

Use of GECARR in conflict contexts

Case Study: Colombia



Colombia

The ‘Good Enough Context Analysis for Rapid Response’ (GECARR) tool

The Good Enough Context Analysis for Rapid Response (GECARR) is a World Vision context analysis tool that provides a macro-level analysis of a country or a specific region during or in anticipation of a crisis. GECARR is designed to be an inter-agency tool and it’s flexible, so that it can be used in unpredictable and conflict-prone contexts.

GECARR draws together the views of a wide variety of internal and external stakeholders, including local community members and produces a snapshot of the current situation and likely future scenarios. It generates actionable and practical recommendations for key stakeholders involved in humanitarian responses. Between 2014 and 2019, World Vision has conducted 30 GECARR analyses including the Central African Republic, Syria, Jordan, Kurdish Region of Iraq, Sierra Leone/Ebola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mali.



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The Process

In the context of the Venezuelan migration crisis, World Vision conducted a GECARR analysis in Colombia in June 2018. Colombia is the country most affected by the migrant crisis due to its long border with Venezuela. The GECARR tool aimed to understand the local context and capacities in order to better respond to the needs of affected people.¹

The GECARR was swiftly put together within two weeks of the initial request. Once the exercise began, in less than 10 days the GECARR international and local team of eight consulted 209 people (20 community members and 8 individuals from NGOs, UN agencies, government and churches) in three different areas of the city of Cúcuta, the capital of the department of Norte de Santander, the main border point with Venezuela. Data collection was conducted through 15 focus group discussions and 13 key informant interviews. A scenario planning workshop was also convened within this same time period with 22

participants, including representatives of World Vision, government, teachers, NGOs, OCHA and churches. They worked to identify and outline 3 key scenarios that were likely to occur in relation to the Venezuelan migration crisis in Colombia in the next 6-12 months. These scenarios consequently played out (the borders were closed, the political and armed incidents at the border occurred and the number of migrants increased). The team also analysed the data, debriefed the senior leadership on the findings and wrote up the first draft of report during their time in-country.

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The Impact

The Colombia GECARR was seen as useful for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was useful because of the impact it had on communities, especially in terms of social cohesion and a reduction in xenophobia, and secondly it was useful internally within the World Vision Colombia office.

Impact on the communities

During the GECARR the dialogue between community members allowed for breaking of barriers between Venezuelan migrants and Colombians and following this assessment, more local social projects were implemented. The engagement of churches during the process and the role they played afterwards in community projects was key in bringing this about.

The GECARR made use of church leaders as a significant source of information, material and moral support and links to other actors within the community. In Colombian and Venezuelan communities' social ties are very important, and so the dialogue and resulting community work meant the GECARR contributed to decreasing the xenophobia and the negative perceptions about the incoming Venezuelan migrants (viewing Venezuelans as migrants that may cause problems). The process of identifying communities' needs helped to galvanise opportunities for more social work programs by the churches, which are in turn having a positive impact on families affected by the crisis. The church leaders that were involved with GECARR have particularly scaled up their work with young people around social problems of delinquency, and changed mindsets have been seen in the children and youth. As a result, the youth are now more open to guidance from church leaders and adopting a better outlook on life (despite challenging backgrounds with parents who might be on drugs etc). Another example of positive uptake is that one of the GECARR recommendations was implemented by a local church where child friendly spaces were created for both Venezuelan and Colombian children. This initiative was well received by the communities.

The GECARR process was perceived as an inclusive exercise that brought together different actors including religious leaders, the beneficiaries, communication specialists, local government representatives and other implementing organisations. This made information production and dissemination faster and more credible. The tool highlighted a need for more such exercises to bring unity by drawing together different parties such as communities, local churches and governments, INGOs or Ministries to discuss context and key needs. The inclusive nature of GECARR was especially welcome because of the lack of discussion and resulting public policy (at the time) on the crisis by the government.

The Colombia GECARR was also unique compared to other GECARRs in utilising community volunteers from the affected communities, both for data collection and attendance at the scenario workshop. As a result, some World Vision staff reported that afterwards these volunteers came forth to offer their assistance. This is seen as a big step in helping migrants and beneficiaries move from the position of assistance recipients to contributing to solving their own issues, instilling a sense of ownership in the conducted projects. The scenario planning workshop also encouraged participants and their communities, as well as increasing trust that organisations and the wider public are genuinely interested in them because they are being included and consulted.

GECARR provided a platform through which government representatives could hear and understand the needs of the affected communities. For instance, it proved very helpful for ongoing inter-agency meetings with the Ministry of Education and Health representatives on child protection. The GECARR scenarios gave World Vision staff more verified information to confidently contribute to these discussions.



Impact within World Vision

For World Vision the GECARR was helpful in not only pinpointing the needs of the Venezuelan migrants, but recognising underlying social issues and observing the social phenomenon of the migration flow and the many problems that come with it. This improved context understanding has been imperative to consider when devising projects and responses.

The GECARR improved World Vision's ability to inform donors and other members of the humanitarian community with verified helpful information, whether communicated through funding proposals or other means.

The exercise was useful in helping to raise the profile of the crisis. Due to the information received through the GECARR scenario planning, communications and media departments within World Vision were able to inform the public of stories from inside the crisis, which is something that had not been done much before due to the lack of access to, and communication with, local communities. Moreover, the information obtained directly from beneficiaries and local actors helped inform World Vision's advocacy strategy regarding routes of complaints to the authorities and protection of the rights of children and women as well as providing a more accurate and responsible storytelling.

The three scenarios also helped redirect projects to a more specific focus by identifying gaps in previous crisis responses, and by obtaining feedback from beneficiaries and implementing partners. In Norte de Santander (Cúcuta and La Guajira) projects were reoriented according to GECARR findings.

Through engaging with local communities, GECARR allowed World Vision to conduct better self-appraisal on how to improve and adhere to the principles of Do-No-Harm after identifying the underlying economic, political and social issues, which can sometimes be ignored.

Areas in Colombia where GECARRs were conducted



Some World Vision staff commented that it helped to broaden the organisations viewpoint and external perception from being just about child sponsorship (whether programmatically or in the information they collected) to also a role of gathering and disseminating information on the broader context with a network of actors. GECARR gave access into school spaces and an improved understanding of the needs of the migrant children and the environment they were in. GECARR also helped organisations identify government shortcomings (whether structural or other) and then plan their responses accordingly.

The internal capacity of the staff was also strengthened as different staff were divided into the different regions in Colombia where GECARRs were conducted, and so they became familiar with the various contexts and the tool. Through engaging with local communities, GECARR allowed World Vision to conduct better self-appraisal on how to improve and adhere to the principles of Do-No-Harm after identifying the underlying economic, political and social issues, which can sometimes be ignored.



Reflections

• Building relationships

The GECARR analysis allowed World Vision to collect information that the government could not always gather, building connections both with new communities and with the government when the report was shared. The GECARR also provided opportunities to connect with other organisations. For example, it opened the way to participate in the GIFMM (Interagency Group of Mixed Migratory Flows), which is the United Nations platform for cooperation where World Vision now is seen as an important player. The key will be maintaining these new relationships throughout the duration of the crisis and beyond.

• Access to first-hand information through involving multiple actors

The Colombia GECARR gathered firsthand information which helped orient the World Vision team towards crucial needs (food security, nutrition, child protection etc) and prevented delays. Context analysis should involve multiple actors, especially beneficiaries, in order to provide a good enough understanding about the local context (such as concerns of affected people or the response gaps). There are also other options for more in-depth analysis that can follow, considering aspects such as the geographic area, climate or local culture.

• Capacity building

The GECARR tool in Colombia allowed for capacity building within the World Vision teams and volunteers. Given the difficulties in logistics, the exercise helped the team find among beneficiaries potential volunteers who were willing to help and therefore built their capacity at the same time. This is in alignment with the Agenda for Humanity², of which one of the core responsibilities is the imperative to 'Invest in Humanity' through investing in local capacities, recognising local knowledge and providing dignified ways for affected community members to participate in all aspects of our work from assessment, design, implementation and review.

This first GECARR exercise generated the capacity within World Vision to conduct two additional GECARRs in the following months: in municipalities of the department of La Guajira on the northern border and, in the municipality of Ipiales (on the southern border with Ecuador). All three GECARRs conducted lessons learnt exercises on the process, to help with learning for increased capacity. The challenge remains on how to maintain this increased capacity moving forward, whether through involvement in regular context monitoring, further GECARR exercises depending on the context, or other means that keep these skills up to date and utilised.

Children have fun in the Child Friendly Space in the El Talento neighborhood of Cúcuta, Colombia, where about 80% of the population are Venezuelan migrants.



• Prioritisation

Through understanding of local needs, the World Vision office has acknowledged it can better prioritise affected families across all regions according to need. The report also helped identify underlying issues that were not prioritised, such as fear of Colombians of losing job opportunities and growing xenophobia, as well as validating the shift in focus of the office on the emergency needs of the population. Thanks to the GECARR, teams were better able to capitalise on the data and generate awareness about dire needs among the affected communities, resulting in formulating new projects to receiving funding from donors in order to serve more children and their families. The team acknowledged however that the analysis could have a much wider impact both within World Vision and externally if it has been continually shared, with the aim to improve prioritisation, monitoring and resulting action on an ongoing basis.

The inclusive nature of GECARR was especially welcome because of the lack of discussion and resulting public policy (at the time) on the crisis by the government.

• Perception

Given the many strategic partnerships that came from the GECARR, World Vision was able to design a stronger response program, establish an office in Cúcuta as a local headquarter (where several humanitarian response projects are implemented from in the border area), and become an active participant in the wider humanitarian community. The GECARR therefore shifted the perception that World Vision is only a child sponsorship organisation and demonstrated a responsiveness to addressing the most pressing needs of communities.

• Need for wider recognition of the tool within and outside of World Vision

It was mentioned repeatedly that the GECARR tool should be recognised at a national level, both within World Vision and externally, to disseminate information and facilitate more specialised and better coordinated work. It is also essential that all World Vision teams are familiar with GECARR for conducting context analysis as it can suggest programmatic options going forward for different teams. There is growing appetite for the tool but World Vision still needs to determine on an ongoing basis sites for selection, available funding for such exercises and appropriate staff for training.

World Vision Colombia's Project Coordinator talks with a Venezuelan migrant woman who received food vouchers from World Vision. She lives in the El Talento neighborhood of Cúcuta, Colombia.

