positive roles that promote peace and reconciliation.
- To PAR: share the results of this study and the databases of the youth mapped organizations with their national and regional partners seeking to link them and other young people to projects in target municipalities.

### Recommendation 2: Develop individual capacities of young people for peace and reconciliation

- To local, regional and national governments, take actions or support programs that help increase access for young people to good quality higher education in PAR territories.
- To PAR, strengthen soft skills such as empathy, verbal and written communication, creativity, teamwork, and proactive attitudes in youth projects within the program's strategic component of *Reconciliation Skills*.
- To PAR, start or support programs that promote youth entrepreneurship, employment and income generation.
- To PAR, start or support programs that promote knowledge, celebration and cultural and artistic exchange among young people around traditional cultural expressions and new urban artistic trends.
- To PAR, generate synergies with other programs administered by ACDI VOCA, such as the Employability Program (CEP), that can link young people to work in urban centers of the prioritized municipalities.
- Use the power of media and national and local opinion leaders to promote positive heroes that generate changes in attitudes and behaviors in young people and in the community in line with PAR's drivers like respect, dialogue, and others, such as empathy and positive coexistence in community.

### **Recommendation 3: Strengthening local youth-led organizations creates conditions for a stable and lasting peace in the territory**

- To PAR and its allies, create alliances for reconciliation directly with youth-led organizations with a proven track record in the program's territories.
- To all the organizations that wish to carry out regional and local interventions, carry out dialogue processes in the territory that include youth in order to identify their interests and expectations, assess existing youth initiatives in the field of intervention and incorporate ideas and inputs of youth-led organizations in the territory in the design of programs, communicative content and calls for peace and reconciliation.
- To PAR, make open calls and access to resources processes more flexible to increase access for youth-led organizations.
- To PAR, start municipal information days aimed at organizations and youth groups and support the application processes of youth-led organizations to calls for project funding.
- To PAR, generate local inter-agency spaces between private or social organizations with experience and youth-led organizations in order to generate synergies for the presentation and execution of projects, organizational mentoring, microfinance and relationship.
- To PAR, generate sustainable partnerships with national government entities such as “Colombia Joven” that offer youth-led organizations knowledge, capacity and strategic relationships.
- To PAR, within the strategic component of *Skills for Reconciliation*, incorporate trainings focused on developing youth-led organizations' capacities to address issues associated with violence and conflict, such as: conflict resolution, gender violence, leadership, human rights, community dialogue, empowerment, among others.

### **Recommendation 4: Developing collective capacities for peaceful coexistence helps reduce stigmatization towards youth**

- To local governments, promote spaces for intergenerational and intergroup dialogue and collaboration within communities to support youth leadership programs.
- To the local, regional and national governments, start programs that strengthen coexistence and family empathy, with emphasis on the relationship with adolescents and youth.
- To the local, regional and national governments, start or support programs focused on the prevention of domestic violence and sexual violence.
- To PAR, collect systematic information on youth and on youth-led organizations that receive support, in order to monitor their performance, generate learning and evaluate the impact of the support.