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Forced to leave: Determinants of slow-onset displacement in Colombia

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**Forced to Leave:
Determinants of Slow-Onset Displacement
in Colombia**

Helen Deacon and Maximilian Görgens

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Forced to Leave: Determinants of Slow-Onset Displacement in Colombia

Abstract

In Colombia, the ongoing armed conflict has had severe effects on internal migration and displacement. While occasions of mass displacement usually attract significant attention, little is known about why forced displacement in Colombia primarily occurs gradually over time and in smaller groups. To address the apparent research gap, this paper analyses the consequences and mechanisms of forced slow-onset displacement and focuses on the interactions between "violence," "food security," and "climate change" as its determinants.

Keywords: Forced slow-onset displacement, migration, Colombia, violence, food security, climate change

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Forced to Leave: Determinants of Slow-Onset Displacement in Colombia¹

Helen Deacon and Maximilian Görgens

Article Outline

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1 Introduction

Around the world there has been an increase in internal displacement, especially as a result of armed conflict and community-based, ethnic, political, or criminal violence (Bennet et al. 2017: 12-13).² Colombia is one of the examples where the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has been rising continuously over the last 10 years. According to the government's registry of victims (RUV), initiated in 1985, this trend continues despite the fact that the govern-

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- 1 This working paper was developed within the context of the seed-money project "Multidimensional Migration Response Matrix" (<www.leibniz-krisen.de/en/research/project-groups/current-projects/crisis-and-migration-drivers/>), which was funded by the Leibniz Working Group on Crises, 2017–2018. Three other Leibniz institutes besides the GIGA participated (ZALF, PIK, ZMT), as well as the SWP. This study on Colombia tests the multidimensional concept for explaining the various dimensions of migration (food security, climate change, and violence).
 - 2 Both authors have contributed equally to the work. They would like to thank the civil society organisation Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento (Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement, CODHES) for hosting them in their office in Bogotá. Further acknowledgements go to the six interview partners as well as to Prof. Dr. Sabine Kurtenbach from the GIGA German Institute for Global and Area Studies, Srijna Jha, Hector Morales, Michelle Bonatti, and Stefan Sieber from the Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research for their valuable advice and feedback.

ment of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) signed a comprehensive peace agreement in 2016. The country has the largest population of IDPs worldwide, with a cumulative figure of 7.47 million (RUV, latest update from 1 March 2019), which represents approximately 15 per cent of the population. Although most people seek refuge in informal settlements in rural towns or larger urban areas such as Bogotá, Medellín, or Cali, nearly 90 per cent of all Colombian municipalities have had IDPs flee to or from their jurisdiction according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC undated). Women and young people as well as indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities have been disproportionately affected (CODHES 2017: 3; OCHA 2018: 12).

According to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, IDPs are people “who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border” (OCHA 2010: 1). While in several contexts people flee to other countries, in Colombia most people seek refuge within the country's national borders. Forced displacement may occur, on the one hand, in response to an emergency or a life-threatening scenario; it can also take the form of slow-onset displacement. The latter refers to migratory movements that are not the result of a single event but rather emerge and continue gradually over time and are often based on a complex mixture of events and determinants (Adamo 2011: 6).

While attention is often focused on media-effective events of mass displacement, it is noteworthy that 80 per cent of IDPs in Colombia leave their homes in smaller groups of up to 50 people, in what is also referred to as individual displacement (Ibañez 2009: 51). Instead of whole communities being displaced at once, lower levels of violence are prevalent, and displacement continues gradually over time.

Although the years 2000 to 2002 – characterised by high levels of mass displacement due to frequent attacks on and combat in municipalities – represent exceptions, Ibañez argues that individual displacement is predominant and on the rise (Ibañez 2009: 50). This sets Colombia apart from countries like Syria, where mass displacement is the dominant form (see *ibid.*). While mass displacement usually receives more attention and assistance is delivered more rapidly (IDMC 2013), in cases of individual displacement it is harder for the Colombian administration and others to determine whether migration was actually “forced” or voluntary and whether support measures should be provided. The lack of comprehensive academic research on individual displacement indicates that less attention has been paid to this phenomenon. To develop adequate policies and civil society responses, it is of utmost importance to examine the characteristics, as well as the complex causes and consequences of, forced slow-onset displacement.

2 Research Design and Methodology

This exploratory study was developed within the Leibniz Association project M3: Multidimensional Framework and Response Matrix for Migration, which focuses on identifying the multidimensional determinants of migration. It aims to answer the following research question: Why is individual slow-onset displacement occurring in Colombia?

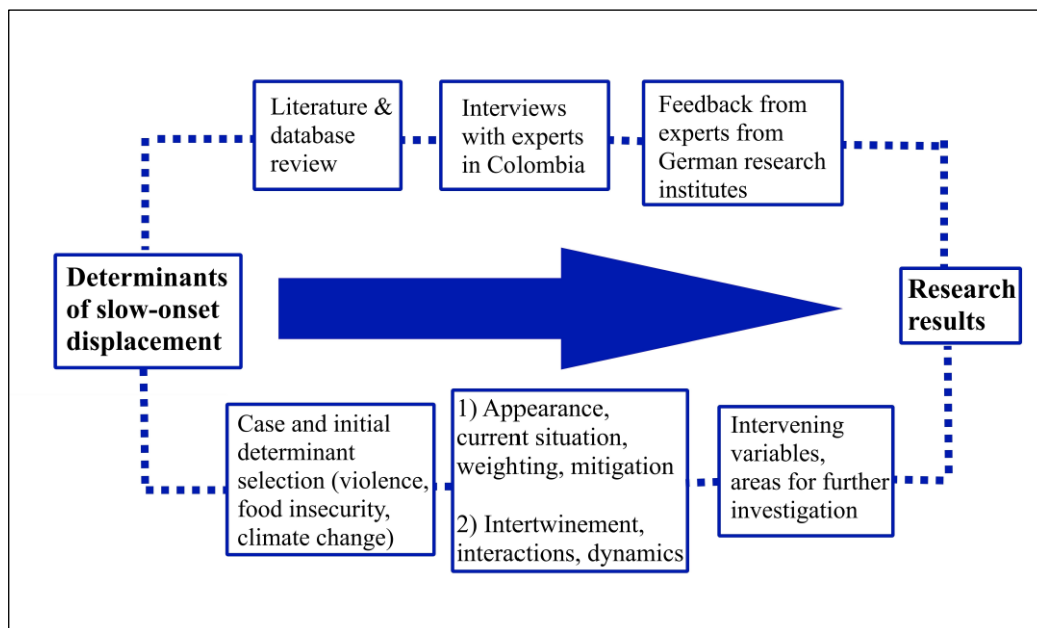
To answer this question, we focus on the complexity of this phenomenon and on the relationship and interaction between its determinants. We therefore develop hypotheses regarding the impact of violence, food security, and climate change on slow-onset displacement. The focus is on violence, as the ongoing armed conflict is widely considered to be the most influential determinant of internal displacement in Colombia. Although food insecurity and climate change clearly affect people's lives in the Latin American country, the academic literature usually does not directly connect them to internal displacement, which is why we examine their impact as well.

For each of the three determinants, we have reviewed the relevant literature and databases to investigate whether and how each affects internal displacement. This investigation has included the current situation, its characteristics, the specific relevance, and the respective mitigation strategies. In the final part of the paper, we discuss the intertwinement, interactions, and dynamics of the three different determinants "violence," "food insecurity," and "climate change," including possible consequences. Here attention is paid to potentially intervening variables, such as problems resulting from resource extraction, which are often underestimated but should be considered for further investigation.³

Although the determinants and their dynamics vary regionally and temporally, we attempt to illustrate our findings by incorporating a local perspective. Using the case of Putumayo province, we intend to draw attention to the determinants of slow-onset displacement and highlight the intertwinement of different issues. Putumayo province has been selected because of the region's involvement in the armed conflict, its vulnerability to climate change, and its challenging food security situation.⁴

3 To include Colombian perspectives, four semi-structured expert interviews were conducted in Bogotá in March 2018. The interviewees were chosen strategically based on their academic knowledge and practical experience related to one or more of the selected determinants. Two of the interviewees, Carlos Núñez and Fernando Vargas, are senior researchers at CODHES and specialists on internal displacement and human rights. To gain a better understanding of food insecurity and displacement, another interview was conducted with Iván Lizarazo, a professor from the Faculty of Agrarian Sciences of the National University. Cecilia Roa from the University of the Andes was chosen because of her expertise regarding the effects of climate change on displacement. The interviewees provided fruitful insights, but they are not a representative sample. The most visible limitation might be the absence of IDP perspectives.

4 Finally, we have discussed our findings with experts from the GIGA German Institute for Global and Area Studies and the Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research. Through various feedback rounds, their comments, doubts, and advice have been collected, discussed, and included in this paper.

Figure 1. Methodological Steps within the Analytical Framework

3 Determinants of Slow-Onset Displacement in Colombia

3.1 Violence-Induced Slow-Onset Displacement

While violence exists in many different forms and contexts, the World Health Organization (WHO 2002: 5) defines it as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person or against a group or community that either results in or has the high likelihood of injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.” This emphasises intentionality over the respective outcome and serves here as a suitable definition.

It is widely recognised that violence due to the internal conflict is the principal reason behind forced displacement in Colombia (Højen 2015). To understand the extent of displacement, it is useful to look at data from the Internal Development Monitoring Centre (IDMC): between 1 January and 30 June 2017 (after the signing of the peace agreement with FARC), 79,000 new displacements in Colombia were recorded, of which 56,000 were conflict- or violence-driven and 23,000 were disaster-driven (Bennett 2017: 10). Violence due to years of armed conflict and disputes about land have caused mass migration and have in many cases led to slow-onset displacement.

Prior research has found that extortion, sexual and gender-based violence, recruitment of children, anti-personnel mines, threats, and pressure to collaborate with armed groups are the main reasons people leave their homes (IDMC undated). Eighty-four per cent of internally displaced people have left because of threats of death or psychological harm (Unidad para la Atención y Reparación Integral a las Víctimas (UARIV) 2013: 17). In several cases violence has also been used as an instrument to demonstrate power and domination. As Fernando Vargas, senior researcher at the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES), points out:

“[paramilitaries] did not limit themselves to killing women, or to violating [...] and sexually torturing them, but at the moment of ending their lives, they fired a hail of bullets in their faces,” sending a “misogynist message, [...] a message of patriarchal reinforcement” (Interview, Vargas, 16 March 2018).

Other prevalent types of violence in the Colombian context include grave violations of human rights and of international humanitarian law, such as extrajudicial executions, forced disappearances, arbitrary detention, and torture (IDMC undated).

Some of the reasons for the ongoing violence in Colombia are the presence of armed groups, social inequality, and the unfair distribution of land (Bicc 2017: 26). The drug trade and the resulting “war on drugs” between government forces and drug cartels have been further determinants of violence and displacement since the early 1970s (IDMC undated). The destruction of coca plants with the herbicide glyphosate has led to environmental damage and to the destruction of rural livelihoods (Oldham and Massey 2002). The important role of land is also reflected by the fact that, despite urban crime in Colombia's biggest cities, the armed conflict has largely been fought in the countryside (Interview, Vargas, 16 March 2018). Furthermore, in many regions “a weak state presence, corruption, informal land rights, and high levels of poverty and vulnerability have also contributed to land dispossession and displacement” (IDMC undated).

3.1.1 *Mitigation Strategies*

At the local level, one of the strategies for coping with the lack of security and with internal displacement has been the founding of self-defence units to protect community members, their territory, and their property. These measures highlight the Colombian government's failure to protect Colombian citizens and the citizens' mistrust of national institutions (Interview, Vargas, 16 March 2018). In other cases, communities have declared themselves “peace communities” – for example, the indigenous Nasa community in Cauca province and San José de Apartadó – an act which has received significant international attention. By not carrying arms and not being allied to any armed actor, they aim to escape the violence directed at their people. Sadly, this approach has not stopped the murder of civilians.

The Colombian government's strategies for dealing with violence-induced displacement have included attempts to support victims on the one hand and, on the other, efforts to end the violent conflict. Throughout the years, Colombia has developed one of the oldest and most comprehensive legal frameworks for responding to internal displacement, including measures to assist and compensate victims (IDMC 2013). Part of the government's response has been the establishment of a department to manage victims' rights, UARIV, and the RUV registry, which unified different existing databases. A particularly important law is the *Ley de Víctimas* (Victim's Law), passed in 2011, which regulates humanitarian assistance and the land restitution programme, enabling IDPs to return to the territories they have been displaced from or providing them with a new place to live. Under this law, 300,000 hectares of land were given

back to people affected by the armed conflict (Unidad de Restitución de Tierras 2017), and by 2016, 580,415 victims had received a total of approximately EUR 11.5 million in individual or collective compensation (Parra 2018). However, this process is complicated and not always possible or desired. Armed groups might still be present or return, or the land might be occupied, has been devastated, or is being used otherwise (e.g. for mining, coca production, or large-scale agricultural activities by multinational companies). In other cases, internally displaced people do not want to return because the place in question reminds them of the horrors they and their loved ones have experienced.

While the government has committed to providing basic access to healthcare (including psychosocial support), education, food, employment, opportunities to earn an income, and dignified housing and living conditions (UARIV 2013: 61-62), the poverty and the insufficient housing conditions that many IDPs face look rather different. Furthermore, the land restitution process is not supported by everyone. Violence and insecurity have led to a decrease in land restitution claims by IDPs, and the agrarian strikes in August 2013 raised questions about the feasibility of small-scale farming and living in the countryside (IDMC 2013). Nevertheless, the government has also granted financial compensation to IDPs. This funding usually includes initial support and money for prevention, emergencies, and IDPs' return to their previous territories. In 2012, 54,010 dispensations of humanitarian aid including food (72 per cent) and non-alimentary (28 per cent) items, with a total value of more than EUR 4 million, were granted (UNARIV 2013: 58). Other measures include the suspension of the otherwise obligatory military service and guarantees of non-repetition of human rights violations. The latter, however, has been impossible to enforce due to the minimal state presence and a territory that is hard to control.

While the Colombian government has made several attempts to respond to the needs of the more than seven million internally displaced people, the situation remains problematic. To date, only a small number of IDPs have received the financial reparations outlined by the Victim's Law (Højen 2015). Those IDPs who have left their homes individually are particularly affected by significant delays in financial assistance and have to wait longer to access welfare programmes because of overburdened administrations (IDMC 2013).

3.2 Food Insecurity–Induced Slow-Onset Displacement

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defines food security as the “physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets the dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO 2006: 1). Since 1948 the right to food has been a human right, as written in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Access to nutrition is considered necessary to enjoy other human rights such as education and work and is crucial for individual health and well-being. Nevertheless, “[in] 2016, the number of undernourished people in the world increased to an estimated 815 million, up from 777 million in

2015 [...]” (FAO 2017: 2). The FAO also confirmed that food insecurity is particularly high in areas where conflicts are present, and institutions fail to respond to needs and crisis.

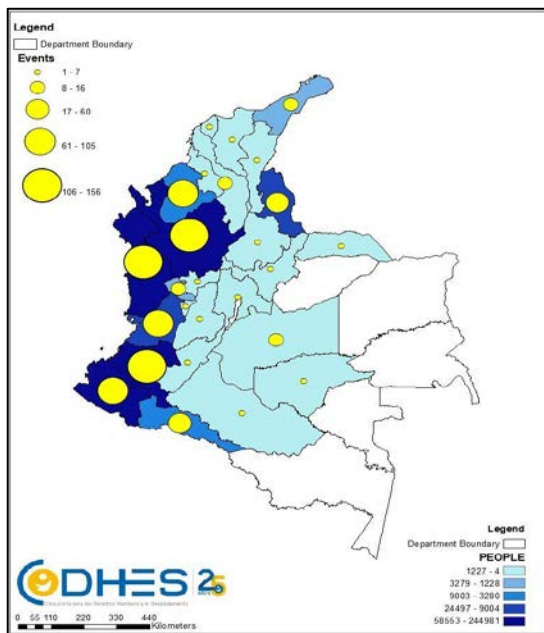
Colombia, like Peru and Ecuador, has made considerable progress in the area of food security. While the country successfully reduced the number of people suffering from malnutrition from 9.7 per cent in the period 2004–2006 to 7.1 per cent in 2014–2016, 2.3 million people are still in need of food assistance (FAO 2017c: 1). This number is alarming considering the fact that Colombia is the world’s most biodiverse country after Brazil, with great potential to provide enough food for its population.⁵

While the human development index (HDI) ranking for Colombia is high (no. 95), income equality and the distribution of wealth remain at a medium level in the country (GINI Index 50.8). This is also underlined by the distribution-sensitive inequality-adjusted human development index (IHDI), which places Colombia 12 ranks behind its position on the HDI.⁶ Problems of food security especially affect people with limited economic resources, people in rural areas, and people at the outskirts of urban peripheries. Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, especially women and young children as well as people affected by armed conflict, are among the most vulnerable. While 57.5 per cent of rural households face an insecure food supply, the average for urban households is much lower at 38.4 per cent (MADR 2016: 15). Organisations such as the FAO have confirmed the existence of a large gap between urban and rural food security: In urban zones food can be distributed easily and people with few economic resources are able to find less expensive goods. The countryside, however, is often more isolated, production can be low, and access to urban markets is limited (Interview, Lizarazo, 20 March 2018). Nevertheless, it remains difficult to make generalisations regarding food security within a territory of 1,141,748 square kilometres that includes five completely different geographic regions (the Caribbean, the Andean, the Pacific, the Orinoco, and the Amazon) with different ecosystems and many different social, political, and economic contexts.

What are the reasons for food insecurity in Colombia? First, violent conflict is the main reason. “The scale and magnitude of forced displacement is not only the main effect of armed conflict, but also the main source of food insecurity” (FAO 2017: 59). It is estimated that from 1980 to 2010, 6.6 million hectares of land were abandoned in Colombia as a result of displacement, especially in the western and coastal areas of the country, with major impacts on agricultural productivity, social inequality, and food security: 80 per cent of IDPs live below the poverty line, including 33 to 35 per cent who suffer conditions of extreme poverty (IDMC 2017: 29). The FAO (2015: 3) has published even higher numbers. This suggests that displaced citizens are among the people most affected by hunger and malnutrition. The following figures reveal which regions have been most affected by internal displacement.

5 While biodiversity provides the opportunity to enhance food security, in some cases mono-cultivation projects compromise biodiversity. An example is soy production in Brazil, for which the deforestation of parts of the Amazon takes place.

6 In conditions of full equality the HDI and the IHDI would be the same.

Figure 2. Mass Displacement in Colombia, 2010–2017

Source: CODHES 2017.

Figure 3. Colombia's Reported Internally Displaced People, 1985–2015

Source: Center for Spatial Research (undated).

Second, it is important to note that access to food rather than a shortage of food itself represents a problem in Colombia. This lack of access is in part attributable to armed conflict, poverty, and high levels of inequality within the society. New food security challenges are related to the power vacuum left by the demobilised FARC guerrillas. The peace agreement has led to new disputes among and the reorganisation of new or remaining criminal groups in several parts of the country (OCHA 2017: 19). For example, in 2018 there was a significant increase in confinement, a lack of mobility due to the presence of armed groups which takes place mostly in rural areas (the departments most affected are on the Pacific coast or at the border with Venezuela). From January to November 2018 the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) registered 20,498 confined people who suffered from limited access to goods (OCHA 2018b: 2).

I can tell you that there is a strong correlation between confinement and the violation of human rights to nutrition because during confinement, basically the communities cannot leave, so they cannot consign goods [and] they cannot trade. The hindrance of necessary movements leads to the consequence of fragility in guaranteeing alimentation. (Interview, Núñez, 8 March 2018)

Third, another influencing factor is mismanagement between the zones of production and the zones of consumption. In many cases food is not distributed in terms of proximity and efficiency, which leads to waste and deterioration. Up to 50 per cent of mangos, cassava, and leafy

vegetables are discarded because of this (FAO 2015). Furthermore, there is a lack of information, access to opportunities and markets remains challenging, and political innovation and technological advances have not resulted in the expected outcomes (Interview, Lizarazo, 20 March 2018).

Finally, “[...] the occurrence of natural disasters, environmental contamination as a result of resource exploitation, and the lack of land titling, [result in] double affectation in these communities” (OCHA 2017: 19). Droughts and floods due to climate change have had a negative impact on agricultural production and food availability, causing further deprivation (OCHA 2017: 19). Phenomena such as La Niña and El Niño, for example, have caused extreme weather events, severely impacting the production of cotton, potatoes, and coffee (FAO 2017c: 2).

In many cases there exists a double or triple effect. According to the OCHA (2018c: 9, 22), the migratory movements of more than one million Venezuelans and returning Colombians into the country have exacerbated the humanitarian crisis of food insecurity, often in the most vulnerable rural communities.

However, despite the rural to urban movements of young people – often because of limited perspectives and labour opportunities – it has been difficult to find reliable academic information confirming that hunger and malnutrition alone lead to migration in Colombia. While this has been confirmed by the FAO for the global level (FAO 2017d), there is no specific data on Colombia.

3.2.1 *Mitigation Strategies*

Different strategies have been used in an attempt to tackle and reduce problems related to food insecurity. Examples include technical support for farmers; the linking of small production sites to private or public markets; school-meal strategies; and nutrition training focused on pregnant and nursing women, adolescent girls, and children under five. The Colombian government regularly develops National Development Plans and from 2015 to 2018 the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR) established a strategy called “Colombia Siembra.” While President Duque’s new National Development Plan, “Pacto por Colombia, Pacto por la equidad,” aims to reduce extreme and multidimensional poverty, create new jobs, and fight crime and informal labour by strengthening the justice and security sector, former president Santos’s intention was to promote the three pillars of peace, fairness, and education. “Colombia Siembra” aimed to increase the agricultural productivity of one million hectares and to create a favourable environment for investment. “In Colombia, various activities have been designed to recover food via industry, commerce, power plants, and directly from the countryside through the Program for the Recovery of Agricultural Surplus (REAGRO)” (Hodson de Jaramillo et al. undated: 231). The Colombian government has also provided technical assistance through the programmes under the Departamento para la Prosperidad Social. One of these programmes is ReSA, which tries to improve access to food for individual consumption. Workshops are offered to help people establish home and community gardens. Participants

not only receive technical support, but also gain increased awareness through educational training about food security and sustainability (Prosperidad Social n. d.).

Since 2007, the FAO Colombia has had a rapid-response unit to respond to emergencies that affect agricultural livelihoods. It can therefore reach vulnerable communities, even when armed groups are present. In its work, the FAO has shifted its focus from post-emergency response to prevention, mitigation, and disaster preparedness (FAO 2017c: 6). An ongoing resilience programme (2017–2020) is intended to reduce food insecurity and rural poverty by strengthening institutions; ensuring access to information; reducing communities' and individuals' vulnerability; and enhancing community preparedness for emergencies through training, early warning, and rapid-response mechanisms (FAO 2017c: 12–16). The World Food Programme is also engaged in similar projects intended to end malnutrition and hunger.

In 2016, food banks in Colombia managed to provide 530,838 people with 19,965 tonnes of donated food and 8,656 tonnes of purchased food (ABACO undated). Private companies such as Éxito, Alpina S.A., and Bon Appétit Colombia have promoted and supported such initiatives. Another project, run by the Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar, is called Madres comunitarias; 63,000 women in different regions and localities cook for local children in need in return for a small monthly income paid by the government. In 2015, these women managed to provide food for 1,077,000 children (Epstein 2017: 6). The Grupo Semillas was also mentioned by our interviewees as an important environmental NGO working with rural communities to overcome problems related to food security, natural resources, biodiversity, and access to territory.

3.3 *The Impact of Climate Change on Slow-Onset Displacement*

The *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* defines climate change as “[...] a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods” (UNFCCC 1992: 4). Global warming is considered to lead to an increase in extreme weather events such as floods, earthquakes, and storms; to increase desertification; and to have severe impacts on ecosystems and mankind, including human health, water resources, food security, survival, and well-being: “Conflict is often compounded by drought and other climate shocks, exacerbating the impacts on rural food security and livelihoods. Migration is one way people try to cope” (FAO 2017d: 1).

Colombia, where people live in unstable areas and regions prone to flooding, is particularly vulnerable to climate change (PNUD 2010). The research on the impact of climate change predicts and has demonstrated an increase in average temperatures, especially in the Pacific region (Carmona & Poveda 2014: 1), and the disappearance of Colombia's glaciers (Rabatel et al. 2013: 89). Furthermore, the forecast of extreme weather events predicts floods, landslides, and storms (PNUD 2010: 2). According to the World Bank's Climate Change Knowledge Portal, “Colombia has the tenth highest economic risk posed by three or more hazards in the world

and the highest recurrence of extreme events in South America, with 84 percent of the population and 86 percent of its assets in areas exposed to two or more hazards" (World Bank undated). Furthermore, World Bank data show that Colombia is vulnerable to cyclones, storm surges, earthquakes, landslides, droughts, volcanic activities, tsunamis, floods, and wildfires (World Bank undated).

Data from the OCHA (2018: 17; combined with RUV data) reveals the extent to which people are affected by disasters. For example, in Norte de Santander, 13,997 people fled their homes due to heavy rainfall in January 2017. In April 2017, 22,267 people were affected by the flooding of several rivers in Putumayo, and in September of the same year heavy rains in Chocó affected 5,380 families and probably also caused mass displacement.

The UNDP argues that climate change in Colombia will especially affect the following six areas (PNUD 2010: 2):

- *Water resources* are likely to decrease in the northern and Andean regions, while floods and landslides will increase in other areas, leading to emergencies, water deficits, and distribution problems. Glaciers in Colombia are melting at a rate of approximately 50 cm to 1 m per year (Costa Posada 2007: 75).
- *Ecosystems*: Climate change is expected to reduce snow-capped areas and to affect forests and moorland as well as corals, which will influence biodiversity and fishing resources.
- *Agriculture and livestock*: "[A] good portion of the agro-ecosystems of the country is vulnerable to increased aridity, soil erosion, desertification, and changes in the hydrological system. In addition, there is a greater risk of crop flooding as well as other natural events that affect agricultural production (windstorms, hailstorms, etc.)" (PNUD 2010: 2).
- *Coastal systems*: The sea-level rise will affect populations in coastal areas and industrial and tourism-related infrastructure. This has the potential for drastic consequences given that the Magdalena-Cauca and Caribbean regions, which are home to 80 per cent of the population and produce 80 per cent of national GDP, produce just 21 per cent of the total surface water supply (IDEAM 2015 in: Hodson de Jaramillo et al. undated: 219). The World Bank argues, "By 2050–2060, the sea level on the Caribbean and Pacific coasts could increase by as much as 40–60 cm as compared to the period 1961–1990. About 1.4 million people would be affected with a sea level rise of 1.0 m, 85 percent living in urban areas" (World Bank undated).
- *Housing and settlements*: Extreme events such as floods, strong rainfall, storms, and landslides could cause the living conditions and livelihoods of displaced and vulnerable populations in Colombia to deteriorate further. Due to social inequalities and the gap between rich and poor communities, populations with limited economic resources often live in the areas most affected by extreme weather events and climate change.

- *Health:* Vector-transmitted diseases such as Zika, malaria, or dengue are likely to increase (PNUD 2010: 2) and may also spread within urban areas where infections can be transmitted more rapidly (Interview, Roa, 20 March 2018).

Furthermore, there are 62,829 different species in Colombia and as many as 1,345 face the threat of extinction (SiB undated). Among the factors threatening biodiversity in Colombia are climate change, pollution, the exploitation of natural resources, the introduction of foreign species, and deforestation (FAO 2005: 2).

3.3.1 *Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies*

Colombia's climate change policies can be categorised as either adaptation or mitigation strategies. The country is under the self-imposed multilateral obligation to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 20 per cent by 2030 and pursues development which is climate resilient – that is, emits low levels of carbon (Minambiente 2017).

Several national strategies address climate change. Particularly worthy of mention is the Adaptation Fund that the Colombian government created to support the construction, reconstruction, and economic and social recovery of areas affected by extreme weather events and to reduce risks associated with climate change. Cecilia Roa (Interview, 20 March 2018), however, criticises the fact that the state is investing much more in adaptation strategies than in the necessary prevention and mitigation.

Experts have underlined the devastating impact of mining and extractive activities and the environmental damage they cause. Roa provides the example of the Amazonian provinces, which receive significant funding to preserve diverse ecosystems, but where extractive industries, often represented by multinational companies, are also producing a contrary effect: “While all these initiatives related to climate change exist, the Colombian state grants licences to extract petrol in the Amazon. So, these are things one does not understand” (Interview, Roa, 20 March 2018). Furthermore, the policies related to climate change depend heavily on the government in office and not on the Colombian state as such (Interview, Núñez, 8 March 2018). This leads to instability and policy changes.

Our interviewees confirmed that international and non-governmental organisations such as Ambiente y Sociedad, Tierra Digna, the United Nations Environment Programme, and the World Wildlife Fund have contributed considerably to raising awareness of environmental issues. The same can be said of alliances such as EcoFondo, which unites many environmental groups that share knowledge, promote sustainability, and strengthen civil participation and environmental justice (Interview, Roa, 20 March 2018).

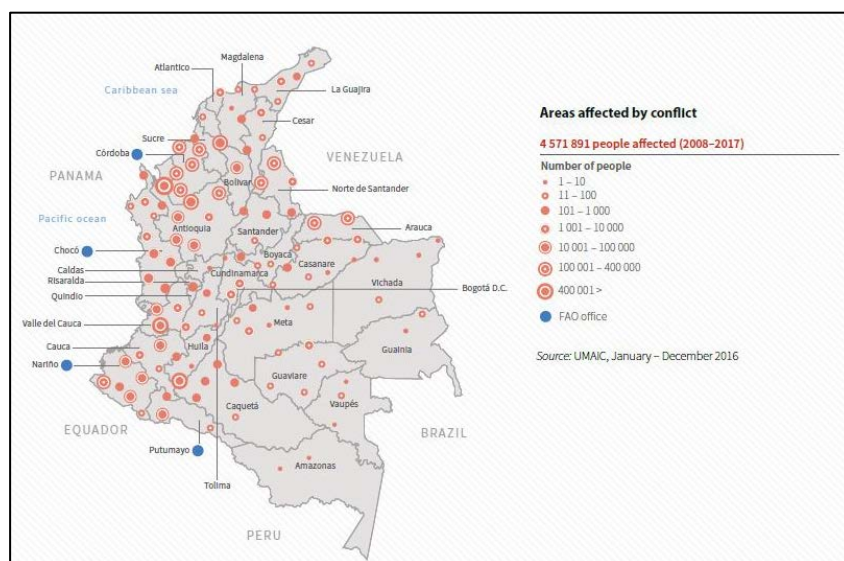
4 Connections between Conflict, Food Security, and Climate Change

While the preceding sections have confirmed our assumptions regarding the strong impact of violence, food insecurity, and climate change on slow-onset displacement, there remain open questions regarding how these determinants are interconnected.

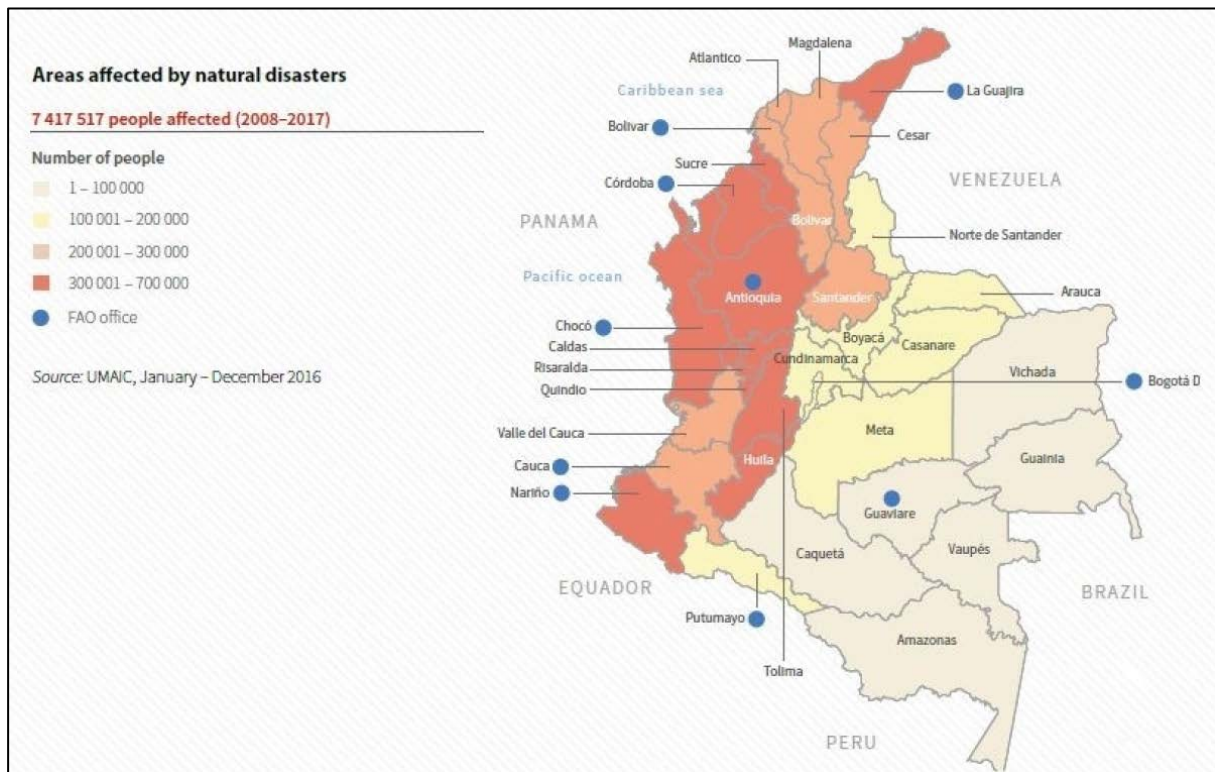
The 2017 FAO (2017: ii) report states that food insecurity is particularly high in areas where violence and conflict are prevalent. This reveals a direct link between violence and food insecurity. Furthermore, extreme weather events, droughts, or floods occur more frequently due to climate change. These phenomena can lead to increased conflict, displacement, and problems related to food insecurity. “Conflict, forced migration, and food insecurity can feed into each other, creating a vicious circle for rural populations. [...] Conflicts increase food insecurity and limit the livelihood options of rural populations. Conversely, food insecurity – driven by sudden food price spikes, dispossession, or loss of agricultural assets – may compound existing grievances and trigger conflict” (FAO 2017d: 2).

Areas of conflict and natural disasters often overlap in Colombia. This suggests that people are frequently affected or displaced not by one issue, but by a mixture of violence and the impacts of climate change, which can also have severe ramifications in terms of food security. As the UNDP suggests, “climate change may accelerate internal displacements and migrations” (PNUD 2010: 2). In 2016, La Guajira, Putumayo, Chocó, Antioquia, and Bolivar were the provinces most affected by natural disasters; the people there were affected by conflict as well (IDMC undated). Furthermore, “[cities], and especially the mountainous capital Bogotá, are at particularly high risk of earthquakes, floods and landslides. This is because of rapid and haphazard urbanisation, dense informal settlements on unstable land, and a significant amount of construction in violation of safety regulations” (IDMC undated). The following figures illustrate the overlap between regions affected by violence and by natural disasters.

Figure 4. Areas Affected by Conflict, 2008–2017



Source: UMAIC, quoted from FAO 2017c: 3.

Figure 5. Areas Affected by Natural Disasters, 2008–2017

Source: UMAIC, quoted from FAO 2017c: 3.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to attribute causality to just one of the specific issues, which may manifest very differently in each context. The specific dynamics vary within each context and over time and space. While such observations have been made at the national level, it is also useful to look at the local level and to further investigate the multidimensional interaction of the determinants of slow-onset displacement.

5 Discussion of Determinants Using the Case of Putumayo

Putumayo province, bordering Brazil and Ecuador, is part of the largest rainforest on earth and is extremely fertile and biodiverse. Today, the region's population is 18.5 per cent indigenous and 3.3 per cent Afro-Colombian (Gobernación de Putumayo 2016: 20–21). These communities have been particularly affected by violence and displacement. The local oil industry is of high economic importance and contributes 63 per cent of the regional GDP (Vega Barbosa, Camilo 2017), while other economic sectors are less developed. The province is where much of the armed conflict has taken place due to its strategic border location, the presence of coca plantations and trading routes, and the extraction of valuable natural resources.

As part of the conflict, more than 300,000 violent incidents have occurred in Putumayo, with 265,519 people suffering atrocities, displacement, and violence (RUV 2019). The overall population of Putumayo is currently approximately 350,000 people.

As part of the US-funded “Plan Colombia” to eradicate illegal coca plantations, widespread aerial glyphosate spraying has taken place in Putumayo and elsewhere. While the multinational company Monsanto has denied the possibility of negative consequences for humans and the environment, for a decade the herbicide has deteriorated the local food security situation as the spraying has led to crop failure, water contamination, and health problems (Ejatlás 2016).

To illustrate the region’s vulnerability to extreme weather events and the impact of climate change, it should be noted that heavy rainfall in April 2017 killed 323 people (Cruz Roja Colombiana 2017: 1), displaced 300 families, and devastated Putumayo’s capital Mocoa (Dewan/Deaton/ Castillo 2017). In addition to mass displacement, the rains also caused slow-onset migration (OCHA 2018: 17). The fields were destroyed and consequently did not bring in the expected harvest and goods for consumption.

In Colombia forced displacement is also strongly linked to the extraction of natural resources. “Since the first presidential term of Álvaro Uribe, there has been a close relationship between phenomena of mass forced displacement and circumstances of violence and areas or territories of special interest for the exploration and exploitation of mining and fossil fuels” (Interview, Vargas, 20 March 2018). Local residents have also been threatened, displaced, and killed by armed groups that control mines or resource deposits, which constitute important sources of revenue (IDMC undated). “Private-sector coal mining has also displaced people in Colombia directly through land acquisition and indirectly through environmental contamination” (IDMC undated). Vargas, a senior researcher at CODHES, states: “There is a profound relationship between environmental injustice, violence, the expansive exploitation of natural resources and the forced mobility of people and entire communities” (Interview, Vargas, 16 March 2018). This relationship can be observed in the province of Putumayo.

According to the Environmental Justice Atlas (Ejatlás 2015), oil extraction in Putumayo has led to desertification, deforestation, and a loss of biodiversity, as well as crop failure and soil contamination because of waste overflows and oil spills. People’s dependence on polluted local water sources for agriculture and sanitation has led to cancer, anaemia, diarrhoea, and vomiting. Skin, eye, and respiratory problems are further issues (Tenthoff 2007: 4).⁷ Furthermore, occupations of oil plants or blockades of supply routes have frequently led to increased petrol prices, which have had an impact on food prices. In 2005 a blockade by the FARC led to a serious bottleneck in the food supply and famine, not only in rural areas but also in Puerto Asís, the most populated municipality in Putumayo (Caracol 2005).

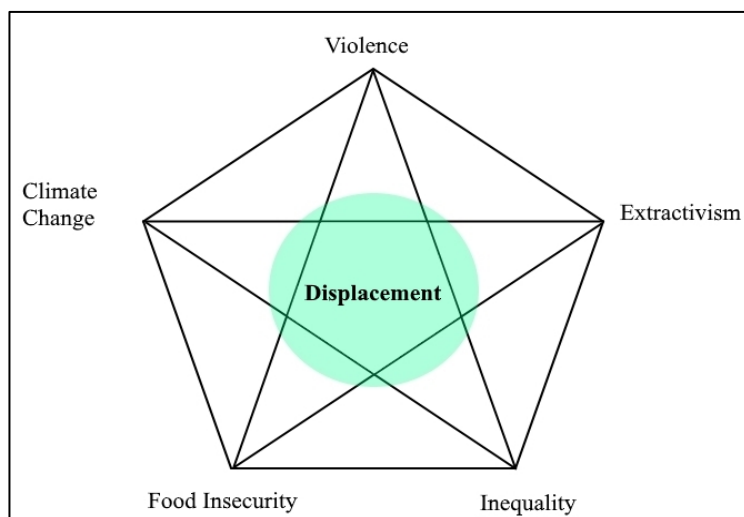
The extraction of natural resources in Colombia has led to violence, and it has the potential to decrease food security and contribute further to climate change. This underlines the question of land ownership and land use and, furthermore, highlights the importance of social

7 Similar health problems have been observed in the Guajira, where the largest open-pit coal mine in Latin America is located.

inequality (Interview, Lizarazo, 20 March 2018). While people living in poverty usually do not have sufficient resources to protect themselves, people with more economic resources often live in urban areas that are less vulnerable to the impact of climate change and can protect themselves better from violence and displacement. While one family must build a house somewhere from whatever they can find, another lives in a guarded compound.

This case study reveals that violence, food insecurity, and climate change, as well as the extraction of natural resources, cannot be observed separately. As the following figure indicates, they interact and consequently create a context that impacts the realities and decisions of people on the ground. Here it is important to bear in mind that it is not only the specific combination of determinants that matters, but also how they manifest and to what degree.

Figure 6. The Interaction of Different Determinants of Migration in Colombia



Note: Authors' own illustration.

6 Conclusion

This paper has revealed that slow-onset displacement in Colombia is caused especially by violence and armed conflict, as well as to a lesser extent by food insecurity and climate change. However, not all forms of internal displacement can be explained by these three determinants. Other factors include the high level of social inequality and non-sustainable extractive activities, which continue to contribute to climate change and the destruction of the environment and local communities' livelihoods. Internal migration is one way in which people try to cope.

While this work intended to provide an overview of the national context, we suggest that there is great potential to discover more about the interaction of the determinants driving forced slow-onset migration at the local level. Land-use and land-access issues are connected to many of the problems that ultimately lead to migration, whether within the country or

across its borders. Violence is often related to control over land (because of illegal crops, strategic trading routes, or natural resources), and agricultural productivity depends on access to land, which might decline in fertility and value due to the impacts of climate change. Localities where several subdrivers of displacement are present should be visited and researched. This paper has shown that the coastal zones as well as the Andean region have been disproportionately affected and therefore may provide valuable information that further explains the dynamics outlined above.

While experts from academia or with practical experience have been interviewed for this paper, those people who have been displaced and directly affected by violence, food security, climate change, the extraction of natural resources, or a combination of these determinants have unfortunately not been included. Future research should incorporate their perspectives and causal chains with regard to the effects, as their experiences may add important perspectives to the existing literature and supplement expert opinions.

Moreover, valuable lessons could also be learned by researching when and why people choose to stay. Despite the existence of violence, food insecurity, resource extraction, or environmental degradation, not all people are leaving their homes or have the capabilities or means to do so.

This study has provided initial insights on the complex situation of slow-onset displacement in Colombia and has shown that more work needs to be done to understand the determinants of this phenomenon in the country, as well as their interaction with other social, political, and environmental problems. The ongoing violence in Colombia and the increasing impact of climate change underscore the relevance and urgency of such research.

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*All interviews were conducted in Spanish and translated into English.

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