



# Diversity and territory

*A treasure in need of hope*



humanity  
& inclusion

Diversity is treasured when there is a deep relationship between the inhabitants and the territory.

The diversity of rural Colombia becomes infinite when it is understood, in the communities that populate it, the rootedness and the refusal to leave their territory because of an incessant war that seems not to end, where the hope of winning what has been lost drives away the cold of fear and breastfeeds like a mother who gives life to her child.

## HI Action

HI starts humanitarian civilian demining work in the department of Cauca, Colombia, in 2017. In a process of coordination and agreement with the authorities of the indigenous reservation and representatives of the peasant authority present in the municipalities.

In the village of La Meseta, in the municipality of Cajibío, Cauca, HI began clearing in the area where a water pumping system that feeds a community aqueduct is located, which used to allow crop irrigation, in addition to representing an important source of drinking water in summer, when the other water sources dry up. When this pumping system broke down many years ago, its location in the middle of a minefield prevented workers from accessing it, leaving the community without water for 17 years.

The clearing of this area was prioritized thanks to the information provided by the community to the [HI Victim Assistance team](#); the inhabitants reported that the rehabilitation of

the water catchment system was one of their development priorities.

water catchment system was one of their development priorities. With support from HI's socio-economic inclusion component, the community was able to purchase new pipes, and provided the labor to install them. Once the demining team cleared the land sufficiently to allow access to the pump, it was repaired, and the tank became operational again.

This intervention, based on HI's integrated mine action approach, allows 740 users to benefit from access to drinking water, including a health center, two schools, a church, and a panela production workshop.

HI had been assigned 83% of the entire territory of the municipality of Corinto, Cauca, which corresponded mainly to the mountainous area. During the work period, 102 explosive devices were destroyed, including anti-personnel mines, unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive devices, resulting in numerous lives saved and guarantees of non-repetition. After the clearing intervention, the community is developing the sugarcane mill





## Cauca context

project, as an alternative production alternative to illicit crops and with the technical support of the community of Cajibío.

HI has extensive experience in humanitarian demining as a factor of conflict transformation, with the participation of communities for risk prevention management and elimination of the threat of explosive devices. During the intervention process HI led an innovative approach based on **Community Liaison and Conflict Sensitivity**, as a tool for community transformation towards socio-economic development of the territories. For this, HI works on establishing trusting relationships with the community to determine needs assessment through community liaison, **ENT** and risk education and; the release of land to allow the development of infrastructure projects and the promotion of peace-building practices.

Cauca is a deeply diverse department, located in the southwest of Colombia and part of the Andean and Pacific regions. It is a large territory made up mostly of ethnic and campesino communities and is made up of **42 municipalities**, with the majority of the population concentrated in its capital Popayán and in the municipality of Santander de Quilichao, located in the north of the department. Thirty-seven percent of the population belongs to ethnic communities, **21%** are indigenous, and **16%** are black, mulatto, and Afro-Colombian, located mainly in the department's rural areas.

Cauca was defined as the epicenter of the war, which gave it the seal of a territory in confrontation due to its geostrategic importance of access to the Pacific coast, affected by drug trafficking and the presence of armed actors of various kinds. It became a

complex scenario characterized as a zone of dispute between guerrilla insurgency and State counterinsurgency. Since the 1960s, the different groups began their transit and permanence, resulting in a high-risk dynamic for the communities.

This meant the combination of military strategies to combat the guerrillas, with actions for the forced eradication of illicit crops, together with social plans and civil-military actions to achieve state control in these zones.

The Consolidation Policy and the high presence of military units, together with the precariousness of its social components, the increasingly evident arbitrariness, the systematic impoverishment of the communities and their stigmatization, among other things, generated a humanitarian crisis of great proportions that aggravated the war and,

consequently, increased the contamination of the territories with the remains of the explosives of war.

Thus, the progressive transformation of the north of the department into one of the key territories for counterinsurgency and drug war operations has had as a correlate the concentration of guerrilla forces, the intensification of armed confrontations and with them, the commission of human rights abuses and breaches of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) by all armed actors.

### **Land release work by Humanity & Inclusion**

HI's land release work consists of conducting non-technical studies to define the precise geographic scope and socioeconomic impact of EC contamination in the areas assigned by the National Authority. More specifically, this technical activity will allow, through community liaison work that includes the active participation of the communities at all stages and the triangulation of information, to cancel suspect areas and confirm dangerous zones. The lands released by the Non-Technical Studies process may be restituted and used while the confirmed polygons will be marked, marked and prioritized for clearing activities, under a previous identification of the development of projects that will allow the use and socio-economic reactivation of the released lands.

On September 14, 2016 at 6:33 pm, a regional media headlined "**In Caloto, Corinto, Miranda and Cajibío there will be humanitarian demining tasks**". This great news of hope in the midst of a peace process with the former FARC guerrilla, sets the possibility of a new future with territories freed from contamination with weapons.

This valuable work also creates a challenge for Humanity & Inclusion as an organization that was assigned the municipalities of Cajibío, Caloto and Corinto.

A challenge that should transcend demining, as a task of destruction or clearance of explosive devices, in terms of square meters, to a more comprehensive action that would allow the socio-economic development of their communities and with this, the hope of recovering what has been lost, from actions such as, the recovery of the water source lost for more than 16 years due to the settlement of armed conflict actors in the municipality of Cajibío, or the possibility of starting a sugarcane mill in an area where illicit crops are the main crop grown and almost the only possibility of income in the municipality of Corinto.

## Example 1.

**Managing security degradation, ensuring humanitarian acceptance, and remaining at the service of communities.**



## Case of Cajibío

The experience began with the rehabilitation of the water source or community aqueduct in the La Meseta district, municipality of Cajibío. The recovery of the water, through participatory work with the community, brought economic reactivation to the area, historically known for the production and commercialization of panela, which due to water scarcity and the presence of an armed group that did not allow its inhabitants to approach this vital source, the community limited its agricultural and economic activities, generating a massive displacement of families for fear of the presence of explosive devices,

threats to their leaders and the lack of opportunities.

Hence, the recovery of water thanks to humanitarian demining and community work also brought hope, a new beginning and the motivation to exchange their experience with other communities that were in the same situation, to share their knowledge and actively participate in the socio-economic reconstruction of the territories.





## Example 2.

**Community Liaison and conflict as a transformational tool for demining - HMA to an end, not an end.**

## Case of Corinto, Los Andes

In Corinto, the peasant reserves and the Páez indigenous Cabildo share territory. Historically, the indigenous and peasant communities have shared the territory of Corinto in the midst of different organizational developments that are configured in their relationship with the tenure and protection of land and territory.

The contradictions of these two organizations in the territory are exacerbated by the fact that most of the land suitable for crops and easily accessible is concentrated in the sugar mills. In this sense, mountainous and difficult to access lands are in the hands of peasants and indigenous people, who enter dispute when the borders of collective property (indigenous resguardo) are extended or enlarged, limiting the political capacity of peasant communities as they become minorities.

The tensions imposed by a context of uncertainty and frustration due to a peace threatened by a new war are now threatened by a new war met with peasant and indigenous,

organizations with a collective purpose: the defense of life and territory. The possibility of collectively agreeing on a security strategy for the entry of demining operations and to approach demining as a collective purpose of peace building and development of their communities. To this end, the communities decided to set aside their differences to reach agreements for joint work and control of the territory.

The learning from Cajibío was taken to Corinto, Cauca, to reach a consensus between peasants and indigenous people on a joint proposal that would allow them to reactivate the use of the land and the development of their community.

The consensus proposal resulted in the construction of a sugar cane mill with the objective of encouraging the cultivation of sugar cane as an alternative to illicit crops and as a mechanism for the recovery of the productive culture of the peasant and indigenous communities, once the humanitarian demining work was completed under an integral work with its other components of prevention, attention to victims and organizational work.

***“ I remember that the community's discussion was about having the possibility of giving young people a close and different alternative to the cultivation of illicit crops. I remember that they talked about the hope of advancing in a context of peace and of being able to be a step ahead in what they define as food sovereignty ”***

*Nestor. HI worker. 2022*

Los Andes is a territorial unit that shows the ethnic and organizational diversity of the municipality, with a peasant and indigenous community that has experienced the harshness of the armed social conflict, expressed in victims of landmines, displacements, disappearances, murders, and the contamination of their territories by the presence of explosive artifacts because of military control by armed actors. As a result of state neglect, the mafia interests of sectors of Colombian society, and the lack of opportunities in Colombian society.

As a result of state neglect, the mafia interests of sectors of Colombian society, and the lack of opportunities, some families in this area have

opted for the cultivation of illicit crops, which has worsened the coexistence of good living and the production of traditional foods of peasant and indigenous communities.

In this sense, the sugar mill initiative would provide the community of Los Andes with the conditions for these two community and ethnic strengths to have direct and autonomous participation in the possibility of generating new socioeconomic conditions for peasants and indigenous victims of the social and armed conflict, through the construction and implementation of a sugar mill, where there was very little sugar cane, but the desire to maintain their cultural traditions.

***“In In the community of the Andes, there are also other crops to harvest, such as coffee and bananas, but there is also the cultivation of illicit crops in the territory, and when HI came up with this project, I thought it was excellent. My impact was a lot in motivating the community, the people, because the community in the Andes has two processes, two organizations, it is indigenous and peasant. So, what we did first was to talk to each other, for years we have always had difficulties in the relationship between peasants and indigenous people, because of the right to land.***

***But when this type of project arrived, the advantage is that we started to think and my incidence was to accompany this process of raising awareness, to see how this project would be a change for the territory and more for the community members, but also for our children, for our young people who today in the community only see that they can live from this other crop, but they do not see that there are other possibilities, not to get money, but at least to survive, to live as a family and that I can also have an economic income from our spaces.***

*Genaro. Community member of Los Andes. 2022*

*(...) something very nice that we learned about was the participation of colleagues from the municipality of Cajibío, Cauca, who helped us to develop the project of the sugarcane mill. These are people who have been working for a long time with the panel mills, they were able to come and teach us the management and production of panela and they came and helped us with the installation of the stove that is used in the panela mill (...). If they were able to do it, after so many years of violence and they already had a head start with the humanitarian demining, why couldn't we also do it?*

*Peasant liaison of Corinto. 2022*

For this, the community of La Meseta in the municipality of Cajibío, with their extensive experience as paneleros, accompanied the process of construction of the sugar mill in Corinto, sharing their knowledge and generating relationships of trust that were maintained despite years of violence.

Participating in the exchange of practices and knowledge between communities that are approximately 3 hours away from each other is a good peace-building practice where the communities themselves are active protagonists in their own reconstruction processes.

*(...) because, it was something that one had never aspired to, like managing projects, of a certain amount. How these types of actions change the vision and build better opportunities for future generations. Well, it also changed my vision, because they are high impact projects for the community, more than a personal project. As a community liaison I contributed with a grain of sand for my community to improve itself, for the community to change illicit crops for peace processes, so I feel very happy because in each project that is delivered to one, it leaves a satisfaction that I am also contributing to my community.*

*Idalia. Indigenous liaison of Corinto. 2022*

Owning the land to cultivate and not having the resources to acquire a sugar mill, and this in turn as the possibility of building roots and hope in times of peace, makes the conventional methods that are considered for the formulation and implementation of this type of project to be put under discussion.

For this reason, it was decided to finance the construction of the sugar mill with the commitment that the communities would generate human and economic resources for planting sugarcane. The project cycle was led

by the peasant and indigenous community liaison.

**The liaison is a community** figure that allows participation and the building of trust between the community and HI. This figure allows the people chosen by the community to perform this work to strengthen their leadership through empowerment actions that materialize in real spaces for participation.


Understanding the communities, from their realities, is the key to generate the real



conditions that allow a meaningful participation of all parties involved. Participation involves breaking with our practices and building other possible and different scenarios that are sometimes uncomfortable, but that have their successes in time and in other ways of doing things.

After 4 years of intervention and after an organizational process with the community for the operation of the community mill, violence intensified with the arrival of new armed groups that came to occupy the spaces left by the FARC. The assassinations of leaders increased considerably, the confrontations between armed groups intensified, and HI withdrew as a humanitarian actor for demining in Corinto.

Faced with this situation, HI had to immediately suspend DH for the safety of its teams and the community. Despite this, protection and prevention actions continue to date, with the support of community liaisons (peasant and indigenous).

The communities continue to strengthen together to maintain control of their territories and the union of their peoples. The sugarcane mill, although not yet generating profits, continues to plant sugarcane, hoping that it will grow for production and, with it, the commercialization of panela, as a tangible sign that hope for a peaceful future is the last thing to be lost. 





## Key learnings

Humanitarian demining generates impact to the extent that it is developed under a comprehensive and participatory approach involving communities in all its processes. Involving communities makes them participate in socio-economic inclusion processes and fosters synergies and exchanges of good practices between their inhabitants and rural development.

Humanitarian demining activities will directly contribute to a significant reduction of the events caused by explosive devices; a reappropriation of the territory by returns and/or land restitution; a recomposition of local economies, especially the conditions of food sovereignty and security and the reconstruction of the social fabric and political participation that can support reconciliation between the

parties to the armed conflict and the civilian population, facilitating social integration and peace building.

To actively involve the communities, HI conducts a needs assessment with them in order to prioritize interventions and define socio-economic inclusion projects that respond to their realities and priority needs.

The definition of the sugarcane mill project aims to replace illicit crops with economic activities that preserve cultural traditions and conflict prevention. The main purpose of the land use after the release of contamination, contributes to the transformation of the communities, towards the socio-economic development of their territories.



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Humanitarian demining is a source of conflict transformation for the communities, to the extent that they were involved in the prioritization of activities and consulted to determine the contamination and its impact. This practice has generated the possibility of creating joint spaces for dialogue and concerted actions for the benefit of their communities and future generations. To date, the communities that were intervened maintain good relations and work together in the cultivation of sugarcane and the search for support to plan the commercialization of panels, when it is fully operational.

Although demining work was suspended due to the upsurge of violence in the area, HI has defined an alternative strategy focused on protection actions that allow the development of capacities in the management and prevention of risks caused by armed violence. This practice has allowed good relations between peasants and indigenous people to be maintained and to continue working on joint actions to strengthen the community.

The community liaison process carried out by HI is comprehensive, as it includes training community leaders in risk education, so that they can disseminate safety messages, conflict resolution and identification of needs together with the community. This in-depth work with a sustainable approach takes time, which is why HI's acceptance in the municipality has been favorable. Thanks to this process and to the good results of HI's work in victim assistance

and MRE, a better trust was established with the community, which is perceived in a very good acceptance by both the indigenous population and the peasant population of the region. Throughout the project, the process of sensitization and community liaison has been key to the success of the activities. It is important to highlight the importance of selecting the community liaison with the community, so that he/she is a native of the intervention area and enjoys the trust of the local population to ensure the exchange of information and oversight of HI's intervention process.

To ensure the efficiency of projects, HI ensures the meaningful participation of communities in fragile contexts, so that they help safeguard the instrumentalization of resources and avoid grievances that lead to further tensions. It also allows projects to be better informed about existing risks in the area. Lastly, meaningful participation is one of the processes for raising awareness of the conflict.

The priorities and perspectives of affected populations should inform decisions made during the project.

This means that projects must ensure that communities are or can be active participants in the decision-making spaces that concern them and are enabled and empowered to express what they expect from the project and how their resources are used.

Explicit and specific mechanisms must be in place to encourage and receive feedback (and act on it) to engage in a transparent dialogue about the appropriateness of our intervention. 