

COLOMBIA

Floods in La Mojana subregion

CRISIS IMPACT OVERVIEW

- On 27 August 2021, the Cauca River in the north of Colombia flooded, causing serious damage to five municipalities in La Mojana subregion (RCN Radio 07/09/2021). La Mojana is located in the north of Colombia, between the departments of Bolívar, Sucre, Antioquia, and Córdoba. It is surrounded by the Magdalena, Cauca, and San Jorge rivers. The flooding was a result of atypical rains during August and a rupture in a dam that functioned as a retaining wall for the river (Semana 28/08/2021), affecting all municipalities of the subregion (El Heraldo 04/09/2021).
- As at 13 September, local governments registered approximately 180,000 individuals as affected in the departments of Bolívar, Córdoba, and Sucre, particularly in the municipalities of Achí, Guaranda, Montecristo, and San Jacinto del Cauca (ELC Córdoba 10/09/2021; El Espectador 06/09/2021; RCN Radio 07/09/2021). At least 500,000 people are exposed to potential future flooding (El Tiempo 31/08/2021). An unknown number of people have had to move to the higher areas of the region because of the damage to their homes.
- As at 3 September, 7,000 hectares of crops were flooded and at risk of being lost. This could affect the agricultural-based livelihoods of many of the region's inhabitants (Radio Nacional de Colombia 03/09/2021). 300,000 cattle are at risk of dying from starvation or drowning (Semana 03/09/2021; El Tiempo 31/08/2021).
- As the damage assessment is in progress, the total number of those affected is not yet known.

ANTICIPATED SCOPE AND SCALE

- According to forecasts by the Ideam, the flooding in La Mojana was caused by atypical rains resulting from the hurricane season in Central America, not the Colombian annual rainy season, which will start in mid-September (El Tiempo 31/08/2021). The La Niña phenomenon has a high probability of hitting Colombia as well, which could increase the severity of the rainy season (El Colombiano 05/09/2021). It is very likely that there will be further overflows of the San Jorge and Magdalena rivers, in addition to flash flooding from excess rainfall.
- Work to repair the damaged dam is expected to take at least 80 days. As at 5 September, repairs had not started (El Espectador 06/09/2021).

HUMANITARIAN CONSTRAINTS

- Since 5 August 2021, the road between San Marcos and Majagual has been flooded, causing transportation difficulties and the risk of collapse for some structures. Much of the food and humanitarian aid that enters the department of Sucre from Córdoba is transported along this road (El Heraldo 05/09/2021; El Universal 06/09/2021).
- At least two non-state armed groups are present in several municipalities in the subregion, including Achí and Guaranda (Centro de Pensamiento UNCaribe 2020). Recently, a third armed actor was involved in confrontations in the department of Bolívar. All three groups have attacked NGOs and social leaders as well as allies of rival groups (El Tiempo 29/07/2021; Blu Radio 02/08/2021). Humanitarian aid may be affected by the fighting and potential stigmatisation of aid workers.



KEY PRIORITIES

50,000

AFFECTED PEOPLE

500,000

PEOPLE AT RISK OF
FUTURE FLOODS

7,000

HECTARES OF CROP
DAMAGED

NATIONAL RESPONSE CAPACITY

- Unidad Nacional para la Gestión del Riesgo de Desastres
- Sistema Nacional de Gestión del Riesgo de Desastres
 - Local governments
 - Colombian National Army

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE CAPACITY

- International Committee of the Red Cross
 - OCHA

SECTORAL NEEDS

Shelter and NFIs

Although the number of displaced people is still unknown, data from previous floods in the region shows that many people whose homes are affected by flooding move to nearby municipalities or areas of the municipality that are not flooded (PAHO 15/06/2007; El Universal 08/08/2010). It is necessary to set up temporary shelters for those affected, as floods often damage families' possessions and make homes uninhabitable.

Currently, at least 4,000 people are in 47 shelters, each with a capacity of 8,000 people (Semana 07/09/2021; Blu Radio 31/08/2021; Radio Santafe 05/09/2021). More shelters are necessary as at least 180,000 individuals have been affected. People also report being in need of NFIs, particularly beds, quilts, cooking utensils, and blankets (La Razón 04/09/2021). The municipalities of Achí, Ayapel, Guarandá, and San Jacinto del Cauca have received food, cleaning, and kitchen utensil kits (Radio Santafe 05/09/2021).

Health

No official assessment of health needs has been made available. Press reports indicate the presence of skin diseases and acute diarrhoea among children and adults as a result of the floods (La Razón 04/09/2021). Fungal infections and snake bites have also been reported, caused by the moisture produced by the flooding (ELC Córdoba 10/09/2021). In previous years, La Mojana subregion has had outbreaks of dengue, chikungunya, and leptospirosis (RCN Radio 27/11/2020; El Heraldó 14/07/2021). Floods are often conducive to these outbreaks, as the mosquitoes that potentially carry the diseases are attracted to the water or because the floodwater gets contaminated by rodents (El Universal 05/09/2021; El Universal 03/09/2021). In previous floods, hospitals were also affected, which led to limited patient care. The established shelters need to provide healthcare services to prevent the spread of the diseases and treat those infected (PAHO 15/06/2007).

Livelihoods

Around 88% of the inhabitants of La Mojana rely on agriculture, livestock, or fishing for their livelihoods (Banco de la República de Colombia 04/2005). The damage from flooding to rice, maize, and banana crops has affected the livelihoods of a large part of the population (Caracol Radio 01/09/2021). Road blockages and problems in transportation could lead to the loss of more crops (El Tiempo 27/08/2021). During the floods of 2005 and 2010, crop damage caused a high risk of food insecurity for a large part of the population (OCHA 04/08/2010 and OCHA 18/11/2010).

AGGRAVATING FACTORS

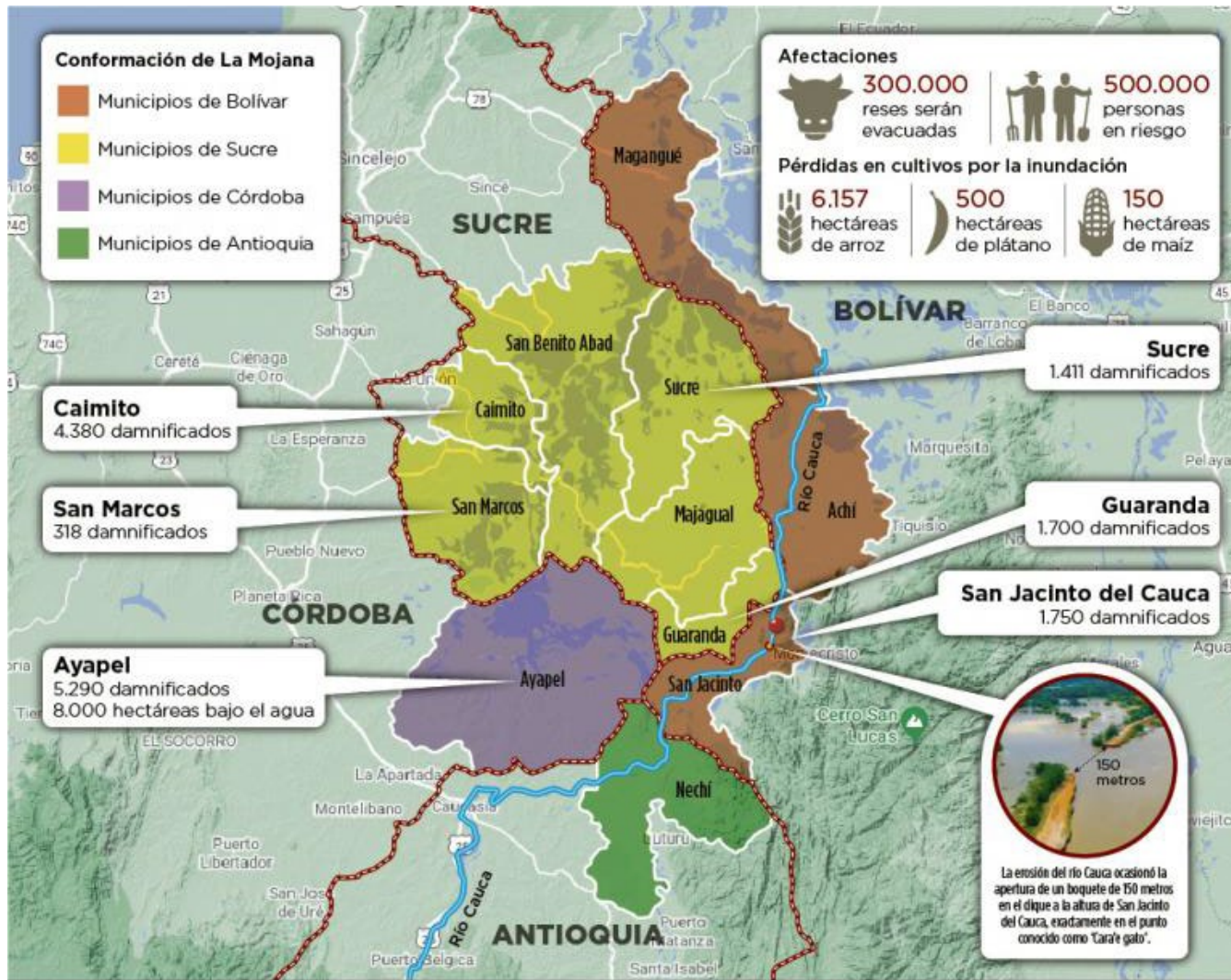
Rainy season and La Niña phenomenon

The overflowing of the Cauca River in La Mojana is the result of unusual rainfall caused by the hurricane season in Central America and the Caribbean. Forecasted to be particularly heavy, Colombia's annual rainy season will begin in mid-September and last until December (El Espectador 23/08/2021). According to the Colombian Ministry for the Environment, the La Niña phenomenon has a 69% chance of hitting Colombia and increasing the rainfall by 60–80% (Agencia EFE 18/08/2021). La Niña could potentially worsen the effects of the rainy season, with a possibility for extended weeks of flooding and further overflowing of the Magdalena and San Jorge rivers.

Armed conflict in the south of the Bolívar department

Since the end of March 2021, armed conflict between non-state armed groups in southern Bolívar has worsened. This has led to the displacement of around 2,600 people, confined many people to their homes, and led to the stigmatisation of some social leaders and NGOs (ICRC 07/08/2021; Contagio Radio 10/03/2021). The conflict may represent a further challenge for the flood-affected population, as the presence of armed groups may restrict their ability to move. It may also create access restrictions for humanitarian organisations.

FLOOD-AFFECTED AREAS IN LA MOJANA (NORTHERN COLOMBIA)



Source : El Heraldo (04/09/2021)