

COLOMBIAN-VENEZUELAN MIGRANT AND REFUGEE ORGANIZATIONS: BECOMING PROTAGONISTS FOR THEIR OWN NEEDS AND CHANGES

CASE STUDY



A training of rescue teams for communities and institutions in Acandí, near the Darién jungle, as part of the ToGETHER programme in Colombia.

Salto Ángel focuses on preparedness and response in the humanitarian sector and on community leadership and transformation in Venezuelan refugee and migrant communities in northern Colombia. Based on a volunteer programme that strengthens people's leadership skills, the organization encourages them to become agents of change within their communities.

Through the ToGETHER programme, supported by the Office for Humanitarian Affairs of the German Federal Foreign Office, Salto Ángel has managed to expand its coverage to 9 out of 13 municipalities in the northernmost region of the country and has extended its portfolio, developing emergency response plans in the border area of Darién.

As a major player among the organisations focusing on refugee and migrant issues in La Guajira, Salto Ángel's extensive empirical knowledge has helped to introduce innovations, such as icon speech to communicate with non-Spanish-speaking migrants, which have been documented in publications such as the *Manual de Herramientas Teóricas y Buenas Prácticas de gestión para organizaciones de personas migrantes y refugiadas venezolanas* (Manual of theoretical tools and best practices for Venezuelan migrant and refugee organizations), and *Experiencias de la Pandemia*

COVID-19. Colombia 2020-2022 (Experiences from the COVID-19 Pandemic).

ToGETHER has made it possible for the organization to occupy relevant advocacy spaces in the humanitarian sphere, such as the *International Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants and their Host Countries and Communities* and the *European Humanitarian Forum*, as well as leading the *Congress on Localization in Latin America and the Caribbean*.

Salto Ángel's flagship project #TúPuedeSerMás (you can be more) has gained recognition for building social capital, creating networks, and strengthening cohesion among local communities.

The organization also focuses on community leadership to mitigate the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and discrimination based on ethnicity, nationality, and sexual orientation. Because of its knowledge management strategies and mentoring of other local organizations, especially members of *Coalición por Venezuela*, Salto Ángel also functions as an umbrella organization.

However, Salto Ángel's lack of direct engagement with donors has often limited its actions and confined its scope to agreements with intermediaries

who tend to impose their own work logic. In 2020, the organization managed to win several small calls for proposals for projects focusing on health emergencies. These came without any 'strings attached' and put the full responsibility of the implementation on the organization. Salto Ángel's experience with running projects of this kind, taking full responsibility, but also having full power to make decisions, put the organization in a completely new position when negotiating terms with partners. It became possible to apply the organization's own programme logic and to manage resources in a much more independent way. Energies were no longer tied up by lengthy reporting requirements and an overly strict control of the finances.

During the pandemic, Salto Ángel became a key local actor and won the recognition of the government institutions responding to the health crisis. Even without much expertise in emergency planning, the dedication of the members of the organization, and the capacity of leaders within the migrant communities to assess needs, allowed Salto Ángel to work hand in hand with law enforcement and institutions. The organization gained respect and became a voice in the planning of response actions, also helping to transform social perceptions about migration.

In 2022, Salto Ángel joined the *Response Plan for Venezuelan Migration* led by the *Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants (R4V)*. The organization became more visible and began to occupy a space in coordination meetings, but it was still difficult to reach a level where independent decision-making was possible. Striving for more influence has led to creating local coordination spaces, which is what *Coalición por Venezuela*, the *Network of Women Leaders of the Venezuelan Diaspora in Latin America*, and the *Caribbean*, *Somos Enlace (We are Liaison)* and *Líderes en Acción (Leaders in Action)*

sponsored by IOM (International Organization for Migration), is all about.

In Colombia, there are no pooled funds to address emergencies or financial schemes from local government institutions, and the calls for proposals typically offered are not usually tailored to the local contexts or the technical language used at the local level. Many of the capacity strengthening processes offered to local organizations are adjusted to the indicators of those offering the programmes rather than to the needs and conditions of their local peers.

In conclusion, in Colombia, Latin America and the Caribbean, localization is still in its early stages. Coordination is dominated by the UN system, preventing local civil society from developing a voice. Local organizations are therefore the result of affected populations wanting to be protagonists of their own changes.

There is also a global vision of the region and its problems in which humanitarian needs are not visible, and the system itself does not allow humanitarian action, peacebuilding, and development to be addressed. However, Salto Ángel has been contributing to changes here by working with the triple nexus approach, which it has fully embraced.

Localization strengthens programmes and projects, giving local organizations the opportunity to gain expertise in management capacity and in handling donor relations so that they can access direct funding and share risks, but also power.

The international cooperation system must agree on localization criteria, increase trust in local actors and promote equal relationships. This includes recognising that (larger) national organizations have different capacities in terms of advocacy and the size of their structure compared to smaller local and community-based organizations.

Asociación Salto Ángel, Colombia

Salto Ángel is a civil humanitarian organization, founded by descendants of the Colombian-Venezuelan migrants in 2018, in response to the humanitarian needs arising from the border crisis. The organization has become a leader in promoting localization and the triple nexus approach in Latin America and the Caribbean.

