

CASE STUDY

Foro Región Central, Colombia

This case study informs a broader initiative by Investing and Partnering with Youth for Peace (IPYP) to explore how youth-led organisations engage with private-sector actors to advance peacebuilding and social cohesion in diverse contexts. Drawing on case studies from across Latin America, Southeast Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, Sweden and the United States, the project identifies common partnership models, enabling factors, challenges and lessons learnt emerging from youth–private sector collaboration. Across the cases, the research highlights the importance of sustainable partnerships, locally grounded approaches, trust-building and moving beyond transactional funding towards genuine co-creation.

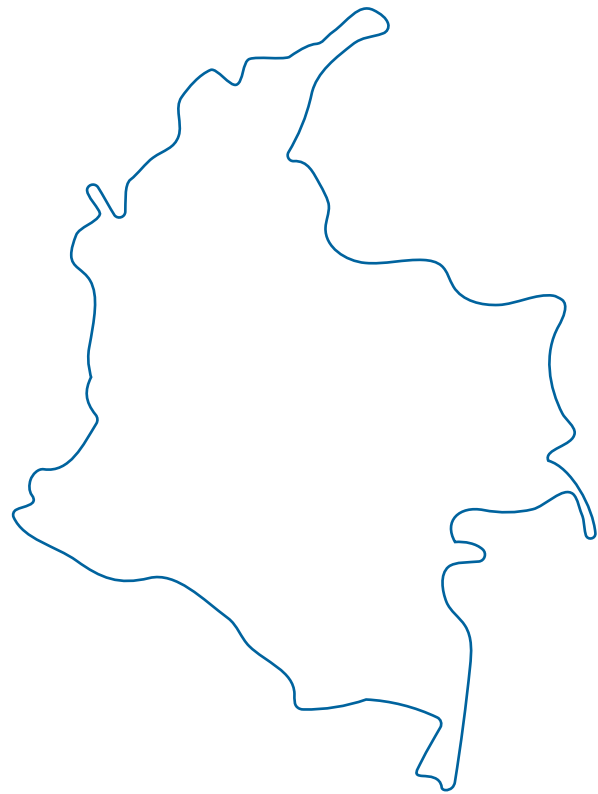
The lessons documented in this case study emerged from several sources: interviews and discussions with Foro Región Central, reports on the organisation’s programmatic activities and its engagement with the private sector, and interviews and a focus group discussion held in Bogotá in 2025 with approximately 25 young peacebuilders representing 15 youth organisations linked to Foro-supported projects¹.

Context

In Colombia, young people continue to face significant structural barriers linked to unemployment, inequality, territorial disparities and long-term effects of the country’s 52-year armed conflict which ended with a comprehensive peace agreement in 2016. Since then, the government of Colombia has sought to advance youth participation and peacebuilding across the country through policies such as the Youth Citizenship Statute (2013) and implementation mechanisms such as the Planes de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial (Territorial Focus Development Programmes, or PDETs) established after the 2016 peace agreement. Yet, implementation of these policies and mechanisms remains uneven across regions. Declining international cooperation funding has pushed civil society organisations to seek new sustainability models. In this context, private sector engagement is increasingly discussed not as a substitute for public action, but as a potential mechanism for co-responsibility and long-term peacebuilding support.

Foro Región Central and their engagement with the private sector

Foro Región Central is a Bogotá-based civil society organisation (CSO), one of the regional chapters of the Fundación Foro Nacional por Colombia, focused on strengthening young people’s participation in democratic processes and their leadership in peacebuilding across territories. The organisation has begun exploring how youth organisations and private-sector actors could collaborate around shared territorial challenges and local development priorities. Although Foro Región Central has not yet consolidated formal partnerships with private-sector actors, it has, through



Planes de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial Colombia

The Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace in Colombia, signed in 2016, adopted the concept of territorial peace, recognising different territorial identities, needs and priorities across the country. Action plans for implementing the peace agreement in rural areas, or Planes de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial (Territorial Focus Development Programmes or PDETs), were developed in consultation with local communities, including private-sector actors. The PDETs emphasise locally-driven development and multi-actor participation in peacebuilding, with private sector engagement increasingly discussed alongside public action and international cooperation. In practice, however, implementation of the PDETs has been delayed, and private sector involvement has been criticised by communities and researchers for exacerbating marginalisation rather than addressing the structural causes of conflict.

dialogue, stakeholder engagement, and its broader work on youth participation and territorial development, identified potential areas for collaboration. For example, the organisation discussed a potential partnership with a car company, reflecting an approach centred on co-creation and shared problem-solving rather than through philanthropy.

In this process, concrete examples surfaced of challenges in and incentives for engaging with the private sector, as well as possible collaboration models and safeguards needed to ensure that this collaboration does not cause additional harm.

Exploring approaches for youth-private partnerships

Foro Región Central’s experience highlights an approach

centred on building the institutional and relational foundations necessary for future collaboration (*pre-partnership readiness*). Rather than prioritising immediate collaboration, the organisation focused on understanding how partnerships can be formed, based on shared objectives, transparency and mutual accountability, around projects that are co-designed and implemented.

The process emphasised the importance of mediation and trust building between youth organisations and private-sector actors. It also highlighted the need for context-sensitive due diligence, governance frameworks and safeguards, including careful assessment of potential partners, meaningful participation of youth and communities in decision making and clear accountability arrangements to manage potential harm or reputational risks.

Another key dimension involved strengthening organisational capacities of youth organisations beyond project delivery, including advocacy skills, knowledge management, monitoring systems and the ability to navigate private sector engagement processes independently. Foro Región Central identified these capacities as essential for sustaining long-term partnerships and ensuring that youth-led initiatives can move beyond short-term project cycles.

Key challenges in engaging with private-sector actors

Several structural and operational challenges shape the organisation's work more broadly and its potential collaboration with the private sector:

-  Limited trust between CSOs and private-sector actors, shaped in part by documented cases of corporate involvement with armed actors during the conflict, as well as civil society perceptions that parts of the private sector sided with actors opposing the protests during periods of social unrest. These dynamics, combined with stigmatising narratives surrounding mobilised youth, created additional barriers to collaboration.
-  Weak institutional capacity at the territory and local level creates uncertainty around coordination, safeguards and continuity of joint initiatives.
-  Persistent power asymmetries between youth-led organisations, donors and corporate actors, require safeguards that emphasise the meaningful inclusion and participation of young people.
-  Short-term funding cycles undermine regular and long-term relationship building.
-  Ethical and reputational risks associated with private-sector actors operating in conflict-affected territories.

Key lessons looking ahead

Foro Región Central's experience demonstrates that building effective youth–private partnerships goes beyond identifying and securing funding opportunities. In contexts affected by conflict, inequality and institutional distrust, long-term investments in governance, mediation, organisational capacity and safeguards — due diligence on prospective partners, processes to ensure meaningful participation of youth and communities and clear accountability mechanisms —, are critical in advancing collaboration. Foro Región Central's process suggests that trust-building and co-design

approaches may be more sustainable than transactional or purely philanthropic models.

The case also highlights that financial innovation mechanisms alone are insufficient without guidelines that ensure efforts are fair and just; measures that support accessibility to young people of diverse backgrounds; and technical and advisory support to grassroots actors navigating complex institutional systems. Ultimately, sustainable partnerships require continuous and regular engagement that allows youth organisations, companies and public institutions to engage over time, while protecting community participation and maintaining accountability. Foro Región Central aims to continue strengthening these conditions while exploring future pathways for responsible youth–private sector collaboration in Colombia.

Acknowledgements

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¹ While researchers reached out to both youth-led organisations and private sector partners, private sector actors did not respond to interview requests. Findings therefore reflect the perspectives of youth-led organisations and peacebuilding actors only, which should be noted as a limitation of this study.