



¿Is corporate social responsibility key to peace in Colombia? Challenges and opportunities

¿Es la responsabilidad social empresarial clave para la paz en Colombia? Retos y oportunidades

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Abstract

In Colombia, the Peace Agreement with the FARC-EP guerrillas was signed in 2016, seeking to create a scenario where dialogue and consensus pave the way for a new development framework that would address the root causes of the protracted armed conflict that had lasted for more than five decades. This study aims to analyze the challenges and opportunities of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for peacebuilding in Colombia, with particular attention to the current post-agreement landscape. To this end, a qualitative methodological design was employed in two stages: a) a systematic review of the literature on CSR and peace, which considered academic publications in Spanish and English between 2019 and 2025, in the Scopus, Web of Science, and Taylor & Francis databases; b) a critical review of the sustainability reports of four leading Colombian companies was conducted, using content analysis techniques, particularly Atlas.ti24 software, which facilitated data coding, visualization, and analysis. The results confirm a growing trend in the publication of academic work on this topic, but also reveal a fragmentation within the field of study. Colombia's leadership in publishing on this subject is noteworthy, ranking fifth globally, reflecting the relevance of the post-conflict period in the global context. Furthermore, comparing academic discourse with the evaluated business practices reveals a significant gap. While reports from companies like Exito and Terpel highlight workplace inclusion initiatives, these are presented in isolation and with a reputational focus, lacking the multisectoral coordination and robust accountability necessary for a more transformative impact on the social fabric. The study concludes that, while CSR is crucial for peace, its implementation in the Colombian context must evolve to adopt an integrative vision that links the various social actors and nature, thereby generating more substantial positive impacts.

Keywords: Colombia, Corporate social responsibility, peace, peacebuilding, sustainable development.

Resumen

En Colombia, durante el año 2016 se firmó el Acuerdo de Paz con la guerrilla de las FARC-EP, buscando crear un escenario donde el diálogo y la concertación dieran paso a un nuevo escenario de desarrollo, que diera respuesta a los orígenes del degradado conflicto armado de más de cinco décadas. Este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar los retos y las oportunidades de la Responsabilidad Social Empresarial (RSE) en el contexto de la construcción de paz en Colombia, considerando el escenario actual de posacuerdo. Para ello, se empleó un diseño metodológico cualitativo en dos etapas: a) una revisión sistemática de la literatura sobre RSE y paz, que consideró la producción académica publicada en español e inglés entre 2019 y 2025, en las bases de datos Scopus, Web of Science y Taylor & Francis; b) una revisión crítica de los informes de sostenibilidad de cuatro empresas colombianas líderes en el mercado, información que fue tratada a partir de la técnica de análisis de contenido, empleando especialmente el software Atlas.ti 24 que facilitó el ejercicio de codificación, graficación y análisis de los datos. Los resultados confirman una tendencia creciente en la publicación de la producción académica sobre el tema, pero también se denota una fragmentación del campo de estudio. El liderazgo de Colombia en la publicación sobre esta temática es evidente, ocupando el quinto lugar a nivel mundial en publicaciones sobre el tema, lo que refleja la relevancia del post-acuerdo en el contexto global. Por otro lado, la comparación entre el discurso académico y las prácticas empresariales evaluadas revela una brecha significativa. Si bien informes de empresas como Exito y Terpel revelan iniciativas de inclusión laboral, estas se presentan de forma fragmentada y con un enfoque reputacional, careciendo de la coordinación multisectorial y de la rendición de cuentas necesarias para un mayor impacto transformador en el tejido social. El estudio concluye que, si bien la RSE es crucial para la paz, su implementación en el contexto colombiano debe trascender y adoptar una visión integradora que vincule a los diversos actores sociales y a la naturaleza, al tiempo que genere mayores impactos positivos.

Palabras clave: Colombia, construcción de paz, desarrollo sostenible, paz, responsabilidad social empresarial.

INTRODUCTION

The long and complex armed conflict in Colombia has left a profound mark on the country's social, economic, environmental, and cultural landscape. While the State has led significant peacebuilding efforts, especially after the signing of the “Final Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace” with the now-defunct FARC-EP guerrilla group, the transition to a post-peace agreement context has highlighted the need for multisectoral participation that transcends government institutions. The country's context has been characterized by a complex interplay between political violence, inequality, and social exclusion, with a frequent absence of the State in territories historically affected by the armed conflict. In this context, the private sector, an actor whose participation has often been ambiguous or even implicated in the violence (Jespersgaard Jakobsen et al., 2024), emerges as a crucial agent with the potential to drive stability and social reconstruction.

Traditionally, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been conceptualized as a tool to balance economic profit, social equity, and environmental sustainability within the triple bottom line model (Gamboa et al., 2022). However, in a post-peace agreement context, CSR takes on a much more strategic and transformative dimension. More than a simple altruistic practice, CSR becomes an engine for peace by directly addressing the structural causes of violence, such as inequality, poverty, and lack of opportunities (Acevedo et al., 2024). Furthermore, companies can facilitate reconciliation, contribute to the reconstruction of territories, generate formal employment, monitor supply chain members, and promote institutional trust—all essential elements for preventing the emergence of new cycles of violence (Sierra, 2021). This approach redefines the traditional role of companies, inviting them to transcend the pursuit of economic or strategic benefits and positively impact the social fabric with genuine commitment (Tellez-Bedoya, 2018).

Despite its potential, the academic literature in high-impact journals linking CSR to peacebuilding remains limited, especially in Latin America and particularly in Colombia. This contrasts with business experiences that have sought to contribute to peace from different perspectives. These include the “Footprints of Peace” project of the National Federation of Coffee Growers, focused on strengthening social and productive alternatives in twenty-two municipalities; the Galletas Noel initiative to train and employ former combatants; and the Proantioquia program, which promoted agricultural production projects and land acquisition in reintegration zones of the Territorial Development Programs (PDET).

Other companies, such as Suramericana, Compañía Nacional del Chocolate, Éxito, Zenú, Unicentro, Conavi, and Noel, have developed educational and cultural initiatives for peacebuilding. At the same time, Compañía Atlántica de Empaques (CEA) has promoted agro-industrial partnerships in rural areas affected by violence. Likewise, Fundación Semana has played an active role in the reconstruction of the municipality of El Salado. Ecopetrol, with the support of the European Union,

has led initiatives such as the Peace Laboratories, and its participation in the Network of Development and Peace Programs (RedProdepaz), created by ISA along with organizations such as Cinep, Isagen, and Fundación Social, has fostered the generation of strategic information that allows for the identification of key projects and regional partners (Bonilla, Restrepo, Vásquez y Betancur, 2011; Jiménez, 2014; FIP, 2019; Prandi & Lozano, 2010; Tellez-Bedoya, 2023).

However, beyond these cases, systematic evidence on the challenges and opportunities Colombian companies face in integrating corporate social responsibility (CSR) with peacebuilding remains scarce. In this context, it is necessary to promote an analysis that identifies key challenges, such as aligning business management with local and national peace objectives, overcoming historical responsibilities that entail ethical commitments to reparations and social justice, and consolidating sustainable cross-sectoral partnerships. Although normative and guiding references exist, such as the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UN, 2011), their application in post-Peace Agreement scenarios still presents significant gaps that warrant further research and academic debate.

Based on the above, this article seeks to fill this gap in the literature. Its objective is to analyze the challenges and opportunities of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the context of peacebuilding for Colombian companies. This stems from the need to recognize an ethical commitment that links economic development with social reparations, aimed at establishing a culture of peace. This research not only contributes to the academic debate but also offers practical guidance for organizations seeking a genuine commitment to reparations, reconciliation, and justice, thereby consolidating a lasting culture of peace, based on the systematic review findings. This will allow the private sector to solidify its position as a key player in the transformation that the country requires in this post-agreement scenario.

To address the above, the methodological design is presented logically and systematically below, with particular emphasis on the steps followed in the systematic review. Subsequently, the main results of this stage are presented, and the article concludes with a discussion of the sustainability reports of four leading companies in the Colombian market, aspects that undoubtedly facilitated the triangulation of information and the formulation of explicit conclusions on the subject.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a qualitative, descriptive approach, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities Colombian companies face when implementing CSR practices in the context of peacebuilding. The choice of this methodological approach is justified by the need to capture the dynamics, perceptions, and content underlying corporate notions, perceptions, and practices, as well as to identify emerging patterns that are difficult to explain from

a quantitative perspective. From this perspective, the study was structured in two complementary stages that combined the analysis of academic literature with the review of publicly available corporate documents.

In the first stage, a systematic review of the scientific literature was conducted to identify, evaluate, and synthesize the theoretical and empirical advances on the relationship between CSR and peacebuilding. This process rigorously followed the PRISMA 2020 protocol guidelines (Preferred Information Elements for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), ensuring transparency, traceability, and methodological quality in the selection of articles for inclusion. The literature search was conducted in three highly regarded academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and Taylor & Francis, selected for their international reach and for hosting indexed, peer-reviewed journals.

The search equation combined Spanish and English terms related to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and peace, incorporating synonyms and Boolean operators to ensure a precise strategy: (“Responsabilidad Social Empresarial” OR “Responsabilidad Social Corporativa” OR “CSR” OR “Corporate social responsibility”) AND NOT (turismo OR “tourism”) AND (Peace OR War OR “armed conflict” OR “war”). To reinforce the validity of the process, inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined. Only original, peer-reviewed research articles published between 2019 and 2025 and available in English or Spanish were considered. Theses, book chapters, presentations, and articles whose main focus was tourism were excluded, as this constitutes a parallel research topic in another study.

The review procedure was carried out in three sequential stages: identification, selection, and evaluation, following the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1). The relevance of each article was assessed using the official protocol checklist, which enabled filtering the literature based on objective, reproducible criteria. The research team also used VosViewer 1.6.20 software for this process.

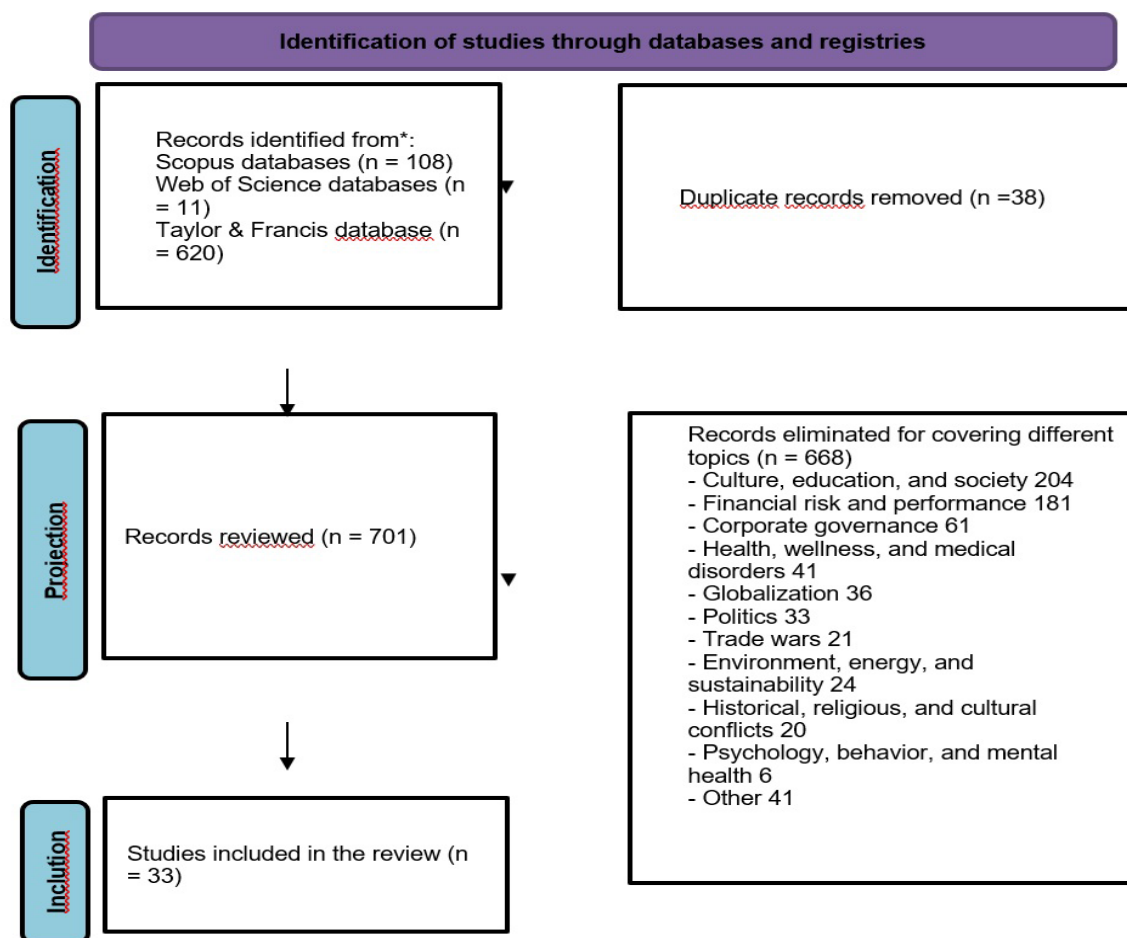


Figure 1. Document selection phases. PRISMA diagram.

Once the systematic review was completed, the second stage of the research began, focusing on the content analysis of corporate reports. This stage aimed to examine how the most economically significant Colombian companies integrate peacebuilding practices into their CSR initiatives and strategies. To this end, four companies—Reficar, Éxito, Claro, and Terpel—were selected from the [Forbes \(2025\)](#) list of the highest-earning organizations in Colombia. The selection was based on three main criteria: ranking among the top ten on the list, having a sustainability report for 2024, and presenting explicit evidence of peacebuilding initiatives in their reports.

The content analysis was conducted using Atlas.ti24 software, a tool that facilitated the organization and coding of relevant excerpts and the visual representation of relationships between categories. The categorization process followed an inductive, emergent approach, consolidating categories based on findings from the systematic review and refining them during coding of the reports. Key categories included territorial development, peacebuilding initiatives, inclusion of conflict victims, reintegration of ex-combatants, collaboration with the Armed Forces, labor and social inclusion, and community reconciliation programs. These categories enabled analysis of business practices in relation to specific peacebuilding scenarios in Colombia, revealing convergences and gaps in business strategies.

Finally, integrating a systematic review of academic literature with an analysis of corporate reports enabled methodological triangulation, thereby strengthening the research findings. While the first stage offered a broad and comparative overview of the state of the art in the international context, the second provided concrete empirical evidence from the recent Colombian context. This methodological design, validated by research published in Scopus on CSR and sustainability, provided the study with a robust analytical framework, capable of contributing to both academic reflection and practical debate on the role of the private sector in peacebuilding.

RESULTS

The bibliometric review reveals a growing trend in academic production on corporate social responsibility (CSR) in peace contexts during 2019–2025 across high-impact journals (Figure 2). This growth reflects the incorporation of the peacebuilding agenda into the global debate on sustainability and corporate governance. Several studies indicate that the relationship between business and peace is emerging as a strengthening field, driven largely by the Sustainable Development Goals and post-conflict dynamics in regions such as Latin America (Joseph, 2025; Miklian, 2019).

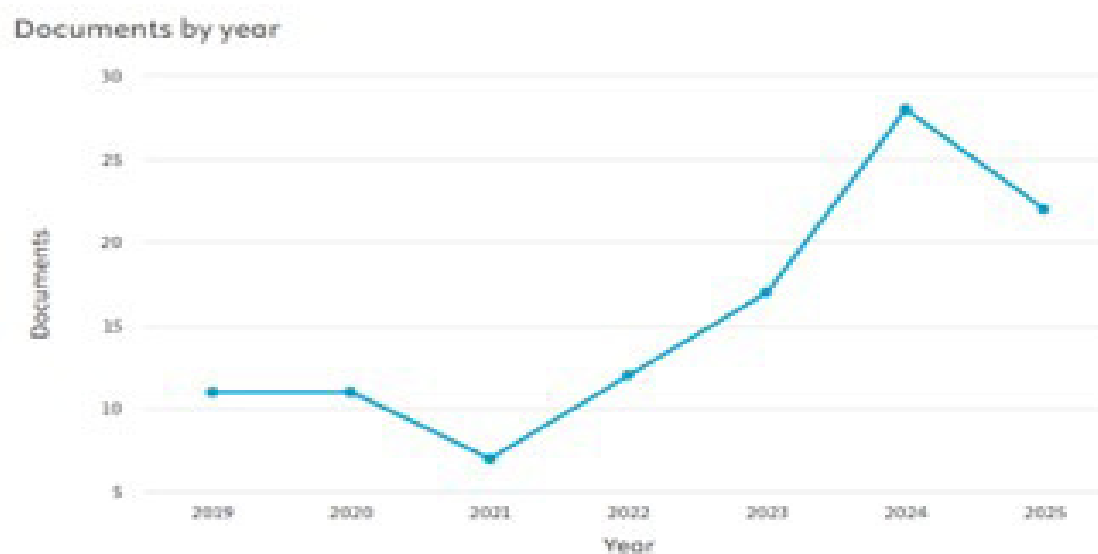


Figure 2. Articles published in Scopus on CSR in peace contexts 2019–2025

Source: Prepared by the authors using data extracted from the Scopus database of ELSEVIER (2025) using the search equation: (“Responsabilidad social corporativa” OR “Responsabilidad social empresarial” OR “CSR” OR “Corporate social responsibility”) AND NOT (turismo OR “tourism”) AND (Paz OR Guerra OR “conflicto armado” OR peace OR “armed conflict” OR war)

Regarding the concentration of publications at the institutional level, educational institutions such as the University of Oslo and Renmin University of China have led in total publications, although with a low average number of articles per university. This finding confirms what the specialized literature has termed the “fragmentation of the field,” where the authorship of prominent authors

predominates over structured research schools (Cechvala et al., 2024). Even so, the leadership of funding bodies such as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the National Natural Science Foundation of China, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, and the National Bureau of Philosophy and Social Sciences demonstrates a growing interest in linking corporate social responsibility and the peace agenda with public policy formulation and the pursuit of development.

Similarly, globally, the countries that fund this research most are the United States, followed by Ukraine and China. However, Colombia’s fifth-place ranking is noteworthy. This presence is significant, as it reflects the fact that the post-Peace Agreement scenario with the now-defunct FARC-EP guerrilla group has spurred academic reflection on the role of businesses in peace (Ganson, 2019). Furthermore, it serves as a living laboratory, with notable experience in transitional justice, reconciliation, and community engagement for peace. Thus, financing not only reflects geopolitical dynamics but also contextual ones, and the Colombian case stands as a benchmark in the international debate.

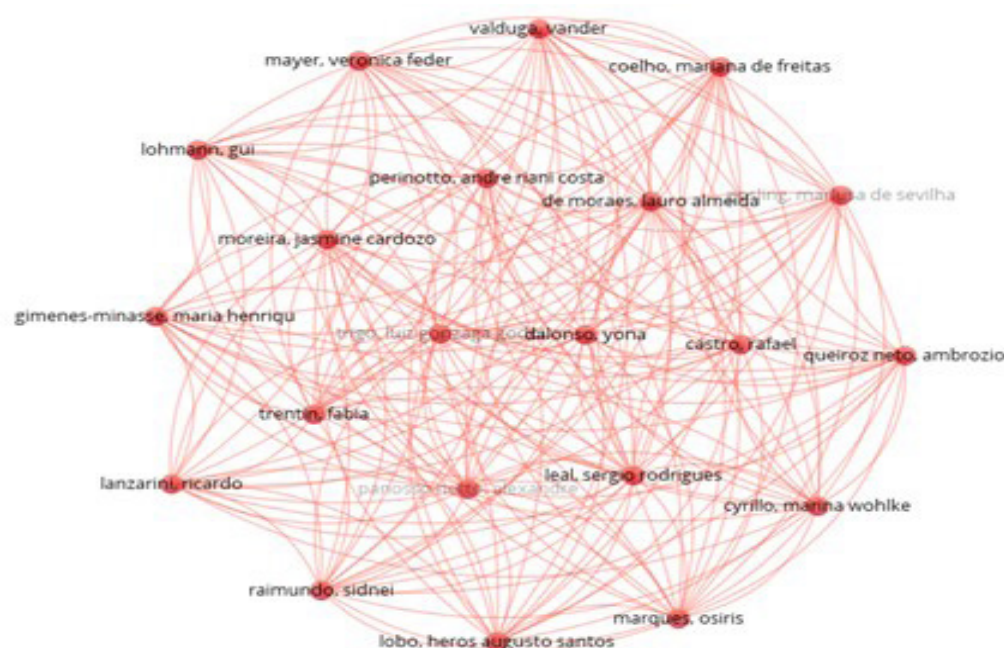


Figure 3. Co-authorship map

Source: Prepared by the authors based on VOSviewer (2025)

Regarding author leadership, the review confirms Miklian and Ganson as leaders in academic production, consistent with previous studies that identify them as leading figures in the field of “business and peace” (Miklian, 2019). However, the co-authorship analysis reveals a complex network, shown in Figure 3, in which Uddin Mahi is the most prominent author, followed by Ahmad Afzal and Islam Thowhidul. Nevertheless, the opposite pattern is observed for co-citations, with only the Academy of Management Review, Bae Kee Hong, and Albuquerque Rui involved. This aligns with recent literature reviews, which show that while case

studies in local contexts generate broad networks, theoretical references are concentrated in a small number of authors and specialized journals, such as the *Academy of Management Review* (Joseph, 2025).

On the other hand, regarding the co-occurrence of keywords, the concept of corporate social responsibility is the central focus of research on this topic, followed by similar terms such as sustainability and sustainable development (Figure 4). This finding aligns with the literature, as peace and its relationship with business are frequently addressed from the perspective of sustainability and global responsibility (Cechvala et al., 2024). The presence of current terms such as COVID-19 and Ukraine indicates that recent global crises and geopolitical conflicts have permeated the analysis of CSR and peace, consistent with studies that document how crisis contexts reconfigure corporate materiality and the social license to operate (Miklian, 2019; Ganson, 2019).

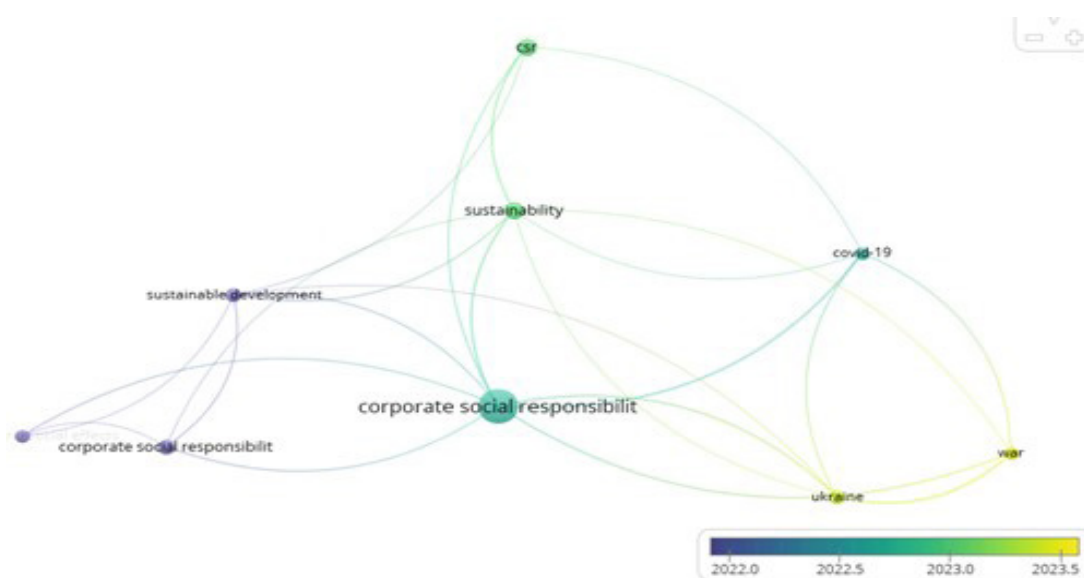


Figure 4. Keyword co-occurrence map
Source: Prepared by the authors based on VOSviewer (2025)

In summary, the bibliometric review not only confirms the sustained growth of academic literature on CSR and peacebuilding but also reveals tensions between the dispersion of empirical studies and the concentration of theoretical approaches. This duality aligns with recent review articles that seek to strengthen conceptual integration and the development of management proposals in conflict contexts, thereby promoting proactive corporate initiatives in post-conflict environments (Joseph, 2025; Tellez-Bedoya, 2023). This confirms the need to continue building a solid and articulated field in which academia plays a strategic role. Now, as part of the systematic review, the most relevant information from the analyzed academic production is presented below, structured as follows: a) the role of global organizations in peacebuilding; b) CSR in peacebuilding scenarios in Colombia.

A) The role of global corporations in peacebuilding

Research on this topic has documented a paradigm shift in the conceptualization of the private sector's role in contexts of fragility, risk, and conflict. Companies have moved from being considered mere economic agents to becoming social agents with an active co-responsibility for governance and social stability (Miklian, 2020; Miklian & Barkemeyer, 2022). This role has become particularly relevant in contexts of weak institutions, where multinational corporations assume functions traditionally belonging to the state (Jespersgaard Jakobsen et al., 2024), especially given the size, influence, and revenue some possess. The relevance of these organizations is also due to their capacity to mobilize material and financial resources, as well as the increasing adoption of international regulations and environmental, social, and corporate governance frameworks, which strengthen their resilience in unstable environments (Reade et al., 2019; Clancey-Shang & Fu, 2024).

Several cases illustrate how corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become an instrument for peacebuilding in this context. In Africa, where conflicts are often linked to resource exploitation, problematic practices such as bribery in Nigeria and Sudan (Miklian, 2016) and the financing of war crimes by diamond mining companies (Mueller-Hirth, 2017) have been documented, as well as the emergence of transformative initiatives. Chevron in Nigeria has contributed to community development to reduce violence, and Shell has hired young people to prevent their recruitment by armed groups (Prandi & Lozano, 2010). In Rwanda, tourism has promoted reconciliation between antagonistic actors in the conflict, and Heineken has served as a refuge and support network for workers during the most turbulent periods of violence (Lenfant & Van Cranenburgh, 2017).

Conversely, in Asia, the Japanese company Komatsu has implemented landmine awareness programs in Cambodia and Afghanistan (Melin, 2016). In Sri Lanka, companies joined forces in the Dr. Lanka First initiative to mobilize public support for peace negotiations (Tripathi & Gündüz, 2008). In Latin America, the cases of El Salvador and Guatemala demonstrate how the business elite, initially reluctant, transformed its role from obstacle to key facilitator in peace processes, driven by the spread of conflict and the potential for market expansion (Tripathi & Gündüz, 2008, cited by Tellez-Bedoya, 2023).

However, the Business for Peace (B4P) approach, which promotes corporate participation in peacebuilding, has also received criticism. It has been noted that, in sectors such as the extractive industry, many corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives can be instrumentalized for purely reputational purposes, generating a limited social impact (Weber & Cabras, 2021; Bagatska et al., 2024; Grégoire & Anzueto, 2024). This tension between corporate image and real impact underscores the need for evaluation frameworks that measure and track tangible results in affected communities (Mintah & Elmarzouky, 2024). The legitimacy of these actions depends on their ability to demonstrate genuine accountability, transparency, and long-term sustainability.

In short, companies' overall contribution to peacebuilding is characterized by a recognition of a shared social responsibility that extends beyond economic profit. Cases like Airbnb, which provided shelter to refugees, and Ukrainian companies, which sustained the social fabric amidst the war, reveal the potential of private initiatives to generate resilience and stability (Mintah & Elmarzouky, 2024; Honcharenko et al., 2022). However, for this participation to be sustainable and legitimate, it is essential to move beyond purely philanthropic practices and adopt a systemic approach that prioritizes transparency, environmental sustainability, and the active participation of the social fabric (Dresse et al., 2021; Dielini & Aksentiuk, 2024). Only in this way can the private sector consolidate its active role as a true agent of change in peacebuilding processes.

B) CSR in peacebuilding scenarios in Colombia

In Colombia, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has taken various forms over the years. Initially, corporate action supported charitable initiatives through churches; later, aspects such as education, housing, and recreation were strengthened through compensation funds. Initiatives to create foundations and non-profit organizations also emerged. Today, some companies are committed to implementing global standards such as the GRI Standards, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the UN Global Compact (Tellez-Bedoya, 2018).

The transition of some organizations from a traditional philanthropic model to a strategic component also influences peacebuilding. This transformation responds to the specific dynamics of the armed conflict, which has forced the private sector to confront its role in a context of systemic violence. The specialized literature confirms that, beyond mere economic activity, corporate participation is crucial for the long-term sustainability of peace (Miklian & Medina Bickel, 2018). This commitment is manifested through multiple initiatives, such as the creation of socioeconomic reparations programs, the labor inclusion of victims, the local community, and former combatants, the strengthening of social cohesion in affected territories, the funding of initiatives that contribute to human rights, and support for local suppliers (Tellez-Bedoya, 2023).

Historically, the private sector's relationship with the armed conflict in Colombia has been ambivalent. Initially, participation was limited, with only marginal interest in the peace talks of the 1980s and 1990s (Guáqueta, 2006). However, the rise in insecurity, extortion, and kidnappings led to a paradigm shift, significantly increasing business interest in national stability (Rettberg, 2019). This response was not uniform, and while some initiatives supporting ex-combatants persisted over the years (Amis et al., 2006, cited by Tellez-Bedoya, 2023), the consolidation of a comprehensive approach to corporate social responsibility (CSR) in peacebuilding contexts has occurred only recently.

A prime example of this evolution is Undertake Peace Corporation's work. This platform has successfully mobilized the business sector to align its operations with

the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially those related to peace, justice, and institutional strengthening (Sierra, 2021). Its work demonstrates that CSR can function as a tool for territorial governance, facilitating strategic alliances for economic reintegration and the rebuilding of the social fabric.

Beyond the strategic deployment of resources and alliances, corporate participation in peacebuilding raises profound ethical implications that define its social legitimacy in affected territories. Rebuilding trust, a form of social capital devastated by conflict, requires companies to go beyond basic legal compliance. In this sense, symbolic reparation initiatives emerge as crucial instruments for healing divisions and demonstrating a genuine commitment to peace.

Colombian cases, such as companies in the flower and banana sectors participating in public acts of recognition and commemoration, illustrate how these actions focus on restoring victims' dignity and transcend strictly economic compensation. This voluntary ethical commitment is essential to counter perceptions of indifference or historical complicity, thereby laying the foundations for lasting trust in the post-conflict period (Weber & Cabras, 2021).

Several regional experiences support this approach. In Antioquia and Risaralda, the National Association of Business Owners of Colombia (ANDI) has supported victims and former combatants in the creation of productive projects (Guáqueta, 2006; FIP, 2011). Another relevant example is the business sector's contribution through the Peace Fund and other regional initiatives, which channel private funds to support community peace projects, fostering a sense of shared ownership of the peace process (Cani, 2023). Similarly, large companies such as Grupo Éxito and Ecopetrol have implemented training and employment programs for vulnerable populations, demonstrating a tangible commitment to reconciliation (Prandi & Lozano, 2010).

Tourism is a sector that has leveraged corporate social responsibility (CSR) for peacebuilding. In regions historically affected by conflict, such as La Macarena, hotels have boosted local employment and promoted sustainable activities, achieving reconciliation through collaborative work among opposing parties (Tellez-Bedoya, 2022). In urban areas, travel agencies in Bogotá have integrated peace education into their added value, strengthening reconciliation through their services and promoting territories previously at greater risk of conflict. These cases demonstrate the potential of tourism as an engine of development in the country, integrating business ethics with the imperatives of peace.

Despite the progress, integrating CSR into peacebuilding faces significant structural challenges. A primary obstacle is the private sector's skepticism, which often perceives the government as primarily responsible for peace and demands tax incentives to participate (FIP, 2019). This reluctance has manifested in some organizations' lukewarm support for the 2016 Peace Agreement, particularly regarding rural land ownership (Rettberg, 2019).

Furthermore, there is a participation gap between large corporations and Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs). Although the latter are key players in the territory, only 2.1% participate in post-conflict initiatives, which limit the scope and dissemination of social responsibility programs.

A crucial and often controversial point is the link between business ethics and transitional justice. Academic literature underscores that, to achieve lasting peace, companies must acknowledge their historical role in the conflict, whether as victims, collaborators, or, in extreme cases, accomplices (Weber & Cabras, 2021).

The collaboration of certain companies with paramilitary groups, documented in the palm oil sector (FIP, 2011), highlights the need for companies to assume their responsibility regarding historical memory, equity, and non-repetition (Dielini & Aksentiuk, 2024). The concept of corporate reparations (i.e., non-judicial forms of redress for past harm) is central here, going beyond basic philanthropy to address the underlying historical debt. However, in the current context of implementing the Peace Agreement, the results shown by the business sector in this regard are still incipient.

Furthermore, empirical evidence suggests that the most successful corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives in peacebuilding are those that arise from multi-sectoral partnerships between businesses, the state, civil society, and communities (Miklian & Medina Bickel, 2018). Shared governance is essential to overcome institutional weakness and the limited state presence in peripheral areas (Ó Laoghaire, 2024). In this context, for CSR to be truly transformative, it is crucial to empower communities to actively participate in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of projects. This approach, which goes beyond mere consultation, ensures that business initiatives respond to local needs and are not limited to market logic or philanthropy (Bedoya-Dorado & Charfuelán-Aguirre, 2020).

The Colombian experience demonstrates that Corporate Social Responsibility is a fundamental pillar of peacebuilding, but its implementation is complex and multifaceted. While significant progress has been made in socioeconomic inclusion and the strengthening of some sectors, considerable challenges remain, including the lack of MSME participation, weak evaluation frameworks, and the reluctance of some actors to acknowledge their historical role in the conflict. Therefore, for CSR to transcend its current limitations and become a force for social change, companies must make ethical commitments, recognize their influence on the conflict, and work in synergy with the government, universities, and communities in the affected territories.

CSR REPORT EVALUATION RESULTS

To complement the literature review on corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices focused on peacebuilding, a content analysis was conducted on the sustainability reports published in 2024 by four of Colombia's ten largest companies:

Éxito, the Cartagena Refinery (Reficar), Claro, and Terpel. This exercise allowed us to determine how peacebuilding practices are reflected in the actions reported by the business sector. Through the analysis of these documents, trends and gaps in the practices implemented in the territories were identified and compared with academic discourse, providing a more nuanced understanding of the factors that influence the effective implementation of CSR aimed at peacebuilding.

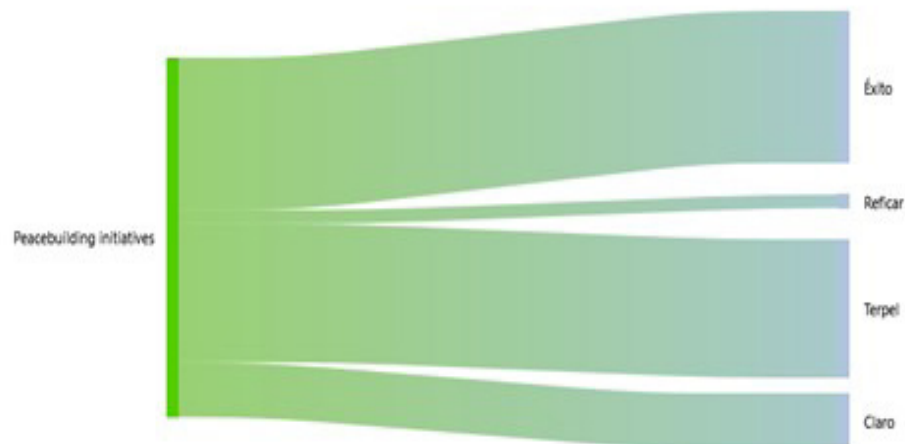


Figure 5. Sankey diagram for analyzing peacebuilding initiatives 2024
Source: Prepared by Atlas.Ti based on discourse analysis

The selected companies show varying levels of progress in presenting CSR initiatives aimed at peacebuilding. Specifically, the reports from Éxito and Terpel show a greater number of explicit initiatives in this area than those from Claro and Reficar (Figure 5). This finding is interesting, as it contrasts with academic research suggesting that companies involved in extractive practices, due to their presence in territories with historical conflicts, have made significant progress orienting their CSR policies toward peace-related goals (Vogel, 2022; Uduji et al., 2024).

The social responsibility initiatives that these companies disclose in their sustainability reports are primarily linked to peacebuilding through an organizational purpose focused on sustainable development, support for local entrepreneurship, and the reintegration of ex-combatants (Figure 6). While these actions are important for the recovery of historically excluded areas, the reports do not demonstrate significant coordination with other social actors, nor do they consider the specific needs of the communities. An example of this gap is that, while companies promote employment opportunities, the literature indicates that ex-combatants, for example, seek reintegration through support for productive projects rather than through direct, wage-based employment.

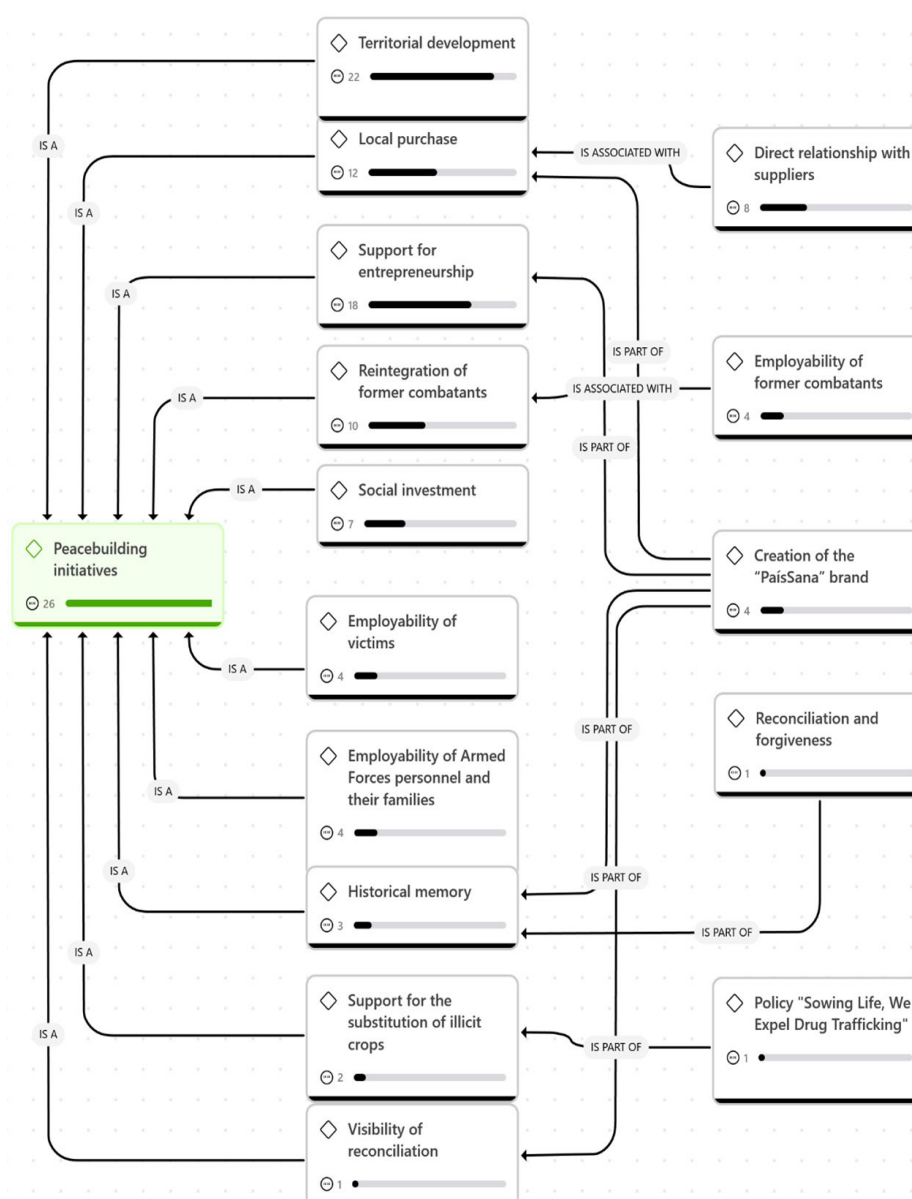


Figure 6. Network of Peacebuilding Initiatives 2024
Source: Prepared by Atlas.Ti based on discourse analysis

Regarding the conflict actors most frequently mentioned in sustainability reports, the analysis shows that conflict victims are the most cited group (Figure 7). Actions directed at this group include job placement and support for entrepreneurship, which align with findings from other academic works (Mintah & Elmarzouky, 2024; Grégoire & Anzueto, 2024; Sierra, 2021; Tellez-Bedoya, 2018). In contrast, the participation of members of the armed forces focuses almost exclusively on employability. In contrast, among ex-combatants, a greater diversity of CSR strategies is observed, depending on their individual reintegration process, whether through support for productive projects or job placement (Jespersgaard Jakobsen et al., 2024).

However, despite the actions, the employability of victims is not as significant as that of former combatants, a gap that organizations could address. While initiatives exist that highlight reconciliation or promote historical memory, essential for preventing the recurrence of violence, there is a clear need to implement more

actions that create spaces for dialogue and reconciliation (Dielini & Aksentiuk, 2024; Weber & Cabras, 2021), fundamental for overcoming conflict in the territories and generating processes for recovering historical memory. Employability or the integration of productive projects among the various actors in the Colombian armed conflict represents one of the key CSR initiatives for peace in the country (Jespersgaard Jakobsen et al., 2024; Gölgeci et al., 2021).



Figure 7. Network of actors related to peacebuilding, stated in CSR reports
Source: Prepared by Atlas.Ti based on discourse analysis

Conversely, comparing the actions reported by these companies with the literature review reveals both progress and significant shortcomings. In practice, the initiatives highlight efforts to integrate vulnerable populations into the labor market and support productive projects, which aligns with academic approaches that emphasize the importance of job creation and community participation (Mintah & Elmarzouky, 2024; Gölgeci et al., 2021; Honcharenko et al., 2022). However, the companies' reports do not delve into the strategic nature of CSR or the transformative scope of these projects, presenting them as isolated achievements or activities, rather than as part of a long-term philosophy or management approach.

Regarding their narratives, the companies frame their actions within stories of reconciliation and development, presenting success stories in specific contexts (Mintah & Elmarzouky, 2024). This fragmented narrative hinders the analysis of continuity and genuine commitment to social justice and reconciliation. This raises the question of whether the motivation for presenting these initiatives is genuine or stems from reputational concerns (Jespersgaard Jakobsen et al., 2024; Anzueto, 2021). Measuring and monitoring the impact of these initiatives is a key challenge in Colombia, though for now it remains a scenario of uncertainty.

Taken together, the contrast between academic discourse and business practice reveals a point of convergence regarding the fundamental role of the private sector in Colombia after the Peace Agreement (Bedoya-Dorado & Charfuelán-Aguirre, 2020), but also a significant gap between the challenges identified in research and the current scope of the initiatives implemented. While academia emphasizes the

importance of frameworks for action, rigorous evaluation criteria, and multi-sectoral coordination (Dielini & Aksentiuk, 2024; Miklian & Barkemeyer, 2022), corporate reports tend to highlight exemplary cases and quantifiable, concrete results, without delving into the challenges or lessons learned (Miklian & Schouten, 2020). In this context, companies must strengthen their accountability, strike a clear balance between positive and negative impacts, link their management to peacebuilding initiatives, and move towards a more robust and transformative approach to CSR.

CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this study was to analyze the challenges and opportunities facing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the context of peacebuilding in Colombia. Through a systematic literature review and a critical analysis of academic and business discourses (sustainability reports), it was found that companies have significant potential to catalyze peace processes. However, structural, operational, and cultural barriers persist that prevent the consolidation of robust initiatives in this area, including limited coordination among business leaders, reluctance to participate in initiatives perceived as politically sensitive, insufficient knowledge of government regulations, and a lack of incentives to sustain participation.

Furthermore, the results show that business initiatives tend to develop in a fragmented manner and with limited scope, as many organizations still view CSR as an isolated exercise rather than a comprehensive approach linked to internal management and the context of the armed conflict in which they operate. The study also highlights the need to strengthen academic training and technical support for the private sector, so that managers recognize the strategic value of aligning their operations with peacebuilding objectives, thereby reducing fragmentation and unequal levels of commitment.

A key finding is that multinational companies, given their scale and financial capacity, should exercise greater leadership in this area. However, evidence suggests their efforts do not always translate into genuine commitment to territorial reconciliation. This underscores the urgent need for mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and measure long-term impact. Finally, a regulatory gap was identified between international standards for corporate social responsibility (CSR) and peacebuilding, and national regulations. This presents a challenge, as it currently creates ambiguities and lacks binding or clearly enforceable mechanisms in business practice.

Similarly, the analysis confirms that CSR in Colombia faces the challenge of moving beyond fragmented practices toward integrated models that incorporate community, government, and social organization participation. At the same time, strategic opportunities are emerging for companies to promote quality employment, strengthen local production chains, and contribute to the social development of the areas most affected by the armed conflict in the country. These findings reinforce the idea that companies can not only generate economic value but also become

agents of social transformation in post-conflict scenarios and, therefore, have an ethical and moral obligation to act proactively within the social fabric in which they operate.

The findings of this research carry implications for three complementary spheres. In academia, they contribute to the emerging literature on the relationship between business and peacebuilding, demonstrating that the interaction between corporate practices and reconciliation processes requires interdisciplinary approaches that integrate economics, social sciences, and peace studies. At the political level, the findings underscore the urgent need for the Congress of the Republic and other institutions to strengthen the regulation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) from a peace perspective, thereby reducing reliance on voluntary initiatives and encouraging a results-oriented commitment. Regarding business management, the study suggests that companies that invest in inclusive projects, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and civic education programs strengthen their legitimacy, reduce reputational risks, and consolidate their position as relevant actors for the country's stability. Therefore, as best practices in this area are disseminated, more organizations can commit to such actions.

Overall, the study recommends developing comparative analyses across strategic sectors, such as extractive industries, agriculture, and infrastructure, to identify variations in CSR practices and determine which strategies are replicable in different contexts. Furthermore, longitudinal research measuring the impact of business initiatives in developing areas is crucial, with an emphasis on job creation, strengthening social cohesion, and reducing community tensions. Future studies should also examine the relationship between adopting international CSR standards and their current effectiveness in local contexts, exploring how the regulatory gap affects their implementation. Finally, the study highlights the need to include state capacities to support and oversee business projects as part of a broader research agenda, since the absence of strong local institutions can limit the outcomes of private actions.

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