

## Five Factors Driving Neglected Crises

### 1 The impact of cultural, political or economic isolation

Reflections from ZOA's work in Colombia - ZOA is providing sustainable access to water for the Wayuu indigenous population



María Edilia (left) has learned how to operate the water desalination system and is one of the local operators © ZOA

Alta Guajira is home to the Wayuu, Colombia's largest indigenous group. The region has a long history of water shortages which are being exacerbated by climate change. This remote region is culturally, economically and geographically isolated from the rest of Colombia and from the world and people have little support as they struggle to adapt.

During the long civil war there was huge internal displacement and Colombia became more politically isolated with few natural ties to other countries giving support.

The Wayuu have only two sources of water and neither is safe. Some take water from open pits that fill during the short rainy season. These pits are also used by livestock and this leads to the spread of diseases which make children vulnerable to malnutrition. The area has the highest malnutrition rates in Colombia.

Others take water from the few remaining deep wells but recently these wells have become salinated and unsafe for human consumption.

ZOA is installing solar-powered water desalination plants with the capacity to transform 2,000 litres of salinated water per hour providing a sustainable source of potable water.

ZOA trains local people to operate and maintain the plants, empowering them to manage this sustainable resource at very low cost (approximately \$65 USD per month). These Water Committees are partnering with schools and developing livelihood opportunities through a cost recovery scheme. They also promote safe water use and hygiene in communities.

This innovative solution is the first in Colombia and will provide stable access to safe drinking water for over 25 years putting an end to decades of water scarcity and reducing the isolation of the people of Alta Guajira.

Often, it does not take much to achieve a significant impact in isolated areas. We believe in supporting the empowerment of communities in neglected crises through low cost, sustainable and community led solutions.