Research Report

Intercultural Agreements and Constructive Transformation of Socio-environmental and Territorial Conflicts: Keys to Making Them Possible

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Introduction

Access to land and its concentration have been significant triggers of territorial conflicts in Colombia. These conflicts manifest themselves on multiple scales and involve different actors (community, state, private sector, among others), so it is possible to find various expressions of this type of conflict. One of these is neighbourhood conflicts with interethnic nuances. These can be understood as those in which Indigenous Peoples, Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal, Palenquero, campesinos, or local communities confront each other over the ownership and appropriation of a specific territory (Duarte, 2015). These conflicts have socio-environmental expressions, as they challenge established ways of using, understanding, and managing nature.

Recent years have seen an increase in the study of the aforementioned conflicts, as well as socio-environmental, territorial and intercultural conflicts in Colombia in general. The primary focus of this research has been on their characterisation, with a secondary emphasis on understanding the factors that enable positive transformation or the construction of agreements (Morales and Ungar, 2022).

The Land at Scale project has also identified the need to understand the factors that facilitate the construction of intercultural agreements, as part of its implementation in Colombia. This project has been developed by Kadaster, ICCO Conexión, and Tropenbos Colombia, with support from the Dutch Business Agency RVO. Its primary objective is to support the land administration processes of indigenous peoples and black and Afro-Colombian communities in a fair, efficient, and effective manner (Land at Scale Colombia, S.f.).

In the territories where Land at Scale is being implemented, the technical teams evidence the existence of neighbourhood conflicts with interethnic nuances. Managing these conflicts requires a comprehensive understanding of the processes involved in constructing agreements regarding the use and tenure of land by the communities.

Considering the above, this research, conducted between October 2024 and February 2025, aimed to identify and analyse the factors that facilitate the construction of neighbourly agreements in contexts of disputes over access to and use of land and its resources.

To achieve this objective, a qualitative methodological design was implemented, based on the review of secondary information sources and interviews with experts from academia, non-governmental organisations, public institutions, indigenous peoples, and peasant communities.

Within the framework of the research, forty-one (41) cases of intercultural agreement construction were identified and analysed to understand the strategies or factors that made them possible. Additionally, the analysis established the triggers of the conflicts, the actors involved, and the role of indigenous peoples, black communities, peasants, youth, and women in these contexts.

This document presents the main findings and results of the research. The names of the interviewees have been anonymised due to confidentiality agreements established with them. Nevertheless, information regarding their occupations and backgrounds is provided.

The text is divided into seven parts. The first part addresses the theoretical and methodological aspects that underpinned the development of the work. The second outlines the factors that trigger conflicts in the analysed cases. The third presents the factors that enable the construction of agreements. The fourth analyses the role that women and youth have played in these contexts. The fifth sketches the main conclusions of the work. The sixth reflects on the relevance of the theoretical framework employed and possible lines for future research. Finally, the seventh part corresponds to the bibliographic references used.

1. Theoretical and Methodological Aspects of the Research

1.1 Theoretical Aspects

Socio-environmental, Territorial, and Intercultural Conflicts

In academic literature, various approaches exist to understand conflicts related to the use and appropriation (both material and symbolic) of nature (Walter, 2009; Vélez-Torres & Vélez, 2019). Despite the lack of general consensus regarding these approaches, common elements can be identified in these definitions, such as: (a) the existence of two or more disputing actors; (b) different forms of use, appropriation (material or symbolic), and valuation of the nature at the centre of the conflict; (c) the dynamic and historical character of the conflicts; and (d) the existence of power asymmetries between the actors.

Considering all the above, socio-environmental conflicts can be defined as situations in which "at least two actors, whose relationships are often characterised by power imbalances, confront each other in the public sphere over the conception, valuation, access, use, or management of nature, either in the present or concerning divergent desired futures" (Folchi, 2001; Gudynas, 2007; Merlinsky, 2013; Peña-Reyes, 2008; Rodríguez, 2006; Walter, 2009 in Morales and Ungar, 2022).

Socio-environmental conflicts occur in territories, that is, spaces historically appropriated by the disputing actors, around which various rules of use, identities, affections, memories, and histories have been constructed (Montañez and Delgado, 1998; Stamm and Aliste, 2014). In this sense, socio-environmental conflicts are also territorial conflicts (Vera, 2017).

Authors like Palmisano (2020) distinguish between socio-environmental and territorial conflicts, focusing on the key aspect that generates the confrontation. In socio-environmental conflicts, the origin of the dispute lies in "the negative transformations—actual or potential—of a space considered common and shared, often identified with the noun nature" (p. 2). In contrast, in territorial conflicts, the involved actors primarily claim ownership and appropriation of a specific territory (p. 2).

In this context, it’s possible to identify a particular type of conflict: neighbourhood conflicts, which can sometimes acquire inter-ethnic nuances (among indigenous, Afro-Colombian, or peasant communities) and whose focus is struggles over territory (Duarte, 2015). Therefore, to address and intervene in these conflicts, it is necessary to understand what territory means to each actor.

Considering the aforementioned elements and its main objective, this research focused on analysing territorial conflicts. Specifically, it centred on neighbourhood conflicts with inter-ethnic nuances, in which the elements at the core of the dispute are territory, its delimitation, tenure, use, and appropriation.

Although Colombia is the country with the second-highest number of socio-environmental conflicts—which, as mentioned, are also territorial— (Ejolt, n.d.), few studies have focused on evaluating the transformation of these types of conflicts and their effects (Morales and Ungar, 2022). Nevertheless, literature offers various approaches and proposed indicators to evaluate the processes of resolution or transformation of socio-environmental conflicts.

These forms of evaluation are mainly designed for conflicts between the private sector and the state, the private sector and communities, and communities and the state. Therefore, for this research, they were adapted in the interview guide to explore the elements that enable agreements between indigenous peoples, black, Afro-Colombian, peasant, and local communities in the context of territorial conflicts.

Environmental Conflict Resolution

Environmental Conflict Resolution (ECR) is an approach to managing these situations that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. It has been adopted by various public entities in the United States and Latin America (O'Leary & Bingham, 2003; Fisher & Sablan, 2018; Ascerald et al., 2010). Although there is no consensus on its definition, as there are diverse notions regarding conflicts and the environment (Fisher & Sablan, 2018), in general terms, it is possible to affirm that ECR involves a series of mechanisms that allow the actors involved in the conflict to build consensus without resorting to judicial instances. This approach views conflict as a situation to be overcome without necessarily addressing its structural causes.

Given the popularisation of this approach, various methods have been developed to evaluate the success of such processes. However, authors like Wondolleck and Yaffee (2000) have highlighted that the perceived success of the evaluation depends on the perspective of the evaluating actor. Generally, two dimensions can be distinguished for assessing the success of an ECR process:

1. *Evaluation of the negotiation or consensus-building process:* This involves variables such as the representation of the parties involved in the conflict; the incorporation of different types of information and knowledge into the process; and cost-effectiveness in terms of time and resources, among others.

2. *Evaluation of the agreement reached:* This considers aspects such as the fairness and legitimacy of the agreement for the parties that participated in the process; evidence of environmental improvements and positive impacts on social systems arising from the construction of the agreement; the durability of the agreement and reduction in levels of controversy; increased social and political capital upon completion of the process; and improved relationships between the parties (Dukes, 2004; Fisher & Sablan, 2018; Kaufman, Ozawa, & Shmueli, 2014).

Transformation of Socio-environmental Conflicts

The transformation of socio-environmental conflicts is an approach that originates within peace studies, where conflicts are understood as phenomena inherent to the development of

social relations. These conflicts have the potential to generate changes in the conditions that give rise to them, fostering scenarios of greater environmental and social justice (Rodríguez et al., 2015).

In this context, conflicts are seen as dynamic phenomena where interventions can lead to their escalation or de-escalation. However, the positive transformation of conflicts aims to reconfigure the structural causes that generate them and to de-escalate levels of violence. Therefore, in order to evaluate a transformation process, it is necessary to conduct long-term monitoring of the conflict's dynamics.

According to Rodríguez et al. (2015), the dimensions for evaluating the effects of transformation include, among others, the strengthening of local governance, local political agency, local control of means of production and technology, as well as environmental integrity. These dimensions manifest on personal, institutional, and cultural scales.

In the Colombian context, through a systematic literature analysis, Morales and Ungar (2022) identified the following elements that enable positive change in conflicts: strengthening community arrangements; establishing coordination and monitoring of agreements with the participation of all involved actors; existence of a favourable normative and policy framework for agreement construction; and access to information and technical-scientific knowledge.

Although both conflict resolution and transformation stem from different understandings and approaches to conflict, they share a common element: the construction of agreements between actors, their participation, and the change in relationships among them.

All the aforementioned elements were considered in designing the instruments (interview guides and information systematisation matrices) used in this research. Additionally, and considering that conflicts are intertwined with gender dimensions, a question regarding the role of women and youth in these processes was included in the interview guide (see section 1.2.2).

1.2 Methodological Aspects of the Research

This research adopts a qualitative approach that commenced with an analysis of secondary information sources such as press articles, theoretical academic documents, and case studies on socio-environmental and territorial conflicts, as well as the construction of intercultural agreements. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with experienced individuals in the subject matter to deepen the understanding of conflicts and intercultural agreements in various regions of Colombia. Below is a detailed description of the research methods and their scope.

1.2.1 Review of Secondary Information Sources

At the initial stage of the research, and with the aim of identifying potential case studies of territorial conflicts where intercultural agreements were reached, as well as to pinpoint relevant authors and experiences for further exploration, a systematic search of secondary information

(theses and journal articles) was conducted using search engines such as Google Scholar and Scopus. This process took place between October and December 2024, employing the following search terms: "Conflictos interculturales en Colombia" ("Intercultural conflicts in Colombia"), "Conflictos socioambientales en Colombia" ("Socio-environmental conflicts in Colombia"), and "Acuerdos interculturales" ("Intercultural agreements").

This search identified 30 documents, which were organised into an analysis matrix considering the following categories: location of the conflict, author(s) of the document, general description of the conflict and measures taken to manage it (e.g., involvement of third parties in agreement construction), types of changes that occurred within the framework of the conflicts (improvement in relations between parties, enhanced access to information, among others), and participation of third parties.

From this information search, it was possible to identify 20 cases of intercultural agreements over territory (see Annex 1a). Generally, the review of secondary information sources shows that most of the identified cases are located in the departments of Cauca and Chocó, involving both the Andean and Pacific regions of the country (7 records). Additionally, some conflicts are situated in the Caribbean (4), and to a lesser extent in the Orinoquia (2) and Amazon (3) regions of Colombia. Regarding the authorship of the reviewed documents, academic institutions such as Instituto Colombiano de Estudios Superiores (ICESI), Universidad Nacional (UNAL), Universidad de Los Andes, Universidad de La Guajira, and Universidad Javeriana in its Bogotá and Cali campuses stand out.

Among the analysed documents are academic journals such as Controversia, Revista Austral de Ciencias Sociales, Ambiente y Desarrollo, and Papel Político, among others. The compilation "Juntanzas en resistencia por el territorio" ("Gatherings in Resistance for the Territory"), published by the peace programme of Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP) in 2021, was also reviewed. Lastly, a press review was conducted, focusing particularly on the newspaper El Espectador and the digital media outlet La Silla Vacía.

While this review of secondary sources on cases of constructing intercultural agreements provides a general overview of the conflicts and the measures adopted, a gap persists in the literature regarding an in-depth understanding of the experiences of the actors involved in the conflict and the detailed process of how intercultural agreements over territory are constructed. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were conducted to delve deeper into these aspects.

1.2.2 Semi-structured Interviews with Experts

Semi-structured interviews were selected as an appropriate qualitative method to complement the previously reviewed secondary information, considering that their "semi-structured" nature provides a broad framework for the interviewer and the team in general, allowing for in-depth exploration of emerging aspects or prioritisation of certain analytical axes according to the development of the interview and the team's discretion. Following the guidelines for implementing this research technique, an interview guide with key themes was designed and some possible guiding questions, considering the literature's approaches to evaluating conflict resolution and transformation processes. Thus, theoretical inputs and reflections inspired by

the cases identified from the secondary source review contributed to the construction of the aforementioned interview guide.

The interview script underwent a joint review with the Tropenbos team, incorporating the suggested adjustments. The proposed interview structure suggested beginning with an inquiry into the general context of territorial conflicts and aimed to delve into specific cases concerning the history of the conflict and its actors. As a central point of the research and following the postulates of conflict resolution and transformation theories, questions were formulated around the actions that enabled the construction of intercultural agreements, the role of knowledge dialogue in these processes, the effects of such resolution or agreement-building on changing relationships between actors, and the role of women and youth in these contexts.

The interviewees were identified using the snowball methodology[1], based on criteria such as: their expertise in the subject of interest; their leadership in contexts of agreement-building in the territories; their work with ethnic communities in conflict situations; and their technical support in processes of inter-ethnic conflict resolution. Three types of interviewees are distinguished: academics with extensive theoretical reflection experience; officials from state entities related to land formalisation or adjudication processes; officials from multilateral bodies with experience in supporting ethnic communities; and leaders of ethnic and local communities who have been involved in territorial conflicts and agreement-building processes. A total of fifteen (15) interviews were conducted. Table 1 presents a general characterisation of the interviewees:

Interviewee Profile	Number of Interviews	General Characterisation
Academics with extensive theoretical reflection experience	4	Professors with over 10 years of experience and doctoral studies from universities such as Universidad Javeriana (Bogotá and Cali campuses), Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, were interviewed. Their interests notably include institutional analysis, governance in socio-ecological systems, rural development, conflict management, public policies, multipurpose cadastre, and agrarian policy.
Government agency officials	5	Officials from state entities such as the Ministry of Agriculture, the National Land Agency, and the Truth Commission, were interviewed. These profiles are characterised by their experience in dialogue spaces with ethnic communities.
Non-governmental organisation		Directors and leaders of territorial projects in NGOs such as Tropenbos and Natura, as well as international cooperation agencies like Conexión Latinoamérica, were

[1] The snowball sampling method is a non-probabilistic sampling technique widely used in qualitative research. It is used to identify participants in a study, especially when the target group is difficult to access or not previously defined. What does it involve? Once the initial participants are identified, they suggest individuals relevant to the research.

Interviewee Profile	Number of Interviews	General Characterisation
(NGO) staff, international cooperation agencies, and foundations	3	interviewed.
Territory leaders	3	Two indigenous leaders from the Arhuaco community in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (SNSM) were interviewed. One possesses experience in directing intercultural educational projects within the SNSM territory, while the other has demonstrated leadership in a consultation body between the national government and indigenous peoples. Additionally, a female peasant leader representing the Asociación Nacional de Zonas de Reserva Campesina (ANZORC, National Association of Peasant Reserve Zones) was interviewed.

Table 1: Description of Interviewee Profiles

Following the initial interviews conducted on 28 November 2024, an information systematisation matrix was designed, considering the following categories of analysis: notion of conflict; general characterisation of intercultural conflicts (addressing the question "What triggers them?" from the interviewees' perspectives); cases of agreement-building with the actors involved; roles of institutions and international cooperation; factors enabling agreements; reflections on mediation and capacity-building. Additionally, analytical categories such as the role of information and its accessibility, and the role of youth and women in agreement-building scenarios were included.

From the semi-structured interviews, 21 cases of intercultural agreement-building were identified across the country. The majority are located in the Pacific region (8 cases) and the Andean region (4 cases). Additionally, 4 cases were established in the Caribbean region, 4 in the Orinoquía and eastern Colombia, and one in the Amazon (see Annex 1b).

2. Factors Triggering Conflicts in the Analysed Cases and Involved Actors

Territorial conflicts in Colombia are phenomena that arise from structural causes such as land grabbing, the development model, and the differential recognition of rights. Hence, there is a need for historical-territorial approaches for their understanding and analysis. While each territorial conflict follows a particular historical-territorial context, in the analysed cases, it is possible to establish structural elements, like those mentioned above, which are elaborated upon below.

2.1 Structural Inequality, Development Model, and Armed Conflict

One of the structural factors that has given rise to territorial conflicts is related to "the exhaustion of arable land and the process of land concentration, driven by logics incentivised by the implementation of an agrarian postmodernism based on monoculture" (Caballero, 2011, in Duarte, 2015).

The historically inequitable distribution of land has been, and continues to be, one of the causes of violence and the emergence of armed conflict in Colombia during the 20th century (Gaviria et al., 2018). According to the National Centre for Historical Memory (2018), this has led to:

> the displacement, abandonment, and dispossession of lands, which signify the defeat, humiliation, and impoverishment of the peasantry in regions dominated by paramilitaries and guerrillas, on the one hand, and on the other, the reconfiguration of land tenure and use towards greater concentration, more livestock farming, and palm and forestry plantations, to the detriment of family agriculture.

This situation persists as illegal armed actors continue to employ strategies to expel individuals who threaten their presence from their controlled territories (Medina, 2009). Findings from some interviews conducted in this research indicate that the presence of these actors in the territories has also forced local communities to coexist with them.

The armed conflict is also linked to illegal economies that involve the accumulation of large landholdings, money laundering, and serve as sources of local power (Reyes, 2008, cited in Medina, 2009). The geography of the Colombian conflict thus coincides with the process of expansion of the agricultural frontier and is marked by the opposition between armed actors exercising control over ethnic communities and/or settlers (Medina, 2009).

Furthermore, the land-use planning and development models adopted and promoted in the country have generated benefits to actors who concentrate land ownership, as production is not conceived from local ethnic logics. Instead, agro-industrial economic models prevail, which radically differ from how communities perceive the territory. According to Darío Fajardo (2015), the structure of agro-industries is based on large estates expanded at the expense of community lands, directly affecting medium-scale producers, peasants, and landless workers.

These elements highlight the existence of a complex relationship among the concentration of agrarian property, the presence of transnational capital, and the strengthening of an economic project that neither generates employment nor development (Fajardo, 2015). Ultimately, the pervasiveness of armed conflicts in Colombia, as a trigger for territorial disputes, is also related to the resistance of dominant economic and political interests (Fajardo, 2015).

2.2 Multiculturalism and Differential Recognition of Rights

The structure of Colombian multiculturalism, particularly the disparities in the recognition of rights, is a trigger for conflicts, as the scope of differential rights systems is not uniform for

indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and peasant communities. Paraphrasing Duarte (2015), multiculturalism can be understood as a political doctrine aiming to acknowledge and preserve social differences in ethnic or differential terms. In the Latin American context, multiculturalism has signified the legal recognition of the plurality of populations.

The multicultural approach does not provide the same guarantees to populations that are in similar conditions of vulnerability beyond their ethnic or cultural self-identification. In Colombia, the emergence of ethnic conflicts tied to territorial recognition logics has intensified following the 1991 constitutional reform, leading to a dilemma of rights between territorial and ethnic laws (Hoffmann, 2001, cited in Duarte, 2015) and introducing "constitutional blocks" focused on recognizing the country's pluriethnic and multicultural diversity (Duarte, 2015). Hence, some ethnic mobilization processes generate contradictions and may even dynamize conflicts in certain regions (Duarte, 2015).

In this sense, the 1991 Constitution marks a milestone, presenting a new state stance on how to address the indigenous population. The Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal, and Palenquero communities, in turn, achieved the recognition model around 1993, leaving a gap in the recognition of rural mestizo populations. From the interviews, a trajectory of recognition of land tenure is acknowledged, starting with indigenous peoples through the resguardo (reserve) mechanism and later with the recognition of the right of black communities through the figure of community councils, and more recently, peasant communities with the establishment of peasant reserve zones[2].

Although progress has been made in the normative recognition of new land tenure figures with the reform of Law 70[3] and the reform of Article 64[4], this has been insufficient in terms of guarantees for reducing conflicts. At the legal and ownership level, the figure of peasants as rights holders has a limited trajectory in the national territory, as they were not identified as a community in the 1991 Political Constitution (Duarte, 2015) and have only recently been recognized as rights holders (see Legislative Act 01 of 2023).
This issue became evident in the interviews conducted, where some of the interviewees reported knowing cases of conflicts in territories among black, peasant, and indigenous communities over territorial claims for expanding reserves or black community territories in areas with the presence of local or peasant communities. In some of these contexts, institutional decisions seem to legitimize one actor's territorial claims over others. Thus, the

[2] La The figure of Peasant Reserve Zones (Zonas de Reserva Campesina), established by Law 160 of 1994, focuses on land formalisation and reflects a historical struggle to vindicate peasant identity and its diversity. In the words of a female peasant leader: "We have been very diligent in understanding that the peasant is a determinant for land use and planning. It does not mean that the peasant identity is the only one present in the territories; we understand that everyone has a vision of the territory and that this exercise must be carried out diligently. Rurality is vast, and despite the fact that the struggle for land rights has been a cause of conflict in Colombia, we are responsible for defending that 'The land belongs to those who work it'" (personal communication with a female leader from a national organisation).
[3] The Law 70 of 1993 focuses on the recognition of rights for Black, Afro-Colombian, Palenquera, and Raizal communities (NARP).
[4] Article 64 of the 1991 Political Constitution stipulates that peasants have the right to non-discrimination and that the state must promote access to land ownership, education, health, housing, among others.

state's lack of awareness about these areas leads to errors in terms of adjudication, further intensifying conflicts (López, 2014).

The aforementioned sections highlight how territorial conflicts, and particularly neighborhood conflicts with interethnic nuances, are phenomena with a specific historical-geographical dimension; which in Colombia have their roots in structural factors such as land distribution and appropriation, the development model, and more recently, the differential recognition of rights for indigenous peoples, black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal (Afro-Colombian native of the Archipelago of San Andrés, Providencia, and Santa Catalina), and Palenquero (descendant of escaped African slaves who established free settlements in Colombia) communities, as well as local communities.

2.4 Actors involved in the conflicts

In the cases analysed, it is possible to identify some recurring types of actors, including indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and peasant communities; state institutions; and illegal armed groups. Additionally, in some cases, mention is made of landowners, private companies, multinationals, and large-scale agricultural or oil enterprises; technical support from universities and academic researchers is also highlighted. Furthermore, albeit to a lesser extent and acting as mediators in the process of agreement-building, certain international cooperation agencies, NGOs, churches, and educational centres are noted.

The present diversity of actors in rural territories—such as ethnic and peasant groups, private enterprises, illegal groups, and the state—creates a complex framework where interests are put in tension and territorial disputes are developed (Riascos and Fernández, 2023).

Below, a general characterisation of the recurrent actors in conflicts and identified agreement-building cases, as well as the role played by each actor in the analysed contexts, is presented.

2.4.1 Ethnic and Local Communities

The community can be understood as a group of people with a common territorial appropriation and, in some cases, with the social legitimacy of kinship among its members—close consanguinity (Institute of Intercultural Studies, 2023). Ethnic groups are groups of people who define themselves under an identity discourse that includes linguistic characteristics, customs, and cultural traditions (Sartori, 2001, cited in López, 2014). Likewise, delimitation as an ethnic group implies a similarity (familiarity) that leads to cooperation and a difference that can signify moments of isolation or conflict. Thus, it is assumed that relationships within ethnic groups in Colombia must be contextualised: they are neither entirely harmonious nor entirely conflictual (López, 2014).

The community entails the interaction of multiple actors (individuals, families, ethnic groups, local and national authorities) concerning the land; therefore, community analysis in Colombia is traversed by power relations, conflicts of interest, and inequalities of gender, class, and ethnicity (Serwat, 2024). Hence, communities are not static but transform with the intervention of development policies. In the context of neighbourhood conflicts with intercultural nuances,

these communities are confronted by opposing interests in land access and territorial use, being one of their main protagonists.

The National Population and Housing Census of 2018 established that there are 115 indigenous peoples in Colombia, and approximately 717 reserves (resguardos) of collective property. Additionally, according to figures from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in 2022, there are 64 Peasant Reserve Zones, not counting those that are still being processed or projected. Regarding community councils, the National Land Agency (Agencia Nacional de Tierras) reported that as of July 2024, there were 281 with collective property titles.

Each indigenous, peasant, and black community has its own historical, cultural, sociopolitical particularities and daily dynamics; that is, we do not speak of homogeneity or uniformity in each group, so there may be ruptures, divergent positions, and different perspectives regarding conflicts and their management in each of them.

2.4.2 State Institutions

El The national government, represented by its ministries and institutions related to land adjudication and formalisation processes, is one of the most recurrent actors in the analysed cases. From the perspective of the interviewed community leaders, the national government is required to intervene in the territories, provide territorial protection, and take an active stance against land concentration.

State institutions are neither homogeneous nor have they been. Their interventions and ability to fulfil agreements within the framework of territorial conflicts have varied over the years and within the same governments, depending on their government plans, the prioritisation of issues related to Comprehensive Rural Reform, and changes in the technical teams of the entities. Therefore, to analyse the role of state institutions in shaping the studied conflicts, it is necessary to consider a historical and institutional sociology approach.

An example of this, according to the interviewees, is that during the government of Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018), initiatives such as the Centre for Social Dialogue (CEDISCO) were implemented, promoting dialogue between civil society and the State, contributing to the early identification and management of conflicts. However, this government showed limitations in key aspects such as land acquisition. In contrast, the government of Iván Duque (2018-2022) lacked significant progress in implementing the Peace Agreement and the Comprehensive Rural Reform. Currently, the government of Gustavo Petro (2022-2026) prioritises agrarian reform, achieving progress in land acquisition[5], although there are still

[5] According to data from the Procuraduría General de la Nación (2024), a total of 21,132 properties were registered in the Land Fund at the end of the first quarter of 2024. According to the latest statistics, 86% of properties are vacant (ANT, 2024). In contrast, the Attorney General's Office reported in the Fifth Follow-up Report to the Peace Agreement that as of March 31, 2023, there was a record of 20,406 rural properties entered into this Fund, with a total area of 2,233,168 hectares (Attorney General's Office, 2023, p. 48). This represents an increase of 3.55% in the number of properties and 8.08% in area (p. 72).

unmet commitments with the communities (personal communication with an indigenous leader, 2025).

The historical non-compliance of agreements by government institutions on structural issues such as the establishment of indigenous reserves has generated distrust among the parties and exacerbated conflicts. This problem partly stems from the lack of budgetary support and an adequate institutional structure to fulfil commitments. Thus, the signing of agreements sometimes becomes a mechanism to reduce conflict and social mobilisation, rather than a mechanism to de-escalate conflicts in the long term.

Nevertheless, state institutions have, during different administrations, established social dialogue departments in entities such as the Ministry of Agriculture, the National Land Agency, the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, the National Mining Agency, among others. This constitutes progress in addressing conflicts, but it does not guarantee concrete results in conflict mediation or land titling. According to the interviewees, the lack of coordination among these teams limits their ability to generate effective joint actions. This highlights the need for a more coordinated and structured approach to address the underlying causes of territorial conflicts.

2.4.3 Landowners

Another relevant actor in the configuration of territorial conflicts, related to land grabbing, are **landowners.** The productive model implemented in rural Colombia prioritises the presence of large landowners, defending a hegemonic vision of development that violates ethnic groups and their significant relationships with the territory (CINEP, 2021). Ethnic groups end up, in areas like northern Cauca, operating under a model based on leasing and labour. The academics, officials interviewed and literature agree on a critical stance towards landowners, monoculture or exploitation companies, and even religious groups with agro-industrial aspirations, such as the Mennonites (Dourojeanni, 2022).; expand the agricultural frontier into vulnerable or protected areas, and ancestral lands, also affecting environmental care since rural communities have productive processes in areas important for environmental conservation.

2.4.4 Armed Actors

As previously mentioned, most conflicts involving territory are related to the internal armed conflict and its dynamics. A strong point of convergence between the interviews and the review of secondary sources is that ethnic groups have been severely affected by land expropriation, overcrowding, dispossession, and displacement (López, 2014). Therefore, armed actors influence the formation and intensification of the identified conflicts. In the analysis by researcher Daniela López (2014), the pressure exerted by armed actors hinders land adjudication processes, as many hectares have been illegally occupied by armed groups and are destined for extensive illicit activities.

However, the Fund continues to be a mechanism in which there is not a significant number of assets available for delivery to the rural population without access to land.

Additionally, the armed conflict has impacted the configuration of territories, which is associated with the

> creation of micro-power structures necessary for the various conflict actors to consolidate their illegal operations, increase economic power, and coerce the political will of communities; thus, consolidating a territorial strategy that includes the exercise of violence to maintain this hegemony (Salas, 2016, p. 56)

Hence, the armed actors present in the territory influence the use and management of the land by establishing rules for the use of resources and relationships among the territorial actors (Crisis Group, 2022).

2.4.5 Academia

University institutions and academic experts have positioned themselves as allies for institutional actors and communities in the analysed cases. In this context, academia has played various roles, providing technical support to both communities and institutions for conflict analysis, information standardisation, and generating inputs for dialogue. Additionally, according to the experience of some interviewees, it has methodologically supported the implementation of dialogue processes and served as a technical advisor to some communities. It has also accompanied the design and execution of dialogue tables and, in cases where communities have needed it, acted as a logistical operator.

2.4.6 International Cooperation

In the analysed cases, international cooperation agencies are involved as actors who, through project implementation, can contribute to capacity building in the territory. This strengthening is mainly related to access to information through the design and implementation of diploma courses, courses, or training in data collection, analysis, and capacity building for dialogue.

The project-based logic under which cooperation operates was questioned by some of the interviewees. The criticism mainly focuses on the duration and sustainability of processes and the inflexibility of indicators used to measure intervention goals. This is because there are cooperation projects that aim to contribute to agreement building or conflict transformation, but the implementation timeline do not allow for long-term processes. This limitation makes interventions mainly focus on meeting project goals without necessarily translating into daily life impacts or transforming the relationships of the involved communities. One way to promote the sustainability of projects is to involve state and local institutions in them, after a prior analysis of their role in conflicts. Additionally, the design and implementation of knowledge management processes with institutions, other cooperation entities, community organizations, and non-governmental organizations working in the area can facilitate the identification and transmission of lessons learned and best practices.

One way in which cooperation has attempted to ensure its resources directly impact communities is by implementing a localisation approach. This approach aims for resources to be managed directly by local organisations or community action boards. However, challenges persist in how to ensure that these resources strengthen organisational processes. According

to one of the interviewees, a key to achieving this could be strengthening local organisations so they are capable of managing, executing, and "accounting for" their own projects.

Other criticisms of cooperation relate to how intervention projects aimed at influencing territorial conflicts are formulated, as sometimes, the way calls for proposals are formulated favours one of the actors involved in the conflict (indigenous peoples, black or peasant communities), Which ends up increasing the asymmetries that exist between them and hindering the conditions for dialogue building. Faced with this, some of the interviewed experts highlight the need for contextual information on conflicts and tensions in the intervention and surrounding areas to guide the formulation of calls for proposals and the construction of their terms of reference.

3. Factors Enabling the Construction of Intercultural Agreements

Considerations Regarding the Resolution and Transformation of Territorial Conflicts in Colombia

As mentioned in the theoretical aspects section, the literature on conflict management, particularly socio-environmental conflicts, presents two main approaches for intervening in such phenomena: resolution and transformation. The first refers to a series of mechanisms (arbitration, mediation, among others) that allow the actors involved in the conflict to build consensus without resorting to judicial instances. This approach understands conflict as a situation to be overcome and de-escalated without necessarily addressing its structural causes. In contrast, conflict transformation, and particularly positive conflict transformation, consists of a long-term process aimed at transforming the structural causes that give rise to conflict and de-escalating its levels of violence.

In the case of territorial conflicts in Colombia, particularly those involving inter-ethnic neighbourhood conflicts, the dialogue with interviewed experts revealed how these two approaches are not free from controversy when applied either to intervene or to understand the dynamics of the studied conflicts.

Some interviewees highlighted the need to be careful with the choice of the notion of transformation to understand the dynamics of such conflicts and the possibilities of building agreements and de-escalation. This is considering the complex web of relationships and structural factors that give rise to territorial conflicts, which are not overcome by building an agreement.

Consequently, they suggest employing analytical categories such as mobilisation, de-escalation of violence or management to understand the changes in these types of conflicts and the possibility of building agreements. In this context, a common point in measuring the management of interethnic conflicts is the de-escalation of violence, which is not synonymous with extensive modification of the socio-historical conditions that foster conflict. In the words of one of the interviewees:

> "(...) we talk about management because there are structural issues behind it. What one can see are moments where particular agreements are reached, but this does not necessarily solve underlying conflicts or, as often happens in our country, it recycles for a few years later" (Personal communication with a Colombian academic, 2024).

Thus, from the perspective of some of the interviewed academic experts, the most convenient theoretical frameworks for understanding the de-escalation of violence in territorial conflicts and the changes that occur in them would be those closer to conflict resolution. This is also evident in instruments such as the "Guide for the Implementation of Intercultural Mediation", which is part of the Toolbox: Conflict Resolution Methods, prepared by the Ministry of Justice and the National Planning Department with support from USAID, and establishes the following goals for intercultural conflict mediation: strengthening social fabric, facilitating communication and dialogue among actors, reducing violent expressions and behaviours, among others.

This does not mean that the transformation approach has not been employed to understand these phenomena. Some of the interviewed academics, as well as dialogue with some public officials from entities responsible for land adjudication in the country, revealed that until a few years ago and even today, the notion of transformation remains present in governmental discourses. Particularly, the experts highlight the use of the notion of "Conflict Transformation" during the government of Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018) as a strategy with political and financial character, aiming to attract funding and positioning in international cooperation projects.

Therefore, both in academic literature and in the intervention of government entities, differences persist in addressing territorial conflicts and accounting for the results of interventions.

Considerations Regarding the Factors Enabling the Construction of Intercultural Agreements

Considering the above and to heed the recommendations of experts in dialogue with the proposed theoretical aspects, this research inquired about the factors that enable the construction of agreements in the context of territorial conflicts. It is important to note that while it is possible to find recurrences both in the dynamics of conflicts and the agreement-building processes, each one of them adheres to a particular historical-territorial context.

Consequently, the factors enabling agreements presented below are not intended to be a generic recipe or an exact formula for all interventions aimed at contributing to the de-escalation of territorial conflicts. On the contrary, from the interviews with experts and the review of secondary sources, there is a recognition of the need to analyse "each conflict on its own terms" and nuance from each specific context. Nevertheless, the identified elements offer key insights for addressing these phenomena.

3.1 Creation of Intercultural Dialogue Spaces

> *Promoting intercultural dialogue spaces is a fundamental element when addressing territorial conflicts. These allow for the recognition of the parties as valid interlocutors*

and can help foster trust among them. Their creation requires long-term efforts and flexible methodological designs that recognize the particularities of the contexts and actors involved; promote the participation of the parties involved, the recognition of common needs and interests, and access to information.

Intercultural dialogue spaces can be understood as meeting scenarios between groups that have different conceptions of the territory, its delimitation, tenure, use, and appropriation. Their purpose is to establish healthy coexistence and identify common guidelines, such as productive processes or environmental conservation (Institute of Intercultural Studies, 2023). These spaces are conceived not only as specific meetings but as medium and long-term processes that do not follow a predefined formula but require an analysis of the conflict on its own terms, which does justice to the diversity and complexity of the Colombian rural context.

The construction of dialogue spaces allows the actors involved in the conflict to interact. This can favour the recognition of the other as a legitimate interlocutor as well as the identification of shared interests and needs. The latter because, paraphrasing one of the interviewees who is part of a multilateral organisation, the groups and families in conflict need the territory to continue existing, and that is their common interest.

In this sense, intercultural dialogue not only recognizes the diversity of subjects but also the importance of conflict in producing changes and questioning the asymmetries that communities face in their interaction with state institutions, companies, and other actors such as academia (CINEP, 2021). So, how are these meeting spaces constructed? In the experience of an Arhuaco leader interviewed:

> First, it is necessary to show what is common, what unites us, what is the interest we have, whether it is a land issue, if we all agree that the territory should be protected, and that is where we both have the same interests... Many times, we enter wanting to resolve the conflict and not in identifying the common interests we have. Examples of state interventions that have generated conflicts, I have many: between Afro and indigenous brothers in the Colombian Pacific in Alto Naya, where an Afro collective territory was constituted without identifying that there were indigenous communities. (Personal communication with an Arhuaco indigenous leader, 2025).

Complementing this view, a Colombian official describes three moments in the process of building intercultural dialogue spaces. The first focuses on the bond with the territory, reflecting on the value of the land in the lives of those who are protagonists of the conflict and their families. The second seeks to agree on the scope and objective of a possible dialogue, recognising the agreements that already exist or have existed in the territory. The third consists of setting a methodological route aa well as establishing dialogue parameters to address conflicts.

Additionally, from the experience of a leader of a non-governmental organization, the meeting spaces involve building daily bonds, from sharing a snack to maintaining some general conditions such as convening an equal number of men and women, indigenous and peasants. The reduction of tension between actors is gradual and requires an exercise of patience and

openness on the part of mediators. An example of this is the case of Solano, Caquetá, where participatory methodologies were used to promote these spaces:
:

> At the beginning, the space was inhabited by indigenous people in one corner and peasants in another. Super separated, with a lot of tension, and we noticed how, each time these meetings took place, this was transforming. [This transformation] had to do with how we framed the spaces and generated these spaces mediated more by affection, with a series of tools that allowed them to narrate who they are and they were losing the fear that had to do with giving up a a piece of their reserve to peasant neighbours to use a piece, and years go by, and they do not return, and more lands are taken (Personal communication with an NGO official, 2025).

In this context, scenario planning emerges as a key methodology within the dialogue establishment process. From the perspective of an official, this tool should be considered when gathering the elements that will be essential in the dialogue to prevent dialogues from occurring “on clouds,” that is, around non-negotiable issues. Form this approach the spectrum of possible solutions to the conflict is broadened, but without losing sight of their viability.

These dialogue scenarios can be promoted and designed by non-governmental organizations that develop work in the territories, by the communities themselves, or even by governmental institutions.

From the experience of the Social Dialogue Group of the National Land Agency (ANT), intervention plans have been built for the generation of dialogue spaces, whose first step is the collaborative development of concertation plans with the actors involved separately. Subsequently, to build bridges of trust and harm-free action, the team in charge conducts workshops where one actor’s requests are socialised with another, and pertinent information is provided for the dialogue. In parallel, other institutional dependencies are articulated to strengthen the process of agreement creation. Regarding the techniques used in these processes, priority is given to the use of social cartography and conjunctural and structural analysis with maps, actors, and relationships.

3.2 Autonomous Agreement Building

The construction of agreements regarding the use and occupation of the territory by ethnic and local communities, prior to their legitimisation or intervention by state authorities, is a key element for the transformation of territorial conflicts.

Autonomous agreement building by communities concerning the occupation, use, and appropriation of the territory, before institutional intervention, was mentioned by several interviewees as a key factor in the de-escalation of territorial conflicts.

In this context, one of the most emblematic cases was the establishment of the Peasant Reserve Zone (ZRC) of La Tuna, located in Santa Rosa, Cauca. In this process, the indigenous peoples, black communities, and peasants present in the area established cartographies, rules for the use and management of the territory, which were then presented

as inputs to the competent authorities, within the framework of the ZRC declaration. This case exemplifies the possibility of creating coexistence agreements for land use that precede the entry of established legal procedures. In the words of an academic expert with extensive experience in Cauca processes:

> It was the first ZRC that overcame a prior consultation... They didn't start with a prior consultation because if you resolve it legally from the outset, the law will favour one side and generate a reaction. What was done was to generate a prior dialogue, calling for territorial planning where processes from SIMA, CRIC, and community councils ordered the territory. This planning allowed that when the legal aspect arrived, what could be done had already been agreed upon in advance (personal communication with a Colombian academic, 2024).

In the case of the La Tuna ZRC, the interethnic and intercultural table of the municipality served as the dialogue scenario with an intercultural dialogue approach, prior to state intervention. The success factors of this process include: 1. The pre-existing dialogue before consultation, which allowed for territorial planning based on the expectations of its protagonists; 2. The conviction of ethnic actors throughout the evolution of the process evolution, transitioning from consultation to peer dialogue; and 3. The interpretation of the legal framework and the points of intersection between the ZRC figure and collective titling, emphasising their role as tools for territorial protection and well-being (Duarte, 2023).

Initiatives where communities and actors involved in conflict establish agreements without institutional mediation are also relevant in terms of their recognition as agents of territorial planning (Trujillo, 2021). These processes persist in collective dynamics of problem identification, priority setting, planning, and formulation of community solutions in the short, medium, and long term (Trujillo, 2021). From this core finding, there is relevant potential in the concertation, mobilisation, and transformation of ethnic and peasant groups to consolidate their territorial autonomies (Tobón and Ferro, 2012 cited in Trujillo, 2021).

A similar experience to that of the ZRC La Tuna is, according to a peasant leader interviewed for this research, that of the ZRC El Pato Balsillas. There, fluid dialogue has taken place, and relations and coexistence agreements between the peasant communities in the area and the Nasa people have been maintained. This has been possible thanks to the recognition of the territorialities of each actor, their shared histories, and territorial aspirations.

Walking in Latá-Latá is another experience that shows how community scenarios of intercultural recognition can be built without institutional mediation. It was founded in 2014 by social organisations in the municipality of Cajibío, Cauca. From its founding act, this project is conceived as a network of peace agents. Approximately 10 community organisations and 4 social groups of Misak-Misak, Nasa, peasant, and Afro-Colombian peoples are involved in this initiative. They have a political training school, ten territorial nodes, ten territorial councillors, four directors, and ten ambassadors or coordinators. Most of them come from the municipality of Cajibío and have developed more than 16 social development projects and programs (Calambas, 2019).

This initiative represents a political project that seeks to preserve the ancestral legacy, keeping alive the philosophy that walking in Latá Latá is synonymous with living in harmony with all

beings in the universe. This project advocates for healthy coexistence and the exchange of knowledge. The actively participating communities exchange their harvests defending the ancestral knowledge of food sovereignty and have communication spaces with wise elders to preserve oral tradition, traditional medicine, and community leadership. According to Calambas (2019), it is a self-sustainable project that does not receive funding from foreign or governmental entities. The self-management tool is understood from sociocracy, the recognition of the other as a social subject, and decision-making from the approval of difference (Calambas, 2019). The organisational structure of self-governance enables the autonomous construction of agreements and intercultural ways of life.

In this context, an interviewed official invites thinking about previous organisational strengthening exercises as a guarantee in the agreement-building processes. In his experience, it is necessary to bring conflicting points to the table and discuss them to prevent the entire process from relying solely on state intervention. In his words:

> If there is no prior exercise to understand the differences with the neighbour or to understand that these differences are not only resolved with the neighbour but also with an institutional model, it is very difficult to manage any conflictivity. If this exercise is not done, there may be much state intervention or whoever, but things will fall apart (Personal communication with a Colombian representative, 2024).

Additionally, the interviewees point out that the possibility of building autonomous spaces for interlocution and dialogue between communities are long-term processes, hence short-term projects are not consistent with a critical and autonomous view of the processes.

The aforementioned experiences have an additional common factor: organisational strengthening as an enabling element for the construction of agreements. This element will be addressed in section 3.4 of this document.

3.3 Informed and Contextualised State Interventions and Support

For state interventions to contribute to the construction of intercultural agreements, they must be carried out in an informed manner that recognizes the organizational processes and prior agreements in the territories. A lack of understanding of local realities can give rise to or exacerbate existing conflicts in the territories or generate tensions.

In the context of territorial conflicts, interventions by state entities in charge of land access, adjudication, and formalisation can have differential effects on the dynamics of territorial conflicts. These can be exacerbated or emerge when a state intervention is carried out without a deep understanding of the relationships, agreements, and specific context of the conflicts, privileging the interests of one actor over another. This, in turn, can affect daily coexistence between groups and even undermine the prior process of common recognition. Such is the case of the conflicts that have arisen between the Arquía reserve and the Cocomaunguía Community Council or between the Motilón Barí reserve and the establishment of the Peasant Reserve Zone of Catatumbo, where factors such as errors in demarcation, erroneous adjudications, lack of prior consultation, lack of community socialisation, and delays in

processes by state institutions have contributed to the emergence and exacerbation of these conflicts (Huertas-Díaz and López-Gómez, 2020).

It is important to highlight that government interventions in territorial conflicts have changed over time depending on the recognition of the conflict and their approach to understanding it. In the words of an interviewed academic:

> All institutional action depends on one premise: The conflict is accepted or not accepted. There are governments that have not cared, and that non-acceptance is a way of inflating conflicts. Clearly, Uribe's government or Santos's was one of the most open to accepting the conflict. In Duque's, it was not an object of work. There was also no emphasis on rural reform as it passed unnoticed (personal communication with a Colombian academic, 2024).

These changes in the approach to conflicts and the interest from national governments have meant that, in many cases, there is no continuity in monitoring the processes and agreements promoted, nor in the teams of institutions that address these kinds of phenomena.

Hence, the various interviewees highlight the need to create information systems, training spaces, and inter-institutional coordination to allow officials to ensure continuity of dialogue processes and understand the complexities of territorial conflicts and the competencies of the various entities involved in their resolution in a complex manner. It is also necessary to provide training spaces for officials for interaction in the territories and conduct interventions from a harm-reduction approach.

From the standpoint of a national peasant organization, the role of institutions is not to impose one actor's vision of the territory over another's. Therefore, there is a call for the construction of methodologies with technical support routes to prevent each technician from “interpreting as they wish.”

In line with this, an Arhuaco leader who is part of a second-level organization states:

> It is important that people who will work with indigenous peoples know the mechanisms, the means to build agreements. We have seen many brothers who are representatives without the sensitivity and expertise required for working with indigenous peoples; that lack of knowledge has significant impacts. Today, we have talked, and there are mechanisms to have training for a much more open dialogue. We have developed a mechanism to talk to judges and magistrates, so they understand from the indigenous logic how land restitution is, in terms of the reference framework (Personal communication with an Arhuaco indigenous leader, 2024).

Additionally, interviewed officials and academics draw attention to the need to understand that the legality of decisions does not necessarily contribute to the de-escalation of conflicts *per se*. While a legal or judicial process can attribute land tenure to one actor or another, this does not guarantee its legitimacy among the conflicting parties. Hence, the need to generate long-term dialogue and intervention processes that allow for the construction of legitimacy regarding the agreements.

Once the legitimacy of the agreements has been established by the actors involved in the conflict, it is essential to evaluate the necessity of securing the pact through formalization via

a legal mechanism granted by the land authority or its equivalent. According to some interviewees, this measure aims to ensure the long-term stability of the settlement.

3.4. Monitoring and Compliance with Agreements

The monitoring and compliance with agreements by both the actors involved in the conflict and state institutions are crucial elements for building trust in the dialogue processes and ensuring their maintenance.

In line with the previous section, and based on the analysis conducted, it is identified that the management of governmental entities can be key in terms of monitoring and compliance. This is not about monitoring based on meetings where two or more communities present their requests, outline the agreed-upon terms, and have a single audience with state authorities. We refer to the construction of a monitoring process that dynamically safeguards the agreements and recognizes the land and territory as central elements in the vital development of the groups involved (López, 2014). This accompaniment represents learning with and from the facilitated processes and intercultural dialogues (CINEP, 2021).

According to a representative from a cooperation organization, this process requires maintaining constant reflection on how to work jointly among the different actors involved in the conflicts and on the strengths each one has. A key to achieving this, according to the experience of one of the interviewees, is that organizations participating in community dialogue processes and their daily monitoring contribute to positioning the various voices present in the territories "on the same level" in creative ways:

> We worked on this from a cooking course, quickly identifying the issue of treatment, discrimination, and how people are named. The cooking space ended up being the place to talk, to be friends, where I am listened to, and where I can be empathetic. There is everyday violence at all levels (Personal communication with multilateral organization representative, 2024).

According to an interviewed official, institutional monitoring (seen as accompaniment) should be mediated by knowledge of the territory and genuine commitment to the communities, participatory processes, and the defence of dialogue. In her perspective, it is not only about a budgetary allocation to manage territorial conflicts but, above all, about the political will to maintain dialogue tables between actors and sustain the processes.

However, there remains a difficulty in terms of compliance when state entities act as guarantors of the processes. Hence, some interviewed leaders state that "there is a disappointing trend where the government fails to fulfil its part of the agreements, and communities face systematic non-compliance year after year." Government compliance focuses on procedural aspects (management logic) with high-level meetings and the issuance of official documents. For example, the situation of the Sikuani people in the Selvas de Aliwa area, who have been in the process of recognising their ancestral reserve for more than 20 years and have faced intensified violence while waiting for institutional compliance.

3.5 Capacity Building for Dialogue and Mobilisation of Affections

Strengthening capacities for dialogue, access, and interpretation of information, active listening, and decision-making on the use and tenure of territory and land by both indigenous peoples, black, Afro-Colombian, and peasant communities, as well as by officials and institutional representatives, is a central element for advancing in the construction of intercultural agreements as it strengthens trust, brings forth affections, and facilitates the development of dialogue spaces.

In spaces of dialogue between communities where there is institutional mediation, building trust remains a challenge. In cases where this articulation and the building of friendship ties between actors were achieved, there were prior training processes for the rural communities' spokespersons and representatives. With this, representatives were trained on ethnic, peasant, and agrarian rights, which went beyond technical processes but required them to think in terms of multiculturalism and territorial particularities.

In parallel, communities were prepared for their participation in dialogue spaces to be more informed, this consisted of providing tools to understand the functioning of the agrarian legal framework. Thus, capacity building seeks to reduce the disparity in access to information among the spokespersons of the involved parties. From the mediation experience in areas such as Catatumbo, an expert representative indicates that, before the dialogue process, it is essential to prepare as a facilitator, know the organization and its aims, understand the political inclination of each actor, identify the representatives who might be involved, and know the positions each party defends.

From the perspective of one of the interviewed academics, the political pressure of territorial organizations must be complemented with strong and prepared leaderships, that not only have the capacity to mobilise affections but also possess political preparation.

Additionally, it is relevant to strengthen capacities that allow actors in conflict to access, understand, and analyse relevant information for their processes and the dialogue they are holding (implications of legal figures of collective land tenure, property location, forms of tenure and appropriation by each actor, among others). An example of capacity building for access to information and territorial understanding was the participatory monitoring in the intercultural territory of Solano, Caquetá, implemented by Fundación Natura. The methodological strategy to carry out this process was to walk the indigenous and peasant territory alongside the technical team of the Foundation. In the words of an official who accompanied the process:

> In addition to bringing people together in spaces to train them, they must be made to walk together. That worked very well for us at that time. The leaders who were trained then, we have several who have been governors within the reserve. One very young who is harshly criticised within his own community because they feel he still has a lot to learn. But several have already been governors and have tried to maintain those learnings and solve those problems in their territory with their neighbours or within the same community (Personal communication with an NGO official, 2025).

This experience shows how the dialogue of knowledge is of utmost relevance and usefulness in the joint construction of knowledge and agreements. Walking the territory together allowed its inhabitants to recognise each other, strengthen their ties, and generate fluent dialogue and build trust. The biologists involved in the implementation of this community project showed openness to indigenous knowledge. This allowed each actor to share their knowledge of the territory dynamics. Thus, the indigenous leaders participating in the process presented an ecological calendar and the reproductive cycles of the animals. Meanwhile, the peasants were experts in the subject of woods because many arrived in the territory attracted by the timber exploitation boom. This willingness to exchange knowledge within the framework of pedagogical processes is relevant in mobilising conflicts and mediating affections.

Affections play a crucial role both in the development of conflict and in the process of building agreements. In community strengthening processes, soft skills such as assertive communication and listening skills are also involved. Moreover, making the connection with the territory explicit is a mechanism that fosters empathy. When participants feel safe and are in a space of trust, they have the opportunity to collectively rebuild what has happened with the territory, with their family, and with themselves, and even carry out reflective exercises that facilitate visualising themselves from affections and territorial aspirations.

In this sense, pedagogical processes of community strengthening involve rebuilding common ground and revisiting territorial meanings. According to one of the interviewees, the way the territory is read, the way the territory speaks, and the "spiritual" bond with it favour intercultural dialogue. In her experience accompanying cases in the Serranía de Perijá and Magdalena Medio, involving the affections placed on the territory makes it possible to build intercultural dialogue and recognise the other in their condition as a person.

This is reflected in the experience of the Gunmaku Educational Institution in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. This educational centre is based on dialogue and coexistence between the Arhuaco and peasant communities. Starting in 2006, by 2015, they had six educational sites in peasant populations. Education is seen, paraphrasing the interviewed leader, as a means to vindicate many families who had been displaced. In this context, a pedagogical process mediated by affections unfolds, where Arhuaco teachers visit houses in the area talking about integral education. The principles of integral education emphasize the well-being of families and environmental care, the principle of "living well" through creating gardens, constant training, and dynamics of teamwork or collectivity. In the words of the Arhuaco principal:

> We have been strengthening that education; it is integral because we not only work on academic training but also form people who can serve society and understand that we have that great task of caring for Mother Earth.

Finally, another relevant example to understand the impact and significance of capacity building is the Process of Pedagogical and Research Experiences in the Colombian Caribbean, which resulted from the accompaniment in education and the implementation of local participatory research in La Guajira, SNSM, and Cartagena (CINEP, 2021)[6] and

[6] This revised document outlines the construction of a diploma programme in Intercultural Education for the defence of territory, developed in collaboration with the Universidad de la Guajira, Universidad de Cartagena, alongside the CINEP team's efforts with participants to systematise local participatory research processes. Transversally, the

involved teachers, leaders, young researchers from the Wayuu, Wiwa, Black, Afro-descendant, peasant, and mestizo communities. From this experience, intercultural education is recognised as a commitment to the construction of collective subjects in the face of extractive economies, dispossession, segregation, and social exclusion.

3.6 Mediation, Accompaniment, or intervention by third parties

Mediation or third-party accompaniment can facilitate dialogue between conflicting parties, capacity building, and dialogue with the State, as long as it considers local needs, respects and strengthens community autonomies. These third parties can vary depending on the context, but their common characteristic is that they are seen by the conflicting parties as legitimate and neutral.

One of the factors that enables the construction of intercultural agreements is the mediation and intervention of third parties. This mediation is characterized by being contextualised, prepared, and open to intercultural recognition. It must also be recognised as neutral by the different actors present in the territory. Drawing from the experience of an Arhuaco educational project leader, the starting point for establishing who can be a mediator should be the dialogue among the territory's inhabitants, as they are the ones who live there and know how to resolve the conflicts. This dialogue allows for the definition of which entities can intervene.

In the various conflicts and experiences analysed, it was possible to establish that this role of third-party intervention has been undertaken by different actors such as academia, the church, non-governmental organizations, and international cooperation.

In general terms, based on the interviews conducted, it was possible to establish that academia has played a relevant role in accompanying actors involved in dialogue by strengthening their dialogue capacities, providing technical support for the collection, analysis, and systematisation of information related to the conflicts, acting as logistical operators, or accompanying processes of rights advocacy when communities have required it.

On the other hand, in conflict zones such as the Magdalena Medio, the church has become an actor that has intervened to prevent the deaths of civilians amid clashes with armed groups. It has also acted as a guarantor for communities, sometimes preventing the intrusion of armed actors into territories and facilitating and enabling the construction of agreements between actors.

Another identified actor in the agreement-building processes is international cooperation. This is evidenced, for example, in the testimony of an academic expert in multipurpose cadastre, who states that the accompaniment of Kadaster has allowed communities to have technical

diploma was accompanied by reflective spaces with Indigenous, Black, Afro-descendant, and Palenquera women, focusing on women's rights issues. The approach taken emphasises situated knowledge production, where individuals act as researchers of their own realities, meaning they possess agency and transform their reality. (CINEP, 2021).

The approach taken emphasises situated knowledge production, where individuals act as researchers of their own realities. This approach underscores their agency, enabling them to transform their circumstances (CINEP, 2021).

support from expert engineers in gathering information about their properties and strengthening community governance as it allows communities themselves to collect information about their territory. This represents a change in access to information as it enables communities, particularly young people, to obtain the necessary inputs to advance in land tenure and formalization processes. In In the interviewee's words:

> In Caquetá, Kadaster trains and leaves equipment, and the community walks through the jungle for 1 month with an expert who goes with them to identify that process. The order is to train the young people, teach the community to handle certain technical tools like a satellite antenna; we have neighbours doing the same. It is possible to generate participatory survey processes where the community itself recognises its property (Personal communication with a Colombian academic expert in multipurpose cadastre, 2024).

In addition to technical support and capacity building, international cooperation has contributed to changing the dynamics of territorial conflicts by providing financial support and funding to the processes. In the experience of ZRC, the interviewed peasant leader states that the first three peasant reserve zones in Colombia were created with World Bank funds. It is also recognized that maintaining relationships with the international community is strategic in resource management.

In the case of state entities, the support of cooperation agencies such as UNDP and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in generating information on conflicts, funding advisors, and expert teams at the topographical, legal, and social levels for conflict management is acknowledged.

4. The Role of Women and Youth in Intercultural Conflicts and Their Potential for Management

The participation of women and youth in the processes of building intercultural agreements has been strengthening over the years. According to Hincapié (2019), the women's role has been decisive in community management and organisation, not only through their everyday caregiving functions but also in the defence of autonomy, decision-making, and administrative representation. However, their level of involvement varies from community to community.

Each community interprets the role of women differently, but according to interviewees, there is a common factor that has enabled the increase in women's participation: access to education. Similarly, the development of internal armed conflict and the intensification of territorial struggles have propelled female leadership. In the peasant organisational experience, when men were imprisoned or threatened by armed actors, it was the women who "stepped up." Thus, although women were initially assigned roles associated with caregiving, taking minutes, or cooking, they have now begun to gain leadership spaces within their organisations. As voiced by a campesino female leader interviewed:

> Until recently, I knew many valuable female colleagues in the ZRC processes, but they never appeared on a board of directors. They did everything, as women were assigned caregiving tasks, which were seen as 'help' but turned out to be more important. Here we faced an issue

> at the start, because most of the male colleagues have 20 or 30 years in the peasant movement, and the fact that we women arrived, being half their age, led to questions about whether we were capable—too young (Personal communication with a campesino female leader, 2025).

Nonetheless, a patriarchal structure still persists in rural Colombia, despite which strong and consolidated female leaderships have emerged, evident in figures like Francia Márquez in Black communities.

Additionally, organisations such as the National Commission of Indigenous Territories and the National Association of Peasant Reserve Zones (ANZORC) have processes in place to strengthen the leadership of women and youth.

In the case of youth, experiences like the multicultural cadastre pilots place young people's technological learning skills at the centre, helping them understand their territory and enhance technical knowledge about it. Although some scholars acknowledge that, given the current structure, staying in rural areas may be unattractive for youth due to the lack of opportunities in these regions, organisations like ANZORC and institutions such as la Institución Educativa de Gunmaku (Educational Institution of Gunmaku) demonstrate that training processes are currently being implemented to encourage the transmission of knowledge and their leadership within organisations.

Regarding this point, the spokesperson for the peasant organisation we interviewed states that youth participation has significantly increased over the past six years. From her extensive experience, it is urgent to incentivise the transmission of knowledge to young people, so they do not abandon the ZRCs. A comprehensive strengthening programme involves commitments to rural education, guarantees for initial work experiences, and demands on institutions to act as guarantors. On strategies for knowledge transfer to youth and the inclusion of women, she asserts:

> There is a transversal exercise on the topic of youth and women: They must be in all spaces. Part of that organisational awareness has emerged from assembly discussions, and part of the agreements is to incorporate it. Our organisations have young leaders; we want to create a team of youth who are knowledgeable about geographical or cadastral issues for information gathering on technical matters (Personal communication with a peasant female leader representing a second-level organisation, 2024).

In this experience, the organisational context of the Peasant Reserve Zones (ZRC) is deployed, where there are areas of foundational organisations with committees, secretariats, and youth collectives. The training schools are seen as a platform for youth to learn what a ZRC is and what political project the peasantry is aiming for. At the same time, the women's school focuses on peasant feminism, featuring twenty modules with basic, intermediate, and advanced content, delving into how women perceive their contributions to processes at multiple levels. Here, youth and women's participation are seen as pillars of continuity for the movement.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This research aimed to identify and analyse the factors that enable the positive transformation of conflicts and the construction of neighbourhood agreements in contexts of disputes over access to and use of land and its resources. To achieve this, a review of secondary information sources and interviews with experts from academia, non-governmental organisations, public institutions, and communities was conducted.

From the analysis of the collected information, it was possible to establish that territorial neighbourhood conflicts with intercultural dimensions in Colombia go beyond mere access to land. While land access and distribution have been among the causes of social conflict in Colombia and have played a central role in the development of the Colombian armed conflict (Pineda, 2016), territorial conflicts involve structural elements related to the differential recognition of rights between ethnic and local communities, as well as the development models promoted in rural areas. These models are often conceived from an agro-industrial perspective rather than one centred on the community.

The existence of these structural causes that generate territorial conflicts, and which are not resolved through the construction of agreements at a specific moment, leads the interviewed actors to question the use of conceptual approaches such as conflict transformation to understand the possibilities for de-escalation and change in these contexts. They recommend employing categories like conflict management or agreement building, closer to a conflict resolution approach. They also highlight that the complex web underpinning territorial conflicts requires the implementation of analytical frameworks that consider the multiplicity of actors and contextual, socio-historical, and political analysis—both to understand these phenomena and to design interventions.

In this context, one of the factors contributing to the escalation of territorial conflicts is the lack of understanding of governance structures within these territories, as well as the asymmetries between ethnic and peasant populations, their disputes, and the agreements that may exist regarding land use and management. This gap in comprehension has led to interventions or decisions related to land use that do not fully account for these dynamics, resulting in judicial or adjudication rulings that favor one party over another—sometimes exacerbating conflicts.

Another factor influencing both the escalation and de-escalation of conflicts relates to access to and understanding of land ownership information, its extent, and the legal implications of collective property mechanisms and environmental regulations. In many of the analyzed cases, initial lack of clarity or limited access to such information hindered dialogue between actors and fueled territorial disputes, as different groups held contrasting perceptions of their right to land ownership and use.

Institutional and community-level challenges persist in terms of access to cadastral information. Hence, capacity-building processes can play a key role in reducing information asymmetries and fostering constructive dialogues among stakeholders.

Additionally, it is important to understand that although land formalisation through collective tenure figures is often seen as a fundamental aspect of resolving territorial conflicts, both the exercise of reviewing secondary sources and semi-structured interviews reveal that this process alone is insufficient for resolving intercultural conflicts. It is also necessary to strengthen community processes, avoiding a scenario where legal mechanisms for land adjudication or tenure become the sole success factor in conflict resolution; and promote processes that ensure not only the legal recognition but also the legitimacy of the agreements.

In this regard, interviewees recommend that before undertaking any intervention aimed at formalisation or land access in territorial conflict scenarios, an analysis should be conducted to understand the trajectory of the conflict and how land access has been configured by one actor or another. This is essential to prevent further increasing power asymmetries between actors, and, consequently, would exacerbate the conflict, and to design interventions suitable to the specific territorial context.

Similarly, emphasis is placed on the need to conceive territories and their inhabitants not only from a technical-scientific perspective but also from a recognition of the potentialities of the territories, their actors, and knowledge.

Aligned with the above, the following are identified as factors contributing to the construction of intercultural agreements:

- The autonomous construction of agreements regarding the use and management of the territory by the communities involved in the conflicts, prior to institutional interventions. These are long-term processes involving mutual recognition, participation, and representation of the parties involved in the conflicts, mutual learning among the parties, and the establishment of instances for dispute resolution.
- The strengthening capacities for both public officials and community actors involved in the conflicts, including: a) recognising the territorial expectations of each actor; b) identifying the needs of all actors and understanding the perceptions surrounding “opposing” claims; c) implementing participatory methodologies to make visible the different forms of territorial appropriation involved in the conflict (e.g., social cartography, joint territory walks, actor maps, community cooking events, among others).
- The accompaniment of third parties, such as academics, non-profit organisations, or international cooperators, who can act as facilitators in capacity-building, intercultural education processes, and the creation of horizontal dialogue spaces where ethnic representatives and officials prepare each other reciprocally.

It is important to clarify that while the factors mentioned above recur across the various cases analysed, their feasibility and development will depend on the specific conditions of each case. Hence, the call to understand each conflict on a case-by-case basis to establish the most suitable interventions for each context.

Finally, it is noteworthy that women and youth have been increasingly gaining participation spaces within organisations and decision-making processes in the territories. However, social

organisations interviewed acknowledge that generational renewal of leadership remains one of the greatest challenges facing rural areas today. To address this, leadership training exercises, knowledge transfer, and intergenerational dialogues have been implemented, seen as key to the sustainability of organisations and their struggles within the territories.

6. Final Reflections

The development of this research contributed to understanding the factors that enable the construction of agreements in the context of territorial conflicts. This is noteworthy considering that most of the literature on such phenomena focuses primarily on their characterisation.

Although the analytical category of socio-environmental conflicts was initially employed, during the research process it became evident that the phenomena under study needed to be understood through the concept of territorial conflicts, particularly neighbourhood conflicts with inter-ethnic nuances (Duarte, 2015). This consideration arose from the fact that the mobilisation of actors in the cases studied was primarily driven by access to and tenure of land and territory.

Furthermore, given the interviewees' perspectives regarding the analytical framework of conflict transformation, categories such as “agreement building” were adopted to understand the moments of change in conflicts. That is, those instances in which both the interviewees and the literature acknowledge that it has been possible to build dialogues, transform relationships, and jointly establish rules concerning the use and appropriation of the territory.

Finally, from the development of this research, it becomes evident that there is a need to continue building knowledge that allows for understanding the trajectories of such conflicts once agreements are established. This is because, in the analysed cases and dialogues with experts, it became evident that once the agreement is built or an intervention under a specific project is concluded, updated information on the conflict's trajectory of change is often lacking.

This, in turn, underscores the necessity of having information systems focused on monitoring and following up on agreements which would allow for tracking changes in the trajectories of conflicts.

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ANNEXES

Annexes

1a. Cases Identified from the Literature Review

Region	Case	Key Actors
Caribbean	Intercultural conflict over wind energy development in Maicao	Wayúu Indigenous communities, energy companies
	Inter-ethnic conflicts in the Colombian Insular Caribbean	Raizal, Afro-descendant, and Indigenous communities

Region	Case	Key Actors
	Participatory local research in La Guajira, Sierra Nevada, and Cartagena	Campesino and Afro-Colombian communities
	Cabildo San Pedro Alcántara y Reparo Torrente	Indigenous and peasant communities
Pacific	Intercultural project in Montes de María	Peasant and Afro-Colombian communities
	Inter-ethnic Territorial Union of Naya (UTINAYA) - Valle del Cauca	Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities
Andean	Municipality of Buenos Aires, Cauca	Nasa Indigenous communities, peasants, and Afro-descendants
	"El trébol" or "La amistad" farm in Cajibío, Cauca	Peasant and Indigenous communities
	Chayaní farm, Cauca	Misak Indigenous and peasant communities
	El Naranjo-Cajibío	Indigenous and peasant communities
	Cauca: Emergence of inter-ethnic and intercultural conflicts: Duarte	Indigenous and peasant communities
	El Mediecito, Popayán: Peasant land occupied by Indigenous groups: Duarte	Indigenous and peasant communities
	Citronela Community Council and Nonandur Indigenous Council	Comunidades afrodescendientes e indígenas

Region	Case	Key Actors
Orinoquía	Case of El Porvenir: Municipality of Puerto Gaitán, Meta	Jiw and Sikuani Indigenous communities, agro-industrial companies
	Puerto Gaitán: Indigenous communities vs. Mennonites	Jiw and Sikuani Indigenous communities, Mennonite settlers
Amazon	Barrancón Reserve in the Amazon	Indigenous peoples of the Amazon
	Management of intercultural conflicts: Huitoto-Tikuna communities in Leticia, Amazon	Huitoto and Tikuna Indigenous communities
	Carbon credits in Vaupés, Amazon	Indigenous communities and carbon companies
Eastern (Catatumbo, Meta, Guaviare)	Case of the Barí indigenous people and peasant communities in Catatumbo, Norte de Santander (2009-2018)	Barí indigenous people, peasant communities
	Peasants and indigenous people over lands in Meta and Guaviare	Peasant and indigenous communities

1b. Cases Identified from Semi-Structured Interviews

Region	Case	Key Actors
Caribbean	Mining companies in Cesar: Peasant resisting	Peasant communities and mining companies
	Serranía del Perijá	Indigenous and peasant communities

Region	Case	Key Actors
	Catas Farm Ayapel-Córdoba	Local communities and environmental organisations
	Arhuaco Case in Sierra Nevada and Arhuaco Comprehensive Education School	Arhuaco Indigenous community, peasant community
Pacific	Community Councils in Buenaventura	Afro-descendant communities
	Northern Cauca (4)	Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities
	Major Community Council of the Anchincayá River	Afro-descendant communities
	Multicultural Cadastre Pilots: Tumaco, Caquetá, and Nuquí	Afro-descendant, Indigenous, and peasant communities
	Major Community Council of Los Riscales	Afro-descendant communities
	Darién River Basins: Tule and Embera Peoples	Tule and Embera Indigenous peoples
	Pacific Coast	Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities
	Juradó Case (Women's Community Cooking Initiative)	Female community leaders
Andean	El Trébol Farm in Cajibío: Territory of Life and Inter-ethnic Space (2)	Peasant and Indigenous communities
	Peasant Reserve Zone (ZRC) in Valle del Río Cimitarra	Peasant communities

Region	Case	Key Actors
	Peasant Reserve Zone (ZRC) in Sumapaz	Peasant communities
	Peasant Reserve Zone (ZRC) La Tuna: Santa Rosa-Bota Caucana	Peasant and Indigenous communities
Orinoquía	Caño Limón Coveñas	Indigenous communities and oil companies
	Barrulia, Puerto Gaitán-Orinoquía	Indigenous and peasant communities
Amazon	National Natural Parks (PNN) en La Paya Putumayo	Indigenous communities and National Natural Parks
Eastern (Llanos and Caquetá)	Eastern Plains: Amphibious Riverside Communities	Riverside and peasant communities
	Intercultural Territory in Solano, Caquetá	Indigenous and peasant communities

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