

**Scaling Impact toward Systems Change:
Narrowing the Rural Equity Gap in Colombia
With a focus on SDG 8 and 16
February 13-14, 2020, Bogota**

1. Context and Background to the Workshop

This workshop is part of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors' *Scaling Solutions toward Shifting Systems* initiative, which encourages funders to work collaboratively to place longer-term, more adaptive and responsive resources with grantees and investees to enable them to scale their solutions and impact on the world's most pressing problems.

This initiative was launched in 2016 by Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors (RPA), the Skoll Foundation, and a committed group of Steering Group members from the Skoll, Ford, and Draper Richards Kaplan Foundations and Porticus. Since then the group has convened dozens of events and undertaken research with funders and partners in the US, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

In 2017, as part of this learning journey, we studied practices and behaviors funders could adopt to support scaled solutions and impact, hearing from grantees with direct experience. Interviews and analysis with dozens of organizations resulted in five recommendations that have resonated with our peer funders: SCALE. In summary, SCALE is when philanthropic funders *Streamline processes; Collaborate more and better; Accelerate progress through non-monetary support; Learn about systems change; and Empower grantees*. Our second-year report in late 2018 illustrated how and why funders are 'walking the talk', and provided case studies of funders in collaboratives aimed at systems change. This second report included seven key findings. Among them were that collaboratives can be more effective and rewarding than going it alone; that shared alignment and expectations on a theory of change matter for success; and that proximity to issues and populations facilitates responsiveness.

A finding in the first year of Scaling Solutions through grantee interviews was that these organizations generally find they understand how to contribute to systems change better than their funders, and moreover, have much stronger connections with government bodies, UN agencies, and the business sector. This finding was documented as well in the [SDG Philanthropy Platform](#) that RPA co-leads with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). In that initiative, it is apparent how powerful and important it is to do more to foster an active ecosystem in focus countries. Through this, grantees, social enterprises, governments at different levels, the UN, business, and philanthropic funders solve problems together. The Platform calls this the collaborative Pathway approach (see diagram in the annexes).

In 2019, we explored more deeply what collaborating for systems change looks like in a particular geographic area on a specific theme, in order to help funders understand the importance of local context and partnerships. This includes three country “deep dives” involving a workshop process that includes preparatory research and interviews, and a follow-up plan based on commitments made in the workshops. The workshops were held in Kenya (July 2019), India (November 2019), and Colombia (February 2020).

The first process in Kenya focused on access to universal health coverage and the broader area of health for all as expressed in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3: *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all, at all ages*. The India Workshop focused on exploring gender equality efforts in India. Interestingly, the Colombia workshop, focused on reducing the rural equity gap in Colombia, had a strong focus on the day-to-day realities of women’s lives, women’s rights, and gender norms in rural Colombia as a component of the equity gap.

2. The Colombia Workshop: Summary

Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors and AFE – Asociación de Fundaciones Familiares y Empresariales/AFE – The Association of Family and Corporate Foundations (Colombia), approached this workshop with a goal to answer the question: How can philanthropic funders better support Colombia in narrowing the rural equity gap by a) working more collaboratively, b) placing longer-term, more adaptive resources with those they fund, and c) using a ‘systems change’ lens in how they fund?

The Colombia workshop, held over one and one half days in Bogota, 13-14 February 2020, was attended by a group of approximately 50 funders, government and multilateral agencies, and representatives of indigenous and rural communities and the nonprofits that serve them.

Within that framework, the workshop was focused on SDG Goal 8, *Decent work and economic growth*, and target, 8.3, *to promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small-and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services*. In addition, SDG Goal 16, *Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels*, was also a guiding frame for discussions.

For most countries, achieving the SDG goals requires greatly scaled-up solutions and impact. A major challenge for Colombia is resolution of an internal conflict that began in the late 1950s between the FARC (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the government of Colombia. A historic ceasefire was signed in 2016, after estimates of over 200,000 people killed and many more displaced internally. Now in a peace-building process and disarmament of the FARC, the situation remains complex and delicate. The FARC controlled a large part of the rural terrain, much of it mountainous and hard to navigate. Among questions being addressed, generally in Colombia, and by workshop attendees are: how to develop those long-neglected regions? How to integrate former FARC members, many of whom have no education or skills? How to address appropriately rural issues in a manner not directed from an urban, centralized viewpoint?

The workshop had a goal to provide those funders, community leaders, and government representatives present with a new set of tools to face complex issues and support communities.

Discussions focused on a systems approach of: 1) addressing root causes; 2) shifting mindsets and behaviors; 3) supporting improved policies and implementation of those policies; 4) understanding and addressing power dynamics, and 5) paying attention to emergent and unintended consequences. Conversation was accompanied by a series of table exercises which led to an intense exchange of ideas.

An important focus of discussions was the question of gender as related to women's rights but also to development. Discussions focused on how women are not perceived contributors to development and progress in rural areas, and services for them are lacking. Gender norms are an area the group felt needed to be addressed at all levels. There was a strong consensus that the rules of the game need to be changed so that human rights are enforced and companies are forced to observe laws that protect women; at the same time, it is understood that those same state institutions are weak.

Workshop participants felt the Iceberg model, which provides a means to addressing societal events/concerns through identifying the patterns, structures, and mental modes that help to maintain the status quo, was particularly useful for them. A main outcome of that exercise was the understanding that many local agencies are generally unequipped to address existing and emergent problems, often approaching them from a centralized, urban/semi-urban viewpoint. There is a need, they say, for well-informed, active, and engaged local entities, and for decentralization of decision-making. These concerns echo those of some of the 12 community leaders interviewed by RPA prior to the workshop.

In summary, local funders took as a given that they would need to understand, from a community's point of view, what they perceived as their most significant challenges and the turnkey solutions – as Donella Meadows would say, the key leverage points. Of course, in any society there are still biases and power dynamics because of divides between wealthy and the impoverished, the urban and rural, and other divides based on gender or ethnicity.

3. Learnings and Outcomes from Pre-Workshop Research

Prior to the workshop, RPA interviewed 12 stakeholders – funders, NGOs, and government representatives - to learn from their on-the-ground experience, and hear their perspectives about rural inequity in Colombia. The interviews covered approaches to addressing problems, engaging with or thinking about the work at the systemic level, and impediments and risks. A range of responses, shared at the workshop as a starting point, is included below.

Interview highlights

Ongoing challenges

- Colombia has one of the most unequal land distributions in the world.
- Large areas of land are still controlled by armed, illegal groups. They control the type and level of crop production in their regions and wield a lot of power.
- Farmers are not well networked and those in the most rural areas lack access to government programs and resources.

- Of the 22 million hectares of arable land in Colombia, only 5.3 million hectares, less than one-quarter of available land, are cultivated currently. At the same time, almost 40 million hectares are used for livestock grazing, an inefficient use of land, water, and soil.
- For non-profits or social enterprises who want stronger relationships with government, what should they be mindful of? This is very difficult to answer. One important point: there is high turnover within government, which makes longerterm initiatives hard to carry out due to the need to build relationships. Another: corruption, vested interests, and politics in decisionmaking about what efforts to support.

Government Response

- There was a perception among interviewees that national agencies have too narrowly defined a focus for rural development. They generally do not include the health, education or basic needs of those communities. As the most rural areas have very little access to health or education, urgent needs are not being met.
- The government has prioritized 170 municipalities formerly controlled by the FARC -- considered conflict-affected areas -- for comprehensive development, but in other rural areas, policies are centered only on agriculture.
- National entities such as the Ministry of Agriculture, have an “obsolete” method for working on rural development, for two principal reasons:
 - Colombia is still very rural and there predominates the false idea that the Ministry of Agriculture dominates transformation in rural areas. Ministries focus on urban/semi urban areas.
 - There continues to be very low productivity in agriculture and many issues with deforestation. There has been no investment in innovation at a government level.
- Weak and inefficient institutions. There is fragmentation and a lack of coordination, as well as inconsistent policies and ineffective public investments.

The Private Sector Response

- While some corporate entities feel they lack the skills to help productively, others do not feel a sense of responsibility for aiding in development of communities.
- The private sector could be a great partner in terms of potential for innovation and proactive approaches. The private sector needs to be a better partner for government.

Opportunities

- There is a lot of opportunity to work with the knowledge community in Colombia— universities, think tanks, academics, artists. Depending on the topic, these intellectuals could be crucial partners.
- Colombia passed a Benefit Corporation law in 2018 and has created incentives for private companies to convert to benefit corporations. The government is now focused on implementation. The government is also interested in including other agencies, such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Tourism and Commerce, in a transformation agenda, meaning this is an opportunity to develop innovative new public policy.

- Rural areas need to be considered with the merit they deserve, and not just as potential centers for development and business.

What would enable the most progress in the next three years in terms of partnerships and influencing? The question of prioritizing efforts in the short term yielded important results focused on maximizing strengths:

- **More institutional capacity**, meaning more financial resources and personnel, to be able to serve effectively more regions in a less centralized manner.
- **A better organized ecosystem of funders** working toward common goals – they are currently too dispersed.
- **More coordination of efforts**. Every organization is focused on day-to-day work and trying to survive, so it is hard to get them to devote time and resources to coordinate with others. There is a lot happening in rural areas, but it is not coordinated at this time

4. Workshop

The workshop focused on identifying methodologies to help donors and other actors to think about change through a systems lens, and how to use those methodologies to reduce the equity gap in rural Colombia. It began with a plenary session moderated by Angela Penagos of RIMISP, the Center for Rural Latin American Development.

Participants:

Angela Penagos (*moderador*), RIMISP - Centro Latinoamericano para el Desarrollo Rural.

Ignacio Martin, Advisor, UN Food and Agriculture Organization

Camila Aguilar, Fundación Alpina

Fernando Henao, Director of Rural Development, Colombian National Planning Department (Departamento Nacional de Planeación (DNP))

Henri Montenegro, Community Representative working with Fundación Bancolombia

Panelists called on the audience to consider the complexities of the rural landscape in Colombia, and to break from the general conception of “rural” as “poor.” Small and medium sized cities, for example, are growing at the same pace as large cities in Colombia, and about 52 percent of the population lives in rural or semi-rural areas. So the country is developing steadily, but not only in urban areas. Importantly, in rural areas, job opportunities are changing and becoming more diversified. Companies can therefore play an important role in the future development of those regions, as may charitable foundations.

“Addressing inequality requires Colombia to turn its attention and resources to the rural landscape, without falling into the trap of oversimplifications that minimize human and territorial diversity. Governments and their institutions must bring forth policies and instruments that reflect explicitly their commitment through institutional solutions and budgets.”

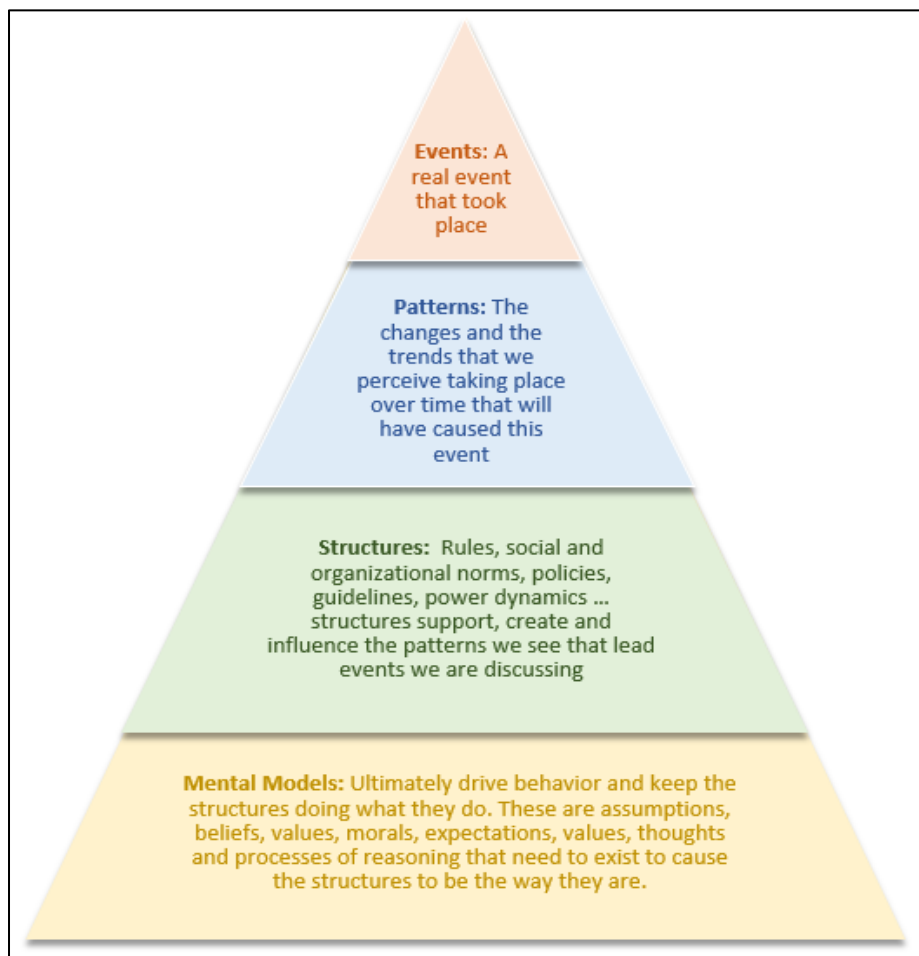
Government representatives on the panel noted the desire of the government to help make positive change, and also impediments to that change. “How” change will happen is thus a crucial part of the discussion. There is a need for coordination and trust. Government agencies, it was stated, sometimes lack the specific skills needed to address current challenges. In addition, budget

limitations, and centralized budgeting structures often impede their ability to produce needed change. Public private partnerships are seen as one way to engage actors with different skill sets in addressing persistent problems.

Bancolombia noted that it is working on difficult topics in conflict-affected areas. Many of those under 40 have lost agricultural expertise, so there is a strong need for extensive training for those who wish to remain in agriculture, and at the same time, an opportunity to improve their skills and production. There is a need for ongoing accompaniment of projects and programs, and an invitation for companies to connect to these efforts, offering their resources. Fundación Alpina discussed the commitment to sustainability of the Alpina business, and the Foundation’s desire to understand the territory and the ambitions and desires of its residents, including for equality in terms of access and opportunity.

Another area of concern is the ongoing deforestation often at the hands of narco traffickers as well as private cattle ranchers. There is a need to explore more sustainable practices for cattle ranching.

Table Exercise 1: Iceberg Model



Participants carried out an exercise at tables to build on the panel discussion and their own experiences as organizations. It is based on the work of early systems thinker Donella Meadows, who posited that if you want to create positive large-scale change, and significant impact, you must think about where you are intervening in a system. Where are your leverage points? The deepest level that will create the greatest change is at the paradigm level. Paradigms are frameworks that have unwritten rules and that cause action; and paradigm shifts are when one paradigm loses influence and another takes over in people's thinking and action.

People who work on systems change in philanthropy and the broader social sectors have taken this and turned it into an 'iceberg model', meaning that you need to be aware that you may only be seeing and affecting the tip of the iceberg. Implications for funders include the following: first, it is important to be in it for the long-term; and second, it is not always easy to measure change, particularly in the short-term. We *can* measure change, but it must be done differently.

Participants tackled issues related to land tenure and how a lack of title can prevent access to benefits such as bank loans, gender issues, education, and lack of access to basic services in rural areas. The iceberg model exercise helped participants to analyze these critical issues in a new light and think about the patterns and trends, the structural issues, and mental modes that impede positive change. For example, the structure of how technical assistance for rural people is designed is not conducive to reality, as there are many people who need assistance and do not "fit into the boxes" of identified categories of need as defined by government. There is a stigma around displaced people in Colombia. Host communities can create an atmosphere of rejection of migrants. People are called 'economic' migrants, even though the reasons for migrating are much more complex, often involving questions related to the longterm armed conflict. Government structures reinforce these categories. Further, across issues addressed, there is not strong social capital in Colombia, and there is also the sense that the government should provide all needed services, even though it does not possess the skills and resources needed for such efforts.

Table Exercise 2: Systems Mapping

Following a primer on systems thinking, groups turned to working in groups to map out existing actors and gaps in their chosen topic for the Iceberg Model. At tables, and drawing on earlier discussions, groups were asked to draw systems maps that included: structures and systems that have an important influence on narrowing the equity gap; flows of information and pressure; and partnerships, collaborations, or networks in business, philanthropy, civil society, government, academia, or media. Participants were asked to put a star where there is positive dynamism/action on narrowing the equity gap, and an X in areas where there is redundancy or competition, and gaps that need attention.



Systems Thinking and Using a Systems Lens

Systems: A set of things (people, resources, services, institutions, values, perceptions, etc.) connected through relationships and interactions with patterns of cause and effect



Using a **systems lens**: "...a view that balances part and whole and focuses on complex interrelationships and patterns from multiple perspectives."

Derek Cabrera

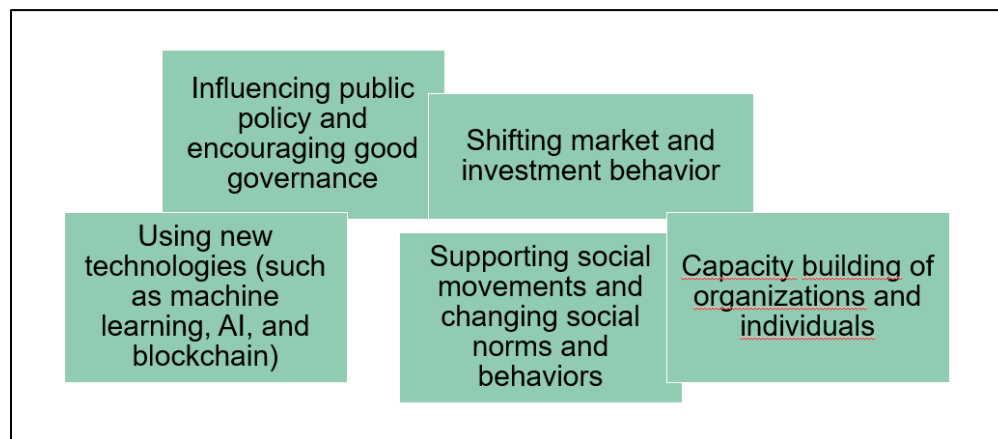
"Systems thinking starts when you first see the world through the eyes of another."

C. West Churchman, Systems Concepts in Action

Table Exercise 3: Transformational Levers

How can philanthropy better support transformational change on narrowing the equity gap in rural Colombia?

Participants were asked to consider the following transformational levers and discuss which of these is being used effectively in their topics of choice, and which would be most effective to address the issues of focus of their tables.



While all transformational levers were addressed, capacity building of organizations and individuals was an important topic cross table discussions, as this was perceived as a critical need that could then facilitate the other transformational levers. For the gender table, for example, capacity building of organizations and individual activists, men included, was seen as an effective way to spread the word. A measure of success for this group would be the number of men also working as advocates for women’s equality and rights. Further, basic health training for a wide range of women, children, educators, and local nonprofits in rural areas would help to improve women’s health, reduce unwanted pregnancies and early pregnancies, thereby improving graduation rates. And for those interested in public policy, they felt planning would improve following a technical assistance/capacity building process, or embedded into one. Likewise, new technologies could be incorporated into technical assistance for local and state actors.

Table Exercise 4: Pathways to scale solutions and impact: Imagining breakthroughs

Participants were asked to think about:

- What partnerships and networks exist that are already working on this?
- A 5-10 year pathway. What outcomes will we expect to see along the way? How will we know we are helping to change mental models and structures?
- What role can each of our sectors play in achieving these changes? (philanthropy, CSOs, business, government, UN)

Participants felt that effective public-private partnerships would be an important step to creating common actions. Accepting and understanding better the “co-existence” of private and government

actors, and promoting best practices to improve and dynamize relationships between these two sectors would help improve the current dynamic. Another important goal is helping private actors to understand their potential in not only promoting best practices themselves, but also in requiring good governance and transparency from local governments. Another goal would be training for community leaders, to encourage citizen participation.

Conclusion: Takeaways and Next Steps

Key Themes:

- Traditional gender norms obfuscate women’s contributions to development and downplay their ability to change the status quo.
- Highly unequal land distribution remains a major challenge for rural development.
- Entrenched negative perceptions about poor, rural populations undermine rural development policies.
- Outdated national rural development policies focused solely on agriculture in some locations ignore the health, education, and economic needs of rural populations. In this sense, it is important to guarantee a more comprehensive approach, tackling economic and social inclusion simultaneously.
- Local populations frequently struggle with illegal armed groups,¹ who still control large tracts of land and regional crop production. This power struggle remains a significant challenge to rural development.
- Local government agencies often lack skills specific to enabling rural development.
- High turnover in government at all levels impedes long-term development initiatives.
- The Colombian business sector has not fully embraced a sense of corporate responsibility and does not know how to intervene constructively in social and economic issues.
- There are important opportunities to involve the business sector in rural development in a strategic way, taking advantage of companies’ value chains, and their capacity to innovate and to transfer technology. This role is key to strengthen productivity and competitiveness in rural areas.
- Corruption in political decision-making is an obstacle to rural development.
- The lack of networks among smallholder farmers prevents these farmers from building their collective strength.
- Community involvement is a key element to guarantee rural development public policies based on local realities.

Among the many takeaways of the day, the following encapsulates much of the discussion: *“efforts across sectors, topics, and across transformational levers should lead to an understanding of rural communities as agents of positive change, and not simply as beneficiaries.”*

Further, the workshop group advocates for the understanding of these communities as valuable, and not simply as “instrumentalized resources” for the benefit of companies who do business in rural

¹ Illegal armed groups is the term used in Colombia to refer to guerillas or paramilitary groups.

areas. This would be a profound change in the current understanding and management of planning and services for these communities.

At the conclusion of the workshop, the partners agreed to the following commitments to continue to move the work forward:

- 1 – RPA to work with AFE to finalize this report.
- 2 – RPA will incorporate learning from the Colombia workshops into a global report about the Scaling Solutions initiative, to be released in late April 2020.
- 3 – RPA to start a google drive where workshop participants can place their own reports and efforts, and where RPA will place relevant documents and resources.
- 4 – AFE and Colombian participants to send information on relevant work Colombian institutions are doing, to be uploaded to the RPA website's Scaling Solutions section and on the SDG Philanthropy Platform website page on Colombia.
- 5 – RPA to recommend participants for speaking roles, when asked, for international events and serve as a bridge between the philanthropy sector in Colombia and globally.

Annex 1: The Collaborative Pathways Approach of the SDG Philanthropy Platform

SDG Philanthropy Platform Collaborative Pathways: The Platform's Flagship Approach at Country Level



Annex 2: Participant List

Organization	Name
3E	Claudia Martínez
3E	Janeth Patricia Velásquez Espinosa
AFE	Paula Ariza
AFE	Andrés Chaur
AFE	Jaime Matuta Hernández
AFE	Erika Marcucci
AFE	María Alejandra Ronderos
Amazon Conservation Team	Daniel Kraus
Arturo & Enrica Sesana Foundation	Robert Navas
Arturo & Enrica Sesana Foundation	Maria Claudia Santos
Avina	Adriana Otoya
CAF	Isabela Acuña
Colombian International Cooperation Agency	María Alejandra Mateus
Consolidation and Stabilization Presidential Advisors Office	Pamela Atehortua
Embassy of Canada	Catalina Jiménez
Escuela Nueva	Clarita Arboleda
Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN	Ignacio Martin
Ford Foundation	Maria Paula Rojas
Ford Foundation	Sally Schuster
Fundación Alpina	Camila Aguilar
Fundación Alpina	Gilma Ballesteros
Fundación Alpina	Catalina Zambrano
Fundación Alpina	Martha Lucia De la Cruz
Fundación Antonio Restrepo Barco	Gabriela Gutierrez Morales
Fundación Bancolombia	Maria José Ramírez Londoño
Fundación Bancolombia	Henry Montenegro
Fundación Bavaria	Bernardo Sainz
Fundación Bavaria	Tatiana Viecco
Fundación Capital	Veruschka Zilveti
Fundación Capital	Suad Fakih
Fundación Colombina	Ana Maria Rojas
Fundación Corbanacol	Juan Felipe Laverde
Fundación Corbanacol	Gloria Cristina Villa Mejia
Fundación Fraternidad Medellín	Rut Maribel Díaz Pérez
Fundación Grupo BIOS	Ricardo Hernández
Fundación Luker	Andrea Camacho
Fundación Saldarriaga Concha	Juan Pablo Álzate
Fundación Smurfit Cartón de Colombia	Catalina Barberena
Fundación Solidaridad por Colombia	Mariana Concha
Fundauniban	Luis Baena
Gaia Amazonas	Doris Ochoa

Organization	Name
Ideas for Peace Foundation	Camila Jaramillo
Ministry of Agriculture	Fernando Henao
PBA Corporation	Santiago Perry
Procasur	Martha Arbeláez
Reconciliation Colombia Foundation	Ana Maria Torres
Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors	Donzelina Barroso
Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors	Heather Grady
Rural Development Latin American Center	Angela Penagos
Sistema B	Juan Camilo Potes
Sistema de Fundaciones el Cerrejón	Nathalia Suarez
Skoll Foundation	Edwin Ou
Skoll Foundation	Claire Wathen
UN National Coordinator Office	Pontus Ohrstedt
United Nations Trust Fund for Colombia Coordinator	Alice Beccaro
WINGS	Nadya Hernández
	Mariana Cabo
	Lilia Córdoba