

RESPONDING TO DISASTER THROUGH THE LOCAL CHURCH



RESPONDING TO EMERGENCIES IN COLOMBIA

Tearfund has acted as an enabler and companion to help a local church initiative in Colombia become a driving force for community action during the civil war.

A violent power struggle between armed rebel groups and the government of Colombia raged for more than 50 years. Innocent civilians bore the brunt: more than 220,000 people died and more than 7.2 million were displaced. Between 1996 and 2003, the northern town of Tierralta experienced a mass influx of families fleeing the violence: they had left everything behind and arrived with nothing but their trauma.

The local evangelical church, Iglesia Cristo el Rey (Church of Christ the King), felt called to provide for people's immediate needs. As one member says, 'We welcomed them all... We all gave whatever we could.' But the congregation soon realised they needed help and contacted Tearfund's partner CORSOC (Corporation for Social Community Development). With finance and

technical support from Tearfund, CORSOC has been developing the capacity of Iglesia Cristo el Rey in disaster response and long-term rehabilitation for more than 20 years.

Initially, Tearfund provided the church with resources to help displaced families rebuild their lives: securing land, building shelters and community kitchens, starting livelihoods projects. Later, CORSOC introduced the church and community to the church and community mobilisation (CCM) process. This is where local churches work together, with their communities, to improve their situations using local resources – helping local churches to become a catalyst for change. Nueva Esperanza (New Hope) has gone on to become an established, united community, enabling the families to shed the label of 'displaced people'.



📷 Couple who were helped by Iglesia Cristo el Rey.
Photo: Lydia Powell/Tearfund

The church and community are now working together on initiatives such as health clinics and improved sanitation projects. CORSOC has delivered advocacy training to help them draw down government funding, and is looking to provide vocational training and access to land. The community now has a strong group identity and unity, which they attribute in part to CCM. Many have joined the church and are now helping families who have arrived more recently.

Church members are well equipped for disaster response and have substantial knowledge about building techniques, advocacy and psycho-social support. They have expanded their work to include a programme for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, which Tearfund also supports.

Throughout, Tearfund has respected the work started locally and we have acted as equippers, enablers and companions, ensuring that programmes remain locally owned. When we first started working with CORSOC in 1996, it was a small organisation with passion and vision, but few resources. We have provided ongoing

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technical training, including regular regional training with other partners, as well as resources and publications. Being part of an international network has encouraged and motivated CORSOC's team.

There is still much to be done to mobilise the Colombian church to see social action as part of its calling, so we are now working with CORSOC to envision other churches through Bible teaching to engage in disaster response and community development.



📷 Church members from Iglesia Cristo el Rey.
Photo: Lydia Powell/Tearfund

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