



**Malteser
International**

Order of Malta Worldwide Relief

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Transforming the Future in Rural Colombia with Local Change Makers

Innovative workshops empower youth, protect the environment,, and promote resilience in indigenous communities

MIAMI – Often rural communities are the first who experience the direct effects of climate change, the pang of malnutrition, and the harsh reality of inadequate health care. To shed light on the most pressing issues affecting children and families, the community, and the environment northern Colombia, Malteser International Americas brought together a group of yet unknown community change makers – indigenous youth, schoolchildren, teachers, local police officers, and struggling farmers – and captured on film their transformation to make a difference, become environmental advocates, and change the course of their future.

“We continue to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable Afro-Colombian communities and the indigenous people of La Guajira and Magdalena through innovative projects that involve the very people we are helping, so they can play a role in creating better futures for themselves with our help,” said Ravi Tripptrap, Executive Director, Malteser International Americas.

An intensive week-long workshop brought together 20 members from the community of varying ages and backgrounds to address critical issues affecting the world around them, and to eradicate stereotypes, build their self-confidence and technical skills, and create change amongst themselves and in their community.

“The inhabitants of this region have felt the catastrophic consequences of the changing climate, and malnutrition. As a result, livelihoods have been threatened and families have been hit hard,” said Jelena Kaifenheim, Regional Manager Latin America and Caribbean, Malteser International Americas. “Our community-based initiatives build skills, empower, and improve the resiliency of entire communities.

Beginning with a a series of transformative sessions and cathartic discussions, the group spent seven days working alongside acclaimed documentary filmmakers from Human Pictures, who taught the group how to use video cameras and technology to tell a story, interview members of the community, and edit the film for its final cut.

Simultaneously, with their own cameras, the Human Pictures team captured the personal and collective transformation of the group in the short documentary film: *“We are the Environment. Communities United.”* (<https://youtu.be/hMiX0N44Q0U>).

Going above and beyond a human interest story, the film peers into the lives of the very people whom our health and nutrition and climate change adaptation programs help.

“Working with Malteser International Americas, we affirmed our belief that part of politically committed filmmaking is transferring our knowledge and also the means of production so communities can actively represent themselves,” said Juan Mejia, Director at Human Pictures.

The week-long transformation was celebrated at a pop-up community film festival where the change makers debuted their film and visually express to their community the effects of climate change, the impact of their daily actions, and how they can create a better future for all.

This workshop was in part made possible by our partners on-the-ground ABIUDEA (Association of Biologists of the Universidad de Atlántico) and PDPC (Programa de Desarrollo y Paz del César/Development and Peace Program of César), and with the generous support of the German Development Ministry (BMZ).

Malteser International Americas has been on the ground bringing relief to indigenous people and Afro-Colombians in northern Colombia affected by armed conflict and internal displacement since 2014, especially in the departments of Magdalena and La Guajira. As a result of the conflict, the Colombians in the region suffer from malnourishment and lack food security. To address these issues, and to help people live healthier lives with dignity, Malteser International Americas expanded its relief and development work in Colombia.

Last year, Malteser International Americas was at the helm of international relief and tackled some of the greatest challenges facing the Americas. In Colombia, the organization:

- Protected 1,200 pregnant women and their unborn babies from the Zika virus by providing prevention kits to often neglected populations where stagnant water is an ideal breeding ground for mosquitos;
- Improved community based health in 23 indigenous communities (5,500 people) by training community health agents and saved 700 undernourished children with food support and training on nutrition of their mothers and other women in the community.
- Provided support for clean-up measures in northern Colombia following floods resulting from Hurricane Matthew and distributed mattresses and 200 hygiene kits to affected families.

About Malteser International Americas:

Malteser International Americas is an affiliate of Malteser International, the humanitarian relief organization of the Order of Malta. Through our U.S. headquarters, Malteser International Americas provides immediate disaster response and preparedness, as well as vital healthcare and nutrition, and clean water and sanitation to vulnerable people in North America, Latin America and the Caribbean. Visit www.orderofmalta.org to learn more.