

## Resilience in Schools: Identifying Protective Factors in Colombian Schools

*The Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child*

is contributing to the growing body of knowledge around how schools navigate adversity, foster resilience, and support schools, practitioners, and policy-makers in designing interventions for schools struggling with the impact of conflict, poverty, emergencies, or violence.

Educapaz is a consortium of partners in Colombia focused on education for peace and strengthening the Colombian education system with a focus on rural education, social-emotional learning and territorial, national and global alliances.

### Background

The world is facing a learning crisis. Worldwide, millions of children reach young adulthood without basic reading, writing, digital literacy, or socio-emotional skills. Conflict, extreme poverty, and lack of adequately trained and supported teachers are only some of the reasons schools struggle to prepare children for the 21st century. While countries have increased access to education, often the quality of learning in low and middle income or conflict-impacted countries remains a challenge.

Education is at the center of building human capital, and schools are instrumental in preparing children to tackle current and future challenges. Understanding how schools mitigate conflict and promote safe, quality learning environments despite adversity is the study of resilience in education. When examining resilience in education, questions around the risks experienced and protective factors employed by teachers, school directors, students, or communities are examined. The study of school-based resilience is focused on identifying the potential protective factors and/or processes that are developed within the school environment and help individuals in schools foster positive socio-emotional and educational learning outcomes despite significant adversity.

While education resilience remains an emerging concept with multiple definitions and theoretical frameworks, its origins emerged from developmental psychology. Over the past three decades, researchers have also put forth a more socio-ecological model of school resilience, focused on the identification of risks in schools and the positive or protective actions taken by teachers, students, school-leadership, communities, and governments to mitigate these risks and foster positive academic and socio-emotional learning outcomes for students. (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997<sup>1</sup>, Wang, 2014<sup>2</sup>).

While the Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child has program partnerships in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, India, Tanzania, Kenya, and Peru, it is in partnership with Educapaz and its consortium of partners in Colombia where the research presented in this brief is being carried out in 20 schools across 3 departments. These 20 schools were chosen because students are achieving positive learning outcomes despite their schools having been affected by armed conflict, recruitment, or extreme poverty as measured with the Multi-Poverty Index.



1. Wang, M. C., Haertel, G. D., & Walberg, H. J. (1997). Fostering educational resilience in inner-city schools. In H. J. Walberg, O. Reyes, & R. P. Weissberg (Eds.), *Issues in children's and families' lives*, Vol. 7. Children and youth: Interdisciplinary perspectives (p. 119–140). Sage Publications, Inc.

2. Wang, M. C., Haertel, G. D., & Walberg, H. J. (1994). Educational resilience in inner cities. In M. C. Wang & E. W. Gordon (Eds.), *Educational resilience in inner-city America: Challenges and prospects* (p. 45–72). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.



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## Colombia and the impact of armed conflict on schools

Millions of children are thought to be impacted by armed conflict worldwide, with estimates for the number of children living in areas affected by conflicts ranging as high as 246 million.<sup>1</sup> Over the past several decades, schools, students, and teachers have become direct targets in countries affected by conflict, adversely affecting the learning and overall wellbeing of children.<sup>2</sup> Of countries in the western hemisphere, Colombia has had the longest-running armed conflict involving multiple armed groups and government security forces.<sup>3</sup> This conflict took a heavy toll on the education sector. National data collected from 1985 onwards reports that out of 8.9 million people in Colombia who are registered as victims of the conflict, 2.5 million – or 1 in 3 – were children. Overall 45,000 children have been killed, 2.3 million have been displaced, and 8,000 have disappeared. Schools over the past decades experienced attacks on teachers, occupation by armed forces, and/or school closures. Today, despite relatively high levels of educational

enrollment nationally, Colombia's departments with large numbers of rural schools, indigenous Colombian communities, and conflict impacted territories continue to experience enrollment, school completion, and quality of education indicators that are well below the national averages.<sup>4</sup>

Despite these challenges, Colombia's education sector, communities, and schools have been innovating and finding solutions to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools despite the adverse impact of conflict on enrollment, quality, and retention. Colombia has a rich history of supporting schools and children in response to the crises affecting its schools. Examples include, but are not limited to, successful alternative education models, indigenous education models, models for rural schools such as *Escuela Nueva*, and nation-wide curricular changes to promote citizenship and social-emotional learning. Communities have rallied to protect students and teachers to reduce violence in and around schools. These experiences are the soil from which school-based resilience is grown.

1. UNICEF. More than 1 in 10 Children Living in Countries and Areas Affected by Armed Conflict. New York: United States Fund for UNICEF; 2015.

2. Education Under Attack 2014. Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2014.

3. The Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army) (FARC-EP) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) were the largest guerrilla groups to initiate armed activity in the 1960s.

4. UNICEF Colombia Annual report. 2017. See: [https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Colombia\\_2017\\_COAR.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Colombia_2017_COAR.pdf)



## Our Research

The Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child, in partnership with Educapaz, is collaborating to conduct a mixed methods study focused on risk-identification in schools as well as exploring the protective factors used by students, teachers, or community members and groups that positively impact student performance in areas impacted by conflict. This research includes the participation of Educapaz partners from 8 organizations with programs in schools affected by conflict.

Our research is designed to identify the factors that influence school resilience in Colombia, understand protective factors that exist in the schools, and identify the mechanisms that specific institutions have used to promote improved outcomes in Colombian children and youth in schools. Our hypothesis is that “resilient” schools share common protective factors or attributes that help foster improved academic outcomes for children. This research will contribute to a shared definition of resilient schools in Colombia and protective factors that exist and, if used together, may help schools achieve better student outcomes in similar contexts.

Eight organizations working with Educapaz initially selected 68 schools considered “resilient” without applying a shared definition of resilience. These 68 schools were a purposeful sample from which 20 schools were selected for their positive outcomes in terms of education quality, retention, and grade progression despite being in territories affected by the presence of armed groups, violence against children, and high levels of poverty. The schools are in the 20 municipalities in the departments of Tolima, Valle, and Cauca.

## Our Central Research Questions

- How is education resilience defined in Colombia? Is there a collective understanding?
- What are the protective factors that teachers, students, school directors and community members feel contribute to the development of institutional resilience in schools?
- What are the adverse experiences that students, teachers, or community members perceive have negatively affected learning and/or student or teacher well-being?
- How can resilience be defined and measured at the school level?
- Do “resilient” schools share similar risks and responses?
- Can protective factors be scaled and implemented more widely?

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# Methodology

The resilient schools' research has two phases. The first part is a case study on the protective factors that are being implemented in the 68 selected Colombian schools affected by armed conflict. These schools were purposively selected by Educapaz and its 8 partners in Colombia based upon their programming and research. The case study will involve key informant interviews with leaders and project managers from the 8 organizations. The participating organization will also work with Educapaz to disseminate surveys at the school level with rectors and teachers. The objective of the case study is to identify, systematize, and promote these promising practices that foster resilience broadly to other organizations and government. These practices will be housed in an online virtual bank where practitioners can access them. A secondary outcome will be a greater consensus and understanding on how resilience is defined and fostered in Colombia at the school level.

The second phase of the research will be primary data collection in 20 schools where a mixed-methods approach will be used to gather more insights directly from parents, teachers, community members, and children.

The research will employ a mixed methods approach using focus groups and individual questionnaires that explore the experiences of children, teachers, school directors, and community members in building a resilient school. Instruments chosen explore both risks to schools and strategies or actions taken by members to overcome these risks. Instruments were chosen for having high internal consistency and validity, and in some cases, validation in different cultural contexts including Colombia. Instruments will be tested and adapted based on the participation of teachers and students in 2 schools in Bogota prior to application to the three departments.

Population	Instrument
Students	RES 360 <sup>1</sup> Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-R) AIR's Conditions for Learning survey-Students <sup>2</sup> AIR's Conditions for Learning survey- Observational Tool <sup>3</sup>
School	AIR's Conditions for Learning survey- Observational Tool <sup>4</sup>
Principal	AIR's Conditions for Learning survey- Principals <sup>5</sup>
Teachers	AIR's Conditions for Learning survey- Teachers <sup>6</sup> Focus group following RES 360 (Annex B and C) <sup>7</sup> Teacher Resilience Scale- TRS <sup>8</sup>



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## Projected Outcomes

This research is being conducted with the goal of helping Educapaz and partners better define and understand what supports the resilience and well-being of schools, teachers, and students from their perspective. The goal is for the findings to inform practitioners regarding the practices and risks that may help promote improved student outcomes in situations of adversity. If identified, shared protective factors that contribute to school resilience can be shared in Colombia through Educapaz's partnerships and with the Ministry of Education with the hope of positively influencing policy through a stronger evidence base. Beyond Colombia, this research will contribute to the growing evidence base and experience of practitioners and communities seeking to support schools in situations of crisis.

1. World Bank. 2013. Resilience in Education System (RES-360 degree) : rapid assessment manual (English). Education Resilience Approaches (ERA) program; Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER). Washington, DC : World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/404871468155121864/Resilience-in-Education-System-RES-360-degree-rapid-assessment-manual>
2. American Institutes for Research, (2014). AIR's Conditions for Learning survey. <https://www.air.org/project/conditions-learning-survey>.
- 3-7. Idem.
8. Daniilidou, Athina & Platsidou, Maria & Daniilidou, Athina. (2018). Teachers' resilience scale: An integrated instrument for assessing protective factors of teachers' resilience. Hellenic Journal of Psychology. 15.

