



A Community Dilemma: DDR and the changing face of violence in Colombia

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Abbreviations

ACR	Alta Consejería para la Reintegración/ Presidential High Council for Reintegration
AUC	Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia/United self-defence forces of Colombia
CBO	Community-based organization
CERAC	Centro de Recursos para el Análisis de Conflictos
CNRR	Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación/National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation
CODA	Comité Operativo de Dejación de Armas/Committee for the Laying Down of Weapons
CONPES	National Council for Economic and Social Policy
CRO	Centro de Referencia y Oportunidades/ Reference and opportunities centre
DAS	Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad/Administrative Department of Security
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
ELN	Ejército de Liberación Nacional/National Liberation Army
EPL	Ejército Popular de Liberación/Popular Liberation Army
ERPAC	Ejército Revolucionario Popular Antiterrorista Colombiano/Colombian people's revolutionary anti-terrorist army
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia/Revolutionary armed forces of Colombia
FIBS	Fondo de Inversión para Beneficio Social/Social Benefit Investment Fund
ICBF	Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar/Colombian Institute of Family Welfare
IDP	Internally displaced people
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JPL	Justice and Peace Law

MAPP-OEA	Misión de Apoyo al Proceso de Paz en Colombia de la Organización de Estados Americanos/Mission of Support to the Peace Process in Colombia of the Organization of American States
M19	Movimiento 19 de Abril/April 19 movement
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OAS	Organization of American States
PAHD	Programa de Atención Humanitaria al Desmovilizado/Humanitarian Support Programme for the Demobilized
PRVC	Programa para la Reincorporación a la Vida Civil/Programme for Reincorporation into Civilian Life
SENA	Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje/National Apprenticeship Service
SSR	Security sector reform
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UTC	Unidad de Trabajo con la Comunidad/Community Works Unit

Executive summary

Over the past decade, Colombia has stood at the forefront of the debate across Latin America, and the world, about how chronic armed violence and insurgent movements can be combated. Although the solutions the country has offered are far from being universally accepted or liked, there is no doubt that its innovations in fields such as transitional justice, counter-insurgency strategy, urban security and the fight against criminal networks in political life have been widely noted. Its programmes of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), and particularly the refitted and streamlined versions that have been put into place since 2006, have also been offered to other countries as models of how extremely violent armed groups can be rapidly dismantled and weakened, and their members reinserted into civilian life.

And yet at the same time, there is growing unease within the country over evidence that the paramilitaries who demobilized from 2003 onwards, and the revolutionary guerrilla movements that were subjected to an intense military offensive under former president Álvaro Uribe, have managed to withstand the pressure, regroup and flourish once again. On one side, there are clear signs that new illegal armed groups, also known in Colombia as *bandas criminales* (*bacrim*s), have inherited command structures and personnel from the paramilitary forces. These groups are now at the forefront of illicit activities, and are using targeted violence against civilians and community leaders in numerous regions of the country. On the other, the continuing battle against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) has not managed to extinguish these forces, whose military actions appear once again to be on the rise.

Beneath all this is a flourishing illicit economy based in large part on the cultivation and processing of coca leaves: despite years of crop eradication, drug seizures and deportation of 'kingpins' to the United States, Colombia remains the world's largest producer of cocaine.

This paper, written by researchers in the Conflict Research Unit of the Clingendael Institute and IKV Pax Christi working together under the auspices of the Dutch Peace, Security and Development Network, aims to understand the role that Colombia's DDR programmes have played over the past decade in dismantling armed groups and reintegrating their members into society, as well as their impact on the restoration of peace and security for communities and citizens.

The paper begins by exploring the long history of Colombian violence, and places the initiation of the demobilization programmes for former guerrilla members and for over 30,000 former paramilitary combatants against the background of the country's changing political and security landscape. Uribe's rise to power in 2002, and his promulgation a year later of the 'Democratic Security Policy', played a fundamentally important role in orienting these DDR policies. Whereas the programme to demobilize guerrillas became a means to extract vital

information for military use, paramilitary demobilization was designed as a quick way to reduce the extraordinary levels of violence registered at the turn of the millennium, while leaving untouched the political, economic and criminal roots of the paramilitary phenomenon.

Based on field research across the country and an extensive review of relevant literature, the paper explores how the DDR programmes were reshaped in 2006 under the aegis of the new High Council for Reintegration (ACR) in a bid to ensure that former combatants could gain suitable training, secure proper jobs, and reintegrate more smoothly into community life. Drawing on interviews with members of the international community, government officials, and analysts, as well as civil society members from some of Colombia's most violent cities and regions, the paper points to the achievements and flaws of these reforms. The reforms extended the possibilities for engagement in community life and built up the network of support services for the demobilized; however, they failed to address the hard economic realities in the country (including the consequences of the massive theft of land during the conflict), overturn business indifference to the demobilized, or rebuild social capital in communities devastated by years of conflict. Instead, they appear to have created a dependent population of ex-combatants that is locked into attending reintegration courses, shuns society, and is increasingly exposed to the temptations and violent intimidation of new criminal groups.

Achieving community security

Most importantly, Colombia's programmes of DDR have made only limited progress towards the goal of achieving genuine community security. The report explains how the reforms carried out in 2006 made significant moves towards the decentralization of management, but a number of obstacles have stood in the path of efforts to give communities greater say over how demobilization and reintegration are handled. Citizens, and particularly victims of the conflict, distrust demobilized former combatants. The former fighters feel unwelcomed by the communities they live in, and let down by the state. And the different levels of the state – municipal, regional and central – often snipe at each other instead of learning to cooperate. Bogotá and the international community tend to be particularly wary of involving local governments that are heavily infiltrated by criminal and paramilitary elements.

As a result, the goal of bringing civil society, local authorities and central government together in a harmonious process of planning and management of DDR has been thwarted. But the report stresses that community security should also be understood in a much wider sense, namely as the goal of building localities in the post-conflict period that are cohesive, peaceful and economically buoyant. DDR can, in principle, contribute to this process. Other policies, however, will play even more important roles – meaning that the priority should be to harmonize demobilization and reintegration with a bigger agenda aimed at constructing the right conditions for thriving communities by including issues such as reparation, restitution and justice.

Progress is now being made in Colombia on this wider agenda. In June this year, President Juan Manuel Santos signed the new Victims' and Land Return Law, a hugely ambitious project aiming to bring redress to four million victims of conflict since 1985. More than ever, the Colombian political establishment appears aware of the effects of a fragmented political system. There even appears to be greater interest in the possibility of sealing a peace accord with the country's revolutionary militia.

The report concludes by insisting on the need to maximize the potential in these reform processes to improve DDR and nurture secure communities. But it also recognizes that the legacy of the failures in the demobilization process must be addressed as a priority in the short and medium term. The emergence of a population of ex-combatants that is still dependent on state support - the ACR reports that 32,000 people were involved last year in one form or another of reintegration activity - and that might well revert to violence and crime if this support is withdrawn, remains a critical concern. The report argues that there is simply no possibility of a policy 'fix' here. Instead, efforts must be made to allow for much greater local freedom to innovate, as well as to manage more effectively the expectations of former fighters as they seek a way into the job market. At the same time, these reforms would be significantly enhanced by broader changes to the way central, regional and local governments coordinate their activities.

A series of other recommendations are put forward as ways to enhance the reintegration process and bridge the differences between key constituencies. These include:

- Decreasing the dependency of former combatants on both the DDR programme and more generally on a life of violence by providing social and economic alternatives.
- Removing the stigma in civil society towards ex-combatants, particularly through the redeployment of the powerful publicity machines employed to encourage demobilization from guerrilla forces.
- Adopting a proactive, locally driven approach to encouraging alternatives to violence instead of focusing solely on more active policing of ex-combatants.
- Exploring means to encourage civil society to act as a bridge between central and local levels of authority, and to participate more actively in the final stages of the reintegration process.

1. Introduction

Since the early 2000s, Colombia has undergone a very complex and lengthy Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process, tackling simultaneously the demobilization and reintegration of multiple armed groups from left and right, against a backdrop of continuing conflict and criminal activity. Paramilitary forces, responsible for the most brutal atrocities of the civil war that raged from the late 1990s, started to demobilize soon after the assumption of power in 2002 of the dissident Liberal Party politician Álvaro Uribe, heralding a sharp reduction in massacres and murders. Since 2005, some of their leaders and political allies have been tried under the Justice and Peace Law (JPL), a groundbreaking piece of transitional justice legislation in the Colombian context that grants partial amnesties in exchange for truth-telling and return of stolen property to victims.

At the same time, Uribe's government spearheaded, with significant US support, a military offensive against the Marxist rebels of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* - FARC) and the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional* - ELN). Both soon retreated to the most remote parts of the country, leading to increased security on the country's roads and steep declines in the rates of kidnapping. Demobilization packages tailored to deserting guerrilla soldiers, and used to extract valuable military information from these ex-combatants, have played a major role in weakening both forces.

Both processes were largely domestic affairs - as opposed to many other DDR processes - although support was offered by foreign donors and multilateral organizations. Their achievements have been widely disseminated by the Colombian government, and offered to the world as a model for all DDR processes.¹ Former members of Uribe's government, which left office in 2010 to be replaced by a new administration headed by Juan Manuel Santos (Uribe's former defence minister) stoutly defend the achievements of these demobilization processes. Whereas the paramilitary initiative is regarded as an essential part of restoring public order and legitimate government across the country, the programme for guerrilla deserters has been presented as a highly effective part of a general counter-insurgency strategy. A certain amount of turbulence and of setbacks in this process, these supporters say, merely reflects the huge security challenges that prevailed at the tail-end of a failed peace process with the guerrillas in 2002.

¹ Notably during a conference on DDR organized by the Colombian government and held in Cartagena, Colombia in May 2009, the *Congreso Internacional de Desarme, Desmovilización y Reintegración*.

Signs of exhaustion

By the start of Santos' new administration, however, evidence had accumulated of the failures of the DDR programmes to achieve a permanent reduction in Colombia's proclivity to armed violence. From 2008 onwards, a host of key indicators of insecurity have risen once again; very sharply in the case of the cities of Medellín and Cali, where murder rates have spiralled upwards (Acero Velásquez 2011). Despite the blows inflicted by government forces, the FARC continues to operate and appears to have consolidated in the far-flung west of the country, and in the Pacific regions of Nariño and Cauca, where it is deeply involved in coca cultivation. More significantly, new criminal groups that have drawn on the human resources and networks of the old paramilitary and other demobilized combatants have sprouted across the country, driving sharp rises in public insecurity, continued killings of community leaders and occasional conflicts with state forces. Cutting-edge research into the trends in crime and violence in Colombia suggests that illegal armed groups are still active in 600 out of the country's 1,101 municipalities, with almost half of those municipalities containing new criminal or neo-paramilitary groups (Corporación Arco Iris 2010, p. 6 and p. 37).

Meanwhile, the process of reintegrating former combatants into normal civilian life has reached a pivotal phase. Reforms carried out in 2006, leading to the creation of the High Council for Reintegration (*Alta Consejería para la Reintegración* - ACR), rekindled expectations in DDR and reoriented the process towards a business-friendly strategy of securing employment for ex-combatants. Reforms also ensured extensive autonomy for programmes carried out in big cities, above all Bogotá and Medellín, while in 2008 a new scheme of community reintegration was introduced with the aim of bringing together ex-combatants and civilians, including victims of the conflict, in programmes aimed at improving the quality of local life for all sides.

At the same time, it is now clear that many former fighters are stuck in the various layers of the reintegration programme, with few chances of getting decent licit work or being fully accepted into society. Criminal activity remains a constant temptation: despite years of coca eradication programmes, Colombia is still the world's number one producer of cocaine, producing about half of the total of 865 tonnes (UNODC 2010, p. 66). The diversion of funds from municipalities or through other rackets is rife in various parts of the country, and illegal armed groups often actively try to recruit ex-combatants. Those who want to avoid returning to illegal activities must often deal with threats and intimidation. The number of murders of demobilized combatants, particularly former paramilitaries, show how perilous and vulnerable the return to civilian life can be. For many, the only resort has been to retreat from society and adopt a shifting existence, moving from one programme in one town to the next in search of fresh opportunities.

The research programme

The Conflict Research Unit of the Clingendael Institute and IKV Pax Christi have explored the new tensions in the reintegration programme, and the challenges that policy-makers now face in Colombia. They did so through a focus on one overarching theme: the way DDR links up with community security, and how the role played by the community may be reinforced so as to make reintegration a more sustainable proposition for ex-combatants. At the heart of the research were two questions: what are the linkages between community security and DDR in Colombia, and what lessons can be learned from these linkages for the effectiveness and sustainability of DDR programmes?

This report is based on an extensive literature review and wide-ranging fieldwork in Colombia, including missions by two researchers to the country. One researcher travelled to the regions most affected by demobilization, where interviews focused on civil society² and local officials engaged in reintegration; and the other to Bogotá, where senior policy-makers, representatives of the international community and security experts were interviewed. Both researchers were assisted throughout by local consultants working with the *Centro de Recursos para el Análisis de Conflictos* (CERAC).

The project was part of a multi-country research programme by the Dutch Peace, Security and Development Network into community security and DDR. The programme has included a desk study into the theoretical linkages between community security and DDR, on the basis of which case studies were carried out in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and South Sudan as well as Colombia.³ Starting from the principal questions cited above, the research aims to look at the contribution of communities to the success of DDR in two interrelated ways. First, it asks how DDR programming, which tends to be a technical exercise run out of capital cities, can make better use of community participation and innovation in the *process* of achieving its objectives. As a result, this report looks at the way community involvement has been handled in Colombian policy formulation, and seeks out the voices of civil society actors, ex-combatants and local officials in order to establish what the role of communities has been in practice.

Second, community security can be conceived rather more broadly than as a simple component of the DDR process. For reintegration to achieve the objectives it sets itself, it must also feed into the consolidation of communities that can resolve disputes peacefully, and that offer economic opportunities to their members. This can be termed the *end-state* of community security. Obviously, DDR is just one – possibly small – part of the generation of such collective living spaces: the new Law of Victims and the Return of Land, signed by President Santos on 10 June, is perhaps the most significant attempt so far by the state to address the legacies of war in

² Civil society defined broadly includes charities, non-governmental development, human rights, and peace organizations, community groups, women's organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations (such as lawyers' groups), trade unions, social movements, coalitions and advocacy groups. It also includes, in this paper, individuals such as journalists, and Afro-Colombian, indigenous and peasant community leaders.

³ See, for reports and background of this network: <http://www.psdnetwork.nl/>

Colombia's communities. Economic and security policy, the construction of the political system and the role of globalization also play huge roles in defining the general wellbeing of communities.

If the DDR process is to be something more than a short-term, stop-gap measure with no impact on sustainable peace, then policy-makers and civil society must seriously consider how it can feed into the achievement of these wider goals.

Structure of the report

The report seeks to answer these questions by looking at both Colombia's DDR policy and the role of communities as part of this policy, as well as at the perceptions that different sections of communities have of the reintegration process.

Chapter two begins by offering a panorama of Colombia's political and security situation, and explains the origin of the DDR programmes as well as the challenges they now face. Chapter three explores in detail the policy framework affecting former combatants, and identifies a number of contradictions in programming as well as the particular difficulties faced in addressing issues of employment, security and interaction with communities and local authorities. Chapter four takes the research down to the grassroots level, exploring how key actors have perceived these initiatives, before identifying some issues that now stand on the wider agenda of consolidating peaceful communities.

A chapter of conclusions and recommendations offers a synthesis of the main points discussed in this report, and a number of suggestions for future reintegration strategy in Colombia. Above all, it stresses that the main flaws now affecting DDR converge on one point: communities are not just an accessory to a successful plan to whittle down the country's armed groups and reduce high levels of violence, but are at the very centre of whether this objective will come to fruition or not.

2. The background to Colombia's DDR programmes

Colombia and its conflict: the complexity of decades of violence

Colombia's history has been tainted by extreme violence for the past 150 years. The current era of armed conflict started with a period known as *La Violencia*, a confrontation between the followers of Colombia's two major parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives, from 1948 to 1953. This conflict began in the wake of the murder of the leftist politician Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, after which Liberal and Communist groups engaged Conservatives in a ruthless nationwide war. In order to defend themselves, the rural population started to carry arms and establish self-defence groups. This period of conflict finally ended with an agreement between the Liberal and the Conservative parties to alternate power every four years, in an arrangement known as the National Front. Although the liberal armed groups laid down their arms, many of those who demobilized were later killed, and the majority of people who followed the Communist Party remained armed (Koth 2005, p. 9). Still, the broad political set-up ensured relative stability until the mid-1970s.

However, the alternation of power excluded large parts of society from participation in political life: large sections of the (poor) urban masses, political movements other than the Liberals and Conservatives, and the rural population. This structural exclusion drove a violent struggle for political transformation, in particular from leftist armed groups such as the guerilla movement of the ELN, the FARC and the urban-based M19 (*Movimiento 19 de Abril*).⁴ They were opposed by the Colombian state, later joined by paramilitary factions.

From the 1970s onwards, organized criminal groups, which profited from extortion rackets and the booming drug trade, evolved rapidly from smaller units into hierarchical and centralized cartel structures (Kenney 2009), adding to an already complex constellation of armed factions. Paramilitaries were also involved in these criminal activities as a means to earn revenue, and as an effect of their roles as protection forces for producers and traffickers of narcotics. Guerilla groups later joined the lucrative criminal business as well. As a result, armed conflict and organized crime were intertwined, blurring the boundary between political contestation and illicit accumulation of wealth.

From 1988 on, the levels of violence intensified over a 15-year period, accelerating from 1996 until reaching a peak in 2003 (Restrepo et al. 2006, pp. 519-523 ; Granada, Restrepo and Vargas, 2009, p. 29). The state proved incapable of restoring order, protecting the civilian population, or providing justice and security. In effect, it withdrew from large swathes of the national territory, and the void was filled with a struggle for control by other armed actors in the conflict: guerillas

⁴ Although these groups shared the same ideology as the Communist Party, it needs to be pointed out that these new guerilla movements were not necessarily related to the earlier Communist Party, which made an effort to distance itself from these groups, in particular the FARC.

and paramilitary groups, both of which were allied to organized criminal activities. The civilian population was subjected to gross human rights violations by all sides, although there is no doubt that paramilitary groups were particularly notorious in this respect: after their federation in the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* - AUC), they became the main source of atrocities against civilians.

At the same time, they also made major inroads into formal state structures, establishing alliances with security forces, taking control of a large number of local authorities (whose resources they milked), and consolidating their power in national political life. The 'parapolitics' scandal, which erupted in 2006, has resulted in judicial proceedings against over one-third of the 260 representatives in Congress, 324 military officers and 109 public officials, among others, on charges of colluding with the paramilitary militia (López 2010, p. 30; HRW 2010,p.24).

Democratic security

The election of Álvaro Uribe as president in 2002 marked a major shift in the Colombian state's approach towards armed violence. Under his 'Democratic Security Policy', Uribe advocated the consolidation of state control over the entirety of Colombia's territory (Colombian government 2003, p. 15), protection of law-abiding citizens, elimination of drug production and trade, and transparency in the management of state resources. With the backing of the United States (which had begun in 1999 through Plan Colombia, initially designed purely as a counter-narcotic strategy), the Colombian government invested heavily in its capacity to combat armed factions and criminal groups. Uribe and the Colombian military command reoriented Plan Colombia away from a purely counter-narcotic strategy towards an intensified military offensive against rebel militia, forcing the guerrillas out of urban areas and into the most remote regions of the country (Marks 2010). At the same time, in July 2003 an agreement to demobilize the paramilitaries was reached with the AUC.

The military and to a lesser extent the national police have received plentiful fresh resources, in what could be called a security sector reform (SSR) process, albeit one with very few changes to institutional culture or civilian oversight (Grabendorff 2009). Through its policy of 'territorial consolidation', the state has moved into areas formerly controlled by guerrillas, initially through a purely military presence aimed at counter-insurgency, but followed later by the gradual reintroduction of social services and the establishment of civilian control (Isacson and Poe 2009). At the same time, the demobilization of the AUC and a tough stance towards its stranglehold on local governments and political life⁵ were meant to enhance the authority of the central state. The supposition of Uribe's administration was that a stronger state with greater territorial presence would also lead to more security for the Colombian people.

⁵ There is debate over whether this clean-up of political bodies was an intentional effect of government policy or the result of an active judicial system. Parties representing paramilitary interests systematically supported the Uribe government throughout its mandate (López 2010, pp. 71-72).

The Democratic Security Policy heralded a sharp reduction in violence against civilians. Following the demobilization of the AUC, the number of kidnappings, homicides and other atrocities dropped dramatically from the days when Colombia was the most violent country in Latin America, with the murder rate halved in the period from 2002 to 2008, while the frequency of kidnapping dwindled (CNRR 2010, pp. 14-15). Roads have become safer – it was notoriously dangerous to drive outside Colombia’s big cities around the year 2000 – and guerrillas have suffered some major defeats, and been driven towards a strategic retreat in the country’s most inaccessible regions.

However, the sustainability of this reduction in violence is far from guaranteed. Although demobilization can be shown to have dampened crime rates for a host of serious offences, foremost among them murder and robbery, this effect starts to wane over time as new forms of organized violence emerge (Restrepo and Muggah, 2009). Moreover, even though the paramilitary structures were dismantled, new illegal armed groups (referred to officially as *bandas criminales emergentes*, or *bacrim*s) are on the rise. The violence associated with these groups includes forced displacement (particularly in the coastal regions of Córdoba and Nariño), massacres and targeted homicides – a total of 40 human rights activists and leaders of displaced communities are reported to have been killed last year. Reports from the end of 2010 indicate that levels of these types of violence are climbing once again, although they remain under the high levels witnessed at the start of the preceding decade.⁶

The state officially recognizes the existence of six of these new criminal groups: Los Rastrojos, Los Paisas, Urabá (or Urabeños), Ejército Revolucionario Popular Antiterrorista Colombiano (ERPAC), Renacer and Los Machos.⁷ There are widespread reports of other criminal groups, including one called the *Águilas Negras* (Black Eagles), but it is unclear whether this is an actual organization, or a label used by several distinct groups in order to spread public fear (HRW 2010, p. 36). A growing number of experts, including groups such as Human Rights Watch as well as the National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation (CNRR) – a standing state body created by the 2005 Justice and Peace Law – regard these groups as successors to or even direct continuations of paramilitary structures, and thus the result of a flawed or incomplete DDR process (HRW 2010; CNRR 2010, p. 13 and ch. 4). According to the monitoring mission of the Organization of American States, recent reports point to a major effort by new criminal groups to enlist demobilized paramilitaries, “the main target for recruitment” (MAPP-OEA 2010, p. 18).

⁶ ‘Bandas criminales, modelo 2010’, VerdadAbierta.com, 09/12/10. See http://www.verdadabierta.com/index.php?option=com_content&id=2898.

⁷ All six are listed in the decree establishing the Inter-institutional Commission against Criminal Gangs and Networks, issued 01/07/10 by the Colombian government.

The government characterizes emerging criminal groups as a new phenomenon, and denies anything more than tenuous links to earlier armed groups: police chiefs have stated that only 12 per cent of the membership of these groups are demobilized paramilitaries.⁸ However, according to a US embassy cable from November 2004 published by Wikileaks, Uribe “speculated that splinter groups of narco-trafficking organizations will follow in the wake of paramilitaries and observed that destroying these groups will require a military solution”.⁹

Meanwhile, the process of establishing a state presence in areas regained from the guerillas remains slow and cumbersome, and the armed forces are still engaged in active combat with these groups in several parts of the country, as became evident in the air and land strike in September 2010 that led to the death of the FARC military commander Víctor Julio Suárez Rojas, alias ‘Mono Jojoy’, along with around 20 colleagues from the FARC. This attack took place in La Macarena, a mountain range that is one of two main areas chosen by the Colombian government for the roll-out of ‘territorial consolidation’.

Current security conditions in Colombia

In the absence of any clear reduction in the illicit economies which, over decades, have shaped the actions and resources of armed groups, it is not altogether surprising that a resurgence of violence should have occurred. It is also notable that the areas where new forms of criminality and insecurity are flourishing include traditional centres of paramilitary activity (the cities of Medellín and Barrancabermeja, for example¹⁰), alongside remote coastal or border regions where narco-trafficking and guerrilla activities have concentrated after being expelled from more central regions. These include the Pacific Coast, particularly Nariño and Chocó, as well as the Atlantic Coast and a number of other peripheral and sparsely populated regions, such as Meta and Putumayo (MAPP-OEA 2011, p. 4; CNRR 2010, pp. 56–59).

Moreover, the reduction in armed violence that followed the demobilization of the AUC has not fundamentally changed some people’s perception of their own security, particularly in areas that were former centres of paramilitary activity (HRW, 2010, p. 39). One symptom of this is Colombia’s continuing humanitarian crisis: the country has the second-largest internally displaced population in the world, with at least 3.6 million people displaced by insecurity, according to government figures.¹¹ Efforts to get people back on to their land have been stymied by the slow progress of cases of ex-paramilitary leaders being heard under the JPL, the huge difficulties in establishing rightful ownership due to the opaque circumstances surrounding the

⁸ ‘12 por ciento de las Bacrim son desmovilizados: Policía Nacional’, *Semana*, 08/01/10.

⁹ ‘Uribe predicted rise of neo-paramilitaries: Wikileaks’, *Colombia Reports*, 17/02/11. See

<http://colombiareports.com/colombia-news/news/14441-uribe-predicted-neo-paramilitaries-in-colombia.html>

¹⁰ Barrancabermeja, a city of 200,000 people in the province of Santander, is the municipality with the highest risk of violence against demobilized people, according to the security unit of the ACR. Interview Bogotá, 10/09/10.

¹¹ Non-governmental organizations put the figure at 5.2 million.

original theft, and the prevailing fear of violent retribution that is still to be found in numerous communities.

Killings of leaders of displaced communities remain common, and forced displacement is reported to have intensified on the Pacific coast, in the Atlantic coastal region of Córdoba, and the central regions of Magdalena and Cauca (HRW 2010, pp. 49–51; CNRR 2010, p. 15). Demobilized combatants face threats and intimidation, as well as re-recruitment into criminal groups (see below). Meanwhile, the Democratic Security Policy has itself contributed to the fear felt by certain communities: for instance the notorious scandal of ‘false positives’ (*falsos positivos*) refers to extrajudicial killings by security forces of more than 1,100 civilians between 2001 and 2009 (CINEP 2009, pp. 1–3). These victims were later reported as guerrilla fighters killed in action so that the security forces could inflate their success rates and claim financial bonuses.

The new criminal groups: an initial assessment

The new criminal groups appear to be at the heart of organized violence, and therefore it is worth briefly considering these groups’ chief characteristics. One of the most salient is their extreme fragmentation. The new groups appear to have derived, to varying degrees, from the paramilitary movement, with some of them emerging as substitutes for the vanished AUC, such as ERPAC,¹² or the Medellín-based Oficina de Envigado (which emerged out of older criminal structures), while others have more clearly gravitated around the remnants of the paramilitary, such as Los Paisas and Los Rastojos (CNRR 2010, p. 11).

Another important feature of these groups is that they have woven a huge variety of local alliances (ICG 2010, p. 10), including pacts with local guerrillas (who protect coca production), and variable levels of capture of municipalities and collusion with police forces and the military.¹³ Tactical diversity is also apparent, with some groups preferring to maintain a low profile while others are uniformed and highly conspicuous. Their objectives are also diverse, though some common characteristics can be found. One recent study indicated that, of 26 groups across the country, all were dedicated to organized crime, and a majority sought to control local populations through threats and fear – thus explaining the continuing murders of community leaders. However, only a minority shared the traditional paramilitary objective of counter-insurgency, and only 7 out of the 26 sought to seize control of state institutions for private benefit (Granada et al. 2009). Current estimates by Colombia’s interior and justice minister furthermore indicate that in 60 municipalities spread over 20 of the country’s 32

¹² Which is sometimes called the ‘Popular Revolutionary Anti-Communist Army of Colombia’ and at other times the ‘Poplar Revolutionary Anti-Terrorist Army of Colombia’.

¹³ In the region of Bajo Cauca, attacks by groups against the local police force have even been reported. Interview with representative of the international community, Bogotá, 31/08/10.

departments, the groups are trying to influence the local and departmental elections that will be held in October 2011.¹⁴

Given the extreme diversity of these groups and the various sources of potential income, it is no surprise that control of the criminal economy in Colombia remains in flux. Criminal groups continue to fight one another for dominance over the main sources of illicit income, and there is speculation that a smaller cabal of organizations, possibly numbering as few as four, are seizing primary control over these income sources. A number of conflict experts in Colombia argue that this 'reconcentration' may end up by reproducing the sort of politically influential vertical cartels that became notorious during the 1980s drug trade boom.¹⁵

Guerrilla activity

At the same time, Colombia is still affected by other sources of conflict. As mentioned earlier, military offensives such as 'Operation Sodom' – the name given to the successful strike against 'Mono Jojoy' – continue against a backdrop of low-intensity warfare by guerrillas. The month preceding the military attack against the FARC's senior military command campaign saw almost 40 military and police officers killed in a number of attacks, including eight police officers in a raid on barracks in the Putumayo region close to the border with Ecuador. In the 'consolidation' zones, meanwhile, the situation is still volatile, and the planned introduction of civilian state control is not complete. Overall, Colombian authorities have reported a rise in guerrilla activity since 2008 (*Semana* 2011a).

One reason behind the longevity and resilience of the guerrilla movement, in spite of the recent military onslaught, has been their heavy engagement in narcotics production and trade, as well as other criminal activities such as racketeering. For example, the FARC's revenue from the drug trade has been estimated to be as high as US\$500 million per year.¹⁶ Thus, their interest in fighting the state is no longer purely political, but has also become a matter of controlling territory and population to protect their resource base – although it should be emphasized that their entry into the coca trade was driven in large part by circumstance rather than design, and that the FARC's revolutionary ideology remains essential to the group's identity (López 2010, p. 176; Felbab-Brown 2009, p. 6). In this complex situation, where distinct ideological, financial and communitarian motives are interwoven, left-wing armed actors form alliances with new criminal groups where this is considered profitable: in the words of one UN official, "all combinations [of armed groups] are possible".¹⁷ The guerrilla's linkages with such groups in

¹⁴ Published on Colombia Reports website, <http://colombiareports.com/colombia-news/news/14357-neo-paramilitary-groups-increase-control-over-countryside-govt.html> (accessed 28/02/11)

¹⁵ Interviews with conflict experts, Bogotá, 7 and 9/09/10.

¹⁶ However, this estimate is high, and other estimates are (much) lower. For example, according to the Congressional Research Service: "The United Nations estimates that the FARC's average annual income is \$342 million of which \$204 million comes from the drug trade. However, the Colombian Finance Ministry reports FARC revenue in 2003 at \$77.16 million, of which drug trafficking accounted for \$11.54 million" (Veillette 2005). The Colombian weekly magazine *Semana* estimated the income for the FARC during 2003 at 23,000 million pesos, about US\$11 million.

¹⁷ Interview, Bogotá, 03/09/10.

fact date from before demobilization, when the paramilitaries were assuming greater control over trafficking routes while the FARC controlled zones of coca production, and a certain amount of cooperation between the two became a central part of the drug business (Felbab-Brown 2009, p. 5).

In sum, Colombia has made great progress since the nadir of violence a decade ago: official murder rates in 2010 were the lowest for 25 years. However, these figures have been contested, while a host of other crimes and acts of violence, including massacres, cases of blackmail, robbery and sexual abuse, have all risen in recent years (Acero Velásquez 2011; *Semana* 2011a). Security conditions remain extraordinarily complex, fragmented and fluid, and the level of danger faced by communities and individuals in Colombia is alarming and unpredictable.

DDR in a time of conflict: 1980–2006

Since the 1980s, and throughout Colombia's phases of conflict, four DDR processes have taken place (CNRR, 2010, pp. 8–9). The first was a general amnesty for guerrillas in 1982; the second, a DDR process for a number of guerilla groups (including the M19 and the *Ejército Popular de Liberación* – EPL, or Popular Liberation Army) that reached a peace agreement with the government in the first half of the 1990s.

A total of 5,700 people demobilized from these relatively small groups, which converted into political parties and generated through their former members an impressive array of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in peace and conflict issues. Their members were reintegrated into civilian life with the help of state social and economic support, although there were no processes of reconciliation and reparation for victims. The limited numbers of ex-combatants, and the fact that their political goals could be pursued via the democratic process, ensured that these processes were fairly successful. It should be added, however, that around 1,000 of the demobilized people were killed, some of them by the FARC.¹⁸

The third DDR process is the so-called 'individual' programme. Running since 1994, this programme focuses on individual deserters from the guerilla movement, and to a more limited extent from other illegal armed groups that have not signed up to the 'collective' DDR initiative. The individual programme is first and foremost a counter-insurgency strategy:¹⁹ by tempting guerrilla members, along with their families, with the prospect of civilian reintegration and return to peacetime activities, the authorities aim to sap the insurgency's strength while obtaining vital intelligence for use in future offensives.

¹⁸ Interview with DDR expert and former guerrilla member, Bogotá, 08/09/10. The FARC accused those who had demobilized of betraying the revolutionary cause.

¹⁹ This interpretation of the programme was echoed by a former senior official in the Defence Ministry and a former presidential candidate. Interviews, Bogotá, 2–3/09/10.

The arsenal of public relations activities and material used to spread the message to FARC and ELN units, including special fairs, the production of CDs and stickers, the aerial distribution of leaflets to areas where the militia has concentrated and the production of slick television advertisements, shows the importance that the military and political leaders have given to this programme.²⁰ Meanwhile, by mid-2010 a total of 29 billion pesos, or around €11 million, had been paid out to almost 5,000 demobilized guerrilla combatants in return for strategic military information.²¹

The demobilization route taken by deserters has been standardized. Each combatant who decides to demobilize can report to any civil authority (including religious ones), which are then obliged to refer them to the nearest military unit (or either the National Police or the Army). Once transferred, they are registered, hand over their weapons, and enter the *Programa de Atención Humanitaria al Desmovilizado* (the Humanitarian Care Programme for the Demobilized, or PAHD). Under this scheme, they receive housing, food, healthcare, and clothing. They are moved to so-called *Hogares de Paz* (Houses of Peace) located in Colombia's biggest cities,²² where they stay until their membership of an armed group and rank is checked by authorities.

If this process is successful, they receive certification as an ex-combatant from the *Comité Operativo de Dejación de Armas* (the Committee for the Laying Down of Weapons, or CODA), part of the Defence Ministry. This signals their shift into the reinsertion and reintegration phase of the DDR process, which up until 2006 was run by the *Programa para la Reincorporación a la Vida Civil* (Programme for Reincorporation into Civilian Life, PRVC, part of the Ministry of Interior and Justice). The programme included healthcare, education and support for economic reintegration in the form of a start-up capital of 8 million Colombian pesos (approximately €3,000), which could be used to start up a business or finance a training course, as well as allowances of 537,000 pesos a month for a maximum of 24 months (Méndez and Rivas 2008, p. 11; Beltrán Moreno 2009, p. 35).

Since 2006 the reintegration programme has been managed by the *Alta Consejería Presidencial para la Reintegración* (Presidential High Council for Reintegration, ACR), whose operations are discussed in detail in the next chapter. Between 2002 and 2010, a total of 22,260 people are reported to have demobilized through this programme, including in their number former members of the FARC, ELN, dissident guerrilla groups and members of the parts of the AUC

²⁰ Interview with various representatives of the PAHD (Humanitarian Support Programme for the Demobilized), 10/09/10.

²¹ Ibid. It is important to note that these payments, or *bonificaciones*, are assessed according to the information handed over, such as whether it leads to the freeing of hostages, the discovery of an arms haul, or the recovery of explosive material.

²² President Uribe's administration made an explicit decision to concentrate demobilized members of the FARC and ELN in big cities so as to provide anonymity and job opportunities. Interview with former senior official from the Defence Ministry, 02/09/10. See also the detailed descriptions of the challenges faced by these former guerrilla fighters in IKV Pax Christi 2006.

that did not demobilize through the collective programme (see below).²³ A number of civil society groups, including most prominently Manos por La Paz, is currently campaigning for this programme to be extended to guerrillas now held in Colombian jails.²⁴

Paramilitary demobilization

Lastly, starting in 2002 and officially terminating in 2006, Colombia saw a fourth and much larger process of DDR: the collective demobilization of the paramilitary forces. This began with a paramilitary ceasefire in 2002, and rapidly moved into demobilization and disarmament, formally on the basis of a one-page peace agreement signed by both sides in Santa Fé de Ralito on 15 July 2003.²⁵ The legal basis for this demobilization was problematic, since there was no law to protect the rights of the victims of paramilitary violence at the start of the process, and the preconditions for a demobilization process – above all a total ceasefire – were never fully met (Koth, 2005, p. 27).

The Justice and Peace Law of 2005, also known as Law 975, eventually established a legal framework on the basis of other transitional justice processes, with the aim of encouraging truth-telling by giving ex-combatants the possibility of commuted jail sentences in return for a full and frank confession of the crimes they committed and the return of stolen property.²⁶ Although Law 975 is a break with blanket amnesties in the past, its implementation has been hampered by insufficient funds and manpower. According to former interior and justice minister Carlos Holguin Sardi, the law “is difficult to understand, even for Colombians”.²⁷

However, the initial absence of a proper legal framework and the lack of any clear preconditions for a paramilitary group’s demobilization – not least an almost total lack of communication with local authorities in places where the demobilization was to take place – meant that process received extremely limited international support at first (Koth, 2005, p. 27). The only major international backing in the earliest ceremonies, during which paramilitary units handed over their arms in locations around the country, came from the International Organization for Migration (IOM),²⁸ albeit only at the explicit request of the government. Shortly afterwards, at the start of 2004, the Organization of American States (OAS) established a monitoring mission, the *Misión de Apoyo al Proceso de Paz en Colombia de la Organización de Estados*

²³ Figures from the PAHD, September 2010.

²⁴ Interview with Manos por la Paz, Bogotá, 31/08/10. According to this group, the vast majority of FARC inmates wish to leave the guerrilla organization.

²⁵ The text (in Spanish) of this agreement can be found on the Conciliation Resources website: <http://www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/colombia/spanish/acuerdo-santafederalito.php>

²⁶ See Congreso de Colombia, 25/07/05. Ley 975 de 2005. “Por lo cual se dictan disposiciones para la reincorporación de miembros de grupos armados organizados al margen de la ley, que contribuyan de manera efectiva a la consecución de la paz nación y se dictan otras disposiciones para acuerdos humanitarios.” Diario oficial 45.980. For the question of the ‘trade-off’ between justice and peace in the case of Colombia, see: <http://www.ictj.org/en/where/region2/514.html>

²⁷ <http://wikileaks.ch/cable/2006/11/06BOGOTÁ10294.html>

²⁸ The IOM had been working with government authorities in support of children and displaced people. Its primary responsibility in the demobilization process was to create a database with the identities of the ex-combatants. Interview with representative of international community in Bogotá, 07/09/10.

Americanos (MAPP-OEA) (Koth 2005, p. 27), which remains the most regular source of reporting on the state of the DDR process. Once Law 975 had been adopted, international donors became more willing to support the process.

All in all, between 2003 and 2006, 31,671 AUC members are reported to have formally demobilized and handed over 18,000 weapons (CNRR 2010, p. 17), in ceremonies conducted for 39 AUC groups (so-called *Bloques* or *Frentes*) at designated demobilization sites. The process was led by the then High Commissioner for Peace (*Alto Comisionado para la Paz*), Luis Carlos Restrepo, and comprised three phases: 1) awareness-raising and preparation for demobilization of the ex-combatants; 2) assembly at a demobilization site, where each ex-combatant formally made known his wish to be demobilized to CODA, after which his status as an ex-combatant would be verified; and 3) formal demobilization and the start of the reintegration process, once CODA certification and formal status as an ex-combatant was granted (Koth 2005; CNRR 2010, pp. 16–17; Porch and Rasmussen 2008).²⁹

Equipped with CODA status, the demobilized paramilitary member could enter the reinsertion and reintegration phase, run by the High Commission for Peace in cooperation with the Interior Ministry's PRVC programme. These demobilized paramilitaries received similar benefits, in terms of education, healthcare and support for economic reintegration, as the individual demobilized, although their start-up capital was much lower (2 million pesos rather than 8 million), and would only be awarded to ex-combatants taking part in collective economic projects that also included local community members and victims (including displaced people) (Méndez and Rivas, 2008, p. 16). Furthermore, the monthly stipend to support their reintegration was also lower, standing at 358,000 pesos (approximately €150), although the collective programme did not insist on attendance at reintegration activities.

Challenges for the DDR process until 2006

Flawed demobilization

Officially the collective demobilization process brought an end to paramilitarism in Colombia. It did, however, face major challenges. First, there has been lively debate over the number of weapons handed in – which is one way, albeit highly contested, of measuring the effectiveness of DDR.³⁰ Some argue that compared with earlier DDR processes in Colombia, as well as other experiences across the world, the number is quite high, as was the quality of the weapons

²⁹ Under-age combatants would follow a different path, and be taken care of by the Colombian Institute for Family Welfare.

³⁰ Measuring the 'success' of disarmament by numbers of weapons handed in is problematic, because the numbers themselves do not say much, except when compared with the numbers of weapons in circulation, the quality of the weapons handed in, and the rates of re-armament – all of which are difficult to assess. Even when this is done, however, such numbers say very little about the success of DDR as a whole, because they do not give any indication of whether ex-combatants were sustainably reintegrated, or whether security as perceived by people increased. The same goes for measuring effectiveness by looking at numbers of demobilized. These issues are part of a more technical debate on the effectiveness of DDR programmes in the Colombian context.

(Spagat and Restrepo 2008). Others, however, point out that arms haul was low in relation to the number of demobilized (Randall 2006, p. 12) or in comparison with the number of weapons estimated to have been in circulation.³¹ This goes to show that disarmament measured in numbers seems to have been incomplete and, in any case, is an incredibly complicated process in a (post-)conflict setting such as Colombia.

Second, and more importantly, there was controversy over the number of demobilized fighters (CNRR 2010, p. 18). Before the process began, the total number of AUC members was estimated at between 10,900 and 20,000 (Porch and Rasmussen 2008, p. 528). But at the end, over 30,000 had passed through the programme. Some government representatives, notably High Commissioner Restrepo, tried to explain away the difference by saying that the higher number included not only fighters, but also supporters and collaborators, such as suppliers, drivers and informants, whom the paramilitaries decided to demobilize as well.³²

A rather different account emerges from the confessions of former members of the paramilitary, as well as the reports of MAPP-OEA (CNRR 2010, p. 18). These suggest that the numbers were artificially inflated by last-minute negotiations and deals, including the purchase by narco-traffickers of entire paramilitary units as a means to seek legal protection, or the filling of units with new members so as to secure more subsidies from the state; this last practice appears to have been particularly common in Medellín and the north-eastern region of César (Interamerican Commission on Human Rights 2007, p. 5).

Early signs that the demobilization process was being manipulated for financial gain or legal protection came alongside evidence that key parts of the paramilitary chain of command were not taking part in the process. These concerns pointed in particular to the mid-level of paramilitary structures, which in some cases remained intact, assumed control over illicit markets in their areas, and have since gone on to compete for larger shares of Colombia's criminal economy. Two prominent examples include the *Bloque de Contrainsurgencia Wayú*, in the frontier region of La Guajira, and a similar front in the Montes de María, on the country's Atlantic coast (Granada et al 2009, pp. 473–474).

Moreover, no broader institutional or economic reform accompanied the processes of collective and individual demobilization. As a result, residual paramilitary structures could rapidly recruit large numbers of demobilized combatants through the help of personal contacts and because many of the recruits were driven by economic necessity. According to one DDR expert,

³¹ One of the leaders of the AUC is known to have illegally imported at least 15,000 guns, which were distributed among only three of the AUC's *bloques*. See: <http://www.verdadabierta.com/victimarios/3259-los-15-mil-fusiles-de-vicente-castano>

³² Recent reports have also indicated that the problem of 'false' demobilizations was an issue not only in the paramilitary demobilization process but also in that of the guerrillas. The former High Commissioner for Peace was accused of claiming to have demobilized a FARC block consisting of 66 members, while in fact recruiting people and buying arms for them to give up, in order to be able to show a successful FARC demobilization. See: <http://www.verdadabierta.com/la-historia/periodo4/entrega-de-bienes-de-victimarios/3062-investigacion-a-luis-carlos-restrepo-por-supuesta-falsa-desmovilizacion-en-2006>

300 members of the 2,000 demobilized members of the *Bloque Central Bolívar* from Medellín returned to organized crime within three days of their disarmament.³³

Underlying these early flaws in the DDR process has been a systematic failure to address the links between the paramilitary movement and the illicit economies that have long flourished in Colombia. Far from undermining these sources of wealth, collective DDR was shaped at the outset by the desire of a number of paramilitary leaders to preserve and expand their riches, and if possible convert them into legitimate assets. These ambitions spurred the demise of the more political elements in the paramilitary movement – AUC leader Carlos Castaño, a radical proponent of counter-insurgency, was killed in 2004 – and have over recent years driven an intense period of criminal reorganization involving rapid movement and intense competition to wrest control over lucrative ventures (Toledo Peace Centre 2010, part II). Furthermore, unlike the demobilizations of the 1980s and early 1990s, the former paramilitary and guerrilla combatants have shown no interest in organizing themselves in the context of civil society, or in achieving any transparent collective representation in political life. For some observers of the process, these initial conditions have proved to be long-lasting and indelible sources of weakness.³⁴

Programme weaknesses

In terms of programme design and implementation, the PRVC's reintegration package for the individually and the collectively demobilized also faced many challenges. The programme focused heavily on economic reintegration, on the assumption that offering alternative livelihoods to ex-combatants would ensure their full return to civilian life. However, the results proved disappointing. In the individual reintegration programme, the programme's method of disbursing start-up capital to every ex-combatant – regardless of business plans or entrepreneurial talent – did not take into account the fact that not all ex-combatants have the required knowledge and skills to run a business (many are more used to obeying orders). There was a lack of assessment of the skills of the demobilized as well as the viability of their business plans, especially within the local economic context. Moreover, start-up capital was limited, and engagement with the private sector was lacking (Méndez and Rivas 2008, p. 14).

As a result, many ex-combatants failed to generate a stable income. For the demobilized paramilitary members, the economic reintegration programme run by the High Commission for Peace in cooperation with the PRVC also faced numerous problems. Since the collective 'projects for peace' were often agricultural, they required land, which was difficult to acquire. Moreover, the start-up capital of two million pesos for each ex-combatant was not enough – even in collective schemes – to cover all the costs, and projects often required additional funding, which was not forthcoming. It proved impossible to fulfil the requirement that

³³ Interview with DDR expert, 06/09/10.

³⁴ Interview, Bogotá, 08/09/10.

members of the local population, particularly those classified as vulnerable, get involved in the projects since there were no extra resources to fund their participation, and the local population was in any case often very hostile to the idea of with demobilized ex-combatants. Finally, little attention was paid to the economic context in which the projects were established, as they were supervised at the national level (Méndez and Rivas, 2008, pp. 17-18).

Other parts of the programme were also found to be inadequate: in the 2006 evaluation of the PRVC programme, it emerged that 31 per cent of the demobilized had not received any financial support; 55 per cent had not had access to state healthcare; 66 per cent had not received any psychosocial support; 55.7 per cent were not enrolled for schooling; and 59.8 per cent did not have any employment or work in a collective productive project (Denissen 2010, p. 334). As a result, MAPP-OEA concluded in 2007 that “people in the communities continue to have the impression that the program does not provide for the socio-economic reintegration of the beneficiaries, and this in turn could be the reason why they tend to go back to illegal activities” (MAPP-OEA 2007, p. 9). With the installation of the ACR in 2006, several changes were made to the reintegration process to improve its effectiveness. The next chapter describes the redesigned reintegration programme in more detail.

3. The new reintegration package, 2006–2010

Introduction

Although the formal period for paramilitary demobilization and disarmament ended in 2006, reintegration proceeded for many AUC members as well as for former guerrilla fighters. Furthermore, the individual DDR programme continued, and between 2006 and 2010 reached its highpoint: close to 14,000 combatants entered the programme of individual demobilization, the vast majority of them from the guerrilla groups FARC and ELN.³⁵ This volume of demobilizations coincided with the intensification of the military and strategic offensive against the guerrilla movements. The ongoing conflict with these as well as the emergence of new criminal factions, featuring in numerous cases the involvement of former paramilitary members, made the DDR programmes a key feature of government policy. A fresh round of efforts to streamline and improve the process on a technical level led to substantial changes in 2006.³⁶

The changes began with the establishment of the ACR as a replacement for the PRVC, which had proved unable to handle the reintegration process. The ACR then decided to harmonize the reintegration process for all ex-combatants, ending the differential treatment for individually and collectively demobilized fighters in terms of conditionality, programmes for income generation and provision of start-up capital.

In addition to this, the ACR adopted a longer-term view of reintegration, replacing the previous focus on short-term 'reinsertion' (Méndez and Rivas 2008, p. 10). The time which participants could spend in the programme was left unspecified, and was to be determined by the individual progress of each ex-combatant. However, in order to receive benefits, ex-combatants were required to take part in the reintegration programme. This approach applied to new participants, as well as to people who had already demobilized in the earlier phase but had not been reintegrated.

The ACR's new approach explicitly recognized, furthermore, that successful reintegration of former combatants into civilian life depends not only on providing opportunities for alternative livelihoods and psychosocial assistance, but also on strengthening the communities in which the former combatants decide to live. As a result, the ACR programme includes not only support for demobilized people, but also activities that aim to improve the economic and social

³⁵ Information from the PAHD.

³⁶ In 2008, the National Council for Economic and Social Policy (CONPES) of the National Planning Department published the 'National Social and Economic Reintegration Policy for Individuals and Illegal Armed Groups'. This document has provided the framework for the Colombian reintegration policy since then, laying out the general objective of the DDR process, as well as the objectives of each of the components of reintegration policy (CONPES 2008).

conditions of these communities. The ACR also attempted to tailor its programmes to ensure the best fit between ex-combatants' capacities and local economic and social opportunities. To manage this localized approach, address the disconnection between local economic and social realities and centralized programming, and allow for more direct contact between demobilized fighters and communities, the ACR embarked on a major process of decentralization through the establishment of regional offices, known as *Centros de Referencia y Oportunidades* (CROs). A total of 29 such centres were up and running by 2010.

This chapter discusses the national reintegration policy and the ACR's programme in more detail, and analyses the challenges it has faced. It starts with a detailed description of the different components of the programme, and issues that are pertinent to each of these. Particular emphasis is placed on the overarching theme of this report, namely the links between reintegration and communities – whether in terms of strategic decision-making, security or economic opportunity.

Reintegration in Colombia: the theory³⁷

The national reintegration programme aims to create a comprehensive approach to reintegration, enabling former combatants and their families to become independent, law-abiding members of society, and creating suitable conditions in communities for them to set up their new lives without causing distress or friction. The ACR programme focuses on healthcare, education, psychosocial attention, social reintegration, professional training, and income generation.

The *healthcare* component consists of access to health and dental services for ex-combatants, as well as their family members, for the duration of the reintegration period. It includes primary attention for problems relating to addiction, mental problems and domestic violence, as well as preventive measures such as vaccination schemes and awareness-raising campaigns on sexual and reproductive health, healthy lifestyles and food security.

Education is seen as central to the ability of an ex-combatant to enter civilian life, and the *education* component of the reintegration programme allows ex-combatants and their family members to take courses at primary, secondary or tertiary level. Basic literacy studies are also available. Education activities are tailored to the needs of each participant.

The *psychosocial* component of the reintegration programme aims to equip participants with the skills needed to be successful in education and work, as well as to become responsible family and community members. Participants learn to establish and maintain harmonious personal relationships, take decisions that help them achieve their goals and, most importantly, to resolve problems and conflicts peacefully. The programme includes workshops on issues of

³⁷ The information for this section was obtained from interviews with ACR officials and from the ACR website www.reintegracion.gov.co The 'theory' is dealt with here as this section looks into policy initiatives whereas the 'practice' of challenges during the implementation of policies is covered in the third section of this chapter.

human rights and duties, and conflict resolution for participants, their family members and host communities. Individual sessions as well as home-visits by trained psychologists and social workers are included to assess whether participants and their families need specific attention. In the case of severe mental problems or addiction issues, the participant is referred to the medical programme.

The *social* programmes of the ACR are run by the National Police, and focus on fostering relationships between ex-combatants and the communities in which they now live, through projects in the communities and the development of the working skills and citizenship of ex-combatants. Demobilized fighters who are waiting to begin or are registered in an education or professional training programme, those who do not yet have jobs after finishing their education or training, and those who cannot enter training or education programmes because they are not offered in their region, can all take part in this programme. Typical activities include reforestation, renovation of community areas such as schools, playgrounds and parks, and educational and prevention activities for vulnerable populations (such as children). The programme includes 20 hours' work per week for six months, and participants are offered training in citizenship, human rights and job-specific skills (painting, first aid, etc).

Economic reintegration in Colombia has two components. It starts with *professional training*, enabling ex-combatants to learn a trade that will help them gain access to the labour market and earn an income, either by finding a job or by starting up a business. The training programmes are adapted to the context of the labour market in each region, as well as to the wishes, previous experience and training of participants. Training can take place at different levels of expertise, from refreshing and complementing skills and knowledge that a participant already has, to longer training courses that allow a participant to find more skilled employment. The National Apprenticeship Service (*Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje* – SENA) offers training courses, and evaluates and certifies the skills of the ex-combatants.

The second component of economic reintegration involves *income-generation* activities. After receiving education and professional training, the reintegration process is completed once the ex-combatant finds a sustainable source of income in the labour market.

The ACR supports two tracks for income generation: employment schemes (which include apprenticeships through SENA), and personal business plans. In the employment scheme the ACR acts as an intermediary between employers in the private sector and ex-combatants looking for work. In order to create job opportunities, the ACR actively seeks the support of the private sector. It does so by encouraging businesses to offer jobs to ex-combatants, in the form of formal apprenticeships through SENA, unpaid internships or permanent employment. Other ways in which the private sector becomes engaged include assisting ex-combatants to write business plans, or investing in their businesses through the Social Benefit Investment Fund (*Fondo de Inversión para Beneficio Social* – FIBS). The 'Time Bank' (*Banco de Tiempo*) helps the private sector to donate time and knowledge in order to assist ex-combatants to exploit all

available job opportunities. The ACR also cooperates with local chambers of commerce in employment-generation activities, and has tried to change the approach towards job placement by seeking to match private sector needs with the skill level of ex-combatants.³⁸ In this respect, it has notched up a number of success stories (see Box 1).

Box 1: Footwear in Bogotá

Bogotá's Chamber of Commerce resolved to adopt a new approach to securing employment for ex-combatants on the basis of a study in 2008 that revealed scepticism in the business community towards the reintegration process: 75 per cent of firms said they had made no commitment to the process, and 45 per cent said they would not be willing to provide employment to demobilized fighters (Observatorio de la Reintegración 2009).

With the help of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Chamber of Commerce identified the footwear industry as a likely source of employment, owing to its shortage of key skills and to growing demand. A combined workshop and training school was established, and 45 of the 82 ex-combatants who entered had found permanent employment by the end of 2010. The Chamber argues that this success illustrates how economic reintegration works best when it is closely matched to the demands of employers and the dynamics of the market.

If an ex-combatant prefers to start his or her own business, he or she can submit a business plan – either individually, or with a group of other ex-combatants – to the ACR, which assesses its feasibility. If the plan is approved, the ACR hands over start-up capital. Given the problems of wastage and corruption associated with this type of programme in the past, there are specific conditions that ex-combatants have to meet when submitting a business plan, including a sufficient level of education, training and experience in the proposed business. They also need to have attended the psychosocial reintegration programme. A total of 7,600 people had received start-up capital under the ACR by the end of 2010.³⁹

Not under the control of the ACR is another component of economic reintegration – group-based employment schemes. Large schemes of this type were common in the first phase of reintegration, until 2006, but were associated with recurrent problems such as fraud and massive commercial failure. The ACR therefore abandoned this approach. However, since 2006 the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has received funding from USAID to run carefully designed and commercially viable agricultural projects for ex-combatants.⁴⁰ Although it works in close consultation with national Colombian agencies involved in reintegration, the ACR does not directly oversee these projects.

³⁸ Most recently this has involved introducing procedures and software for customer-relations management, whereby the Economic Reintegration Unit of the ACR tracks the response of all the businesses it has approached. According to the ACR, these range from multinational to small and medium-sized businesses. Interview Bogotá, 10/09/10.

³⁹ Interview with Economic Reintegration Unit of ACR, Bogotá, 10/09/10.

⁴⁰ The sums involved are US\$52 million from 2006 to 2009, and US\$65 million from 2010 to 2015.

The final component of the Colombian reintegration programme – *community reintegration* – is an innovative attempt to build on the realization that local initiatives are crucial to DDR processes if these are to lead to sustainable peace (UNDP 2009). Reconstructing social ties – both within communities, and between communities and the ex-combatants living in them – is seen as a key ingredient for preventing future violence. As a result, the community reintegration track, run by the Community Works Unit (*Unidad de Trabajo con la Comunidad* – UTC), seeks to develop capacities and resources within the households and communities where ex-combatants live, with the express aim of engaging whole communities in the reintegration process (Caramés 2009), and fostering development and reconciliation in selected communities that are heavily affected by violence.⁴¹

The community reintegration programme works with national and local state agencies, community leaders, youth and children, victims of the conflict and beneficiaries of the reintegration programme.⁴² It begins with a base-line assessment in the community to identify people's needs and wishes. The ACR then offers workshops for the community in which themes such as human rights, protection of rights, citizen participation and peaceful conflict resolution are discussed. Public events are organized so that community leaders and ex-combatants can make a visible commitment to the peaceful transformation of their community. Finally, a project is carried out that benefits the community as a whole, such as making improvements to a local park or clearing a soccer field, and in so doing aims to repair what Colombians so beautifully refer to as the *tejido social* (social fabric) of the community.⁴³ Until the middle of 2010, the ACR reported that it had provided civic training to 20,513 civil society organizations, carried out 101 participatory base-line assessments, initiated 167 community projects and undertaken 217 symbolic actions.⁴⁴

This community reintegration component has received extensive international support. A good example of this is the IOM's support for reintegration projects with a community focus, which is financially supported by the embassies of Canada, Sweden, the United States, the Netherlands

⁴¹ This same unit also works towards the prevention of the recruitment of children.

⁴² The information in this paragraph is drawn from a number of online policy documents: ACR (s.d.). *Ruta de Reintegración. Comunidades*: http://www.reintegracion.gov.co/Es/ruta_reintegracion/Paginas/comunidades.aspx; ACR (s.d.). *Ruta de Reintegración. Formación Ciudadana*: http://www.reintegracion.gov.co/Es/ruta_reintegracion/Paginas/form_ciudadana.aspx; ACR (s.d.). *Ruta de Reintegración. Acción Simbólica*: http://www.reintegracion.gov.co/Es/ruta_reintegracion/Paginas/accion.aspx; ACR (s.d.). *Ruta de Reintegración. Proyecto Comunitario*: http://www.reintegracion.gov.co/Es/ruta_reintegracion/Paginas/proyecto_com.aspx

⁴³ *Tejido social* is difficult to define as the context and the people within it shape what is considered to make up the fabric. Civil society in Colombia see mechanisms of *tejido social* in both formal and informal structures, as opposed to the UNDP which declares that: “[S]ocial fabric is a blend of clear-cut, structural, formal and functional personal networks of initiatives or associations, which can be heterogenic or universal. Social fabric is an asset for individuals and societies as it enables them to expand their operations and opportunities in order to improve their quality of life. Society functions as a social fabric for its citizens; the larger a social fabric, the more developed a society is.” (<http://www.undp.un.hn/PDF/informes/2006/glosario.pdf>, p.1)

⁴⁴ See: <http://www.reintegracion.gov.co/ES/prensa/noticias/Paginas/100718.aspx>

and Spain (UNDP 2009, p. 5). The European Union (EU), meanwhile, supports the community reintegration component of the ACR programme.⁴⁵

The realities and challenges of reintegration

The ACR has made many important modifications to the reintegration process in the wake of the experiences from 2002 to 2006, but it still has to grapple with a number of pressing internal paradoxes and external challenges

Programme paradoxes

The reintegration programme run by the ACR faces two overriding internal paradoxes. The first has to do with the time horizons and conditionality of the ACR's approach. In principle, there is no longer any time limit for receiving benefits. As long as an ex-combatant is enrolled and participates in an officially sanctioned reintegration activity – education, training as part of income generation, or social reintegration – and his reintegration is not deemed complete, he receives a reintegration benefit (approximately 500,000 pesos per month, about €200).

This approach was adopted after the PRVC's system, in which reintegration benefits were capped at 18 months for the collectively demobilized and at 24 months for those in the individual demobilization programme – but with no obligation to participate in reintegration activities for the collectively demobilized⁴⁶ – had proved to be ineffective. The ACR reasons that since not every ex-combatant has the same background, it is unrealistic to set a standard time limit on the reintegration process: some may need more time to establish themselves as employable citizens than others. At the same time, by obliging ex-combatants to follow reintegration courses, the likelihood of successful social and economic reintegration is thought to be higher. According to ACR officials, the average time at present spent in the social reintegration phase (involving health, education and psychosocial programmes) is around two years, while economic reintegration courses last between three months and three years.⁴⁷

At the same time, international officials who have been closely involved with demobilization in Colombia fear that this system is as likely to create a culture of dependency as it is to stimulate independence. According to one official, “the demobilized person is getting used to earning quite a lot for doing nothing”.⁴⁸ Thus, in a context of high unemployment and limited access to economic opportunities (see below), the reintegration process creates perverse incentives: it is much easier to attend more reintegration classes and receive benefits than to go out and find work. Moreover, it creates a sense of entitlement in the ex-combatants: they believe that the government needs to take care of them, even if this makes the ex-combatants feel humiliated at

⁴⁵ Interview with EU delegation in Colombia, Bogotá, 07/09/10.

⁴⁶ For those ex-combatants enrolled in the individual programme, however, there were conditions on receiving the stipend in terms of attendance at reintegration activities.

⁴⁷ Information from ACR Economic Reintegration Department, interview 10/09/10.

⁴⁸ Interview with member of the international community, Bogotá, 07/09/10.

the same time (Denissen 2010, p. 338). There is a risk that the current programme set-up, while providing individualized attention for each ex-combatant, fails to ensure that incentives are adjusted to the economic and social contexts in which they live. Individualized tracks, but with clear end-goals and end-dates for each ex-combatant, might be a way to overcome this (Denissen 2010, p. 339; Morgenstein 2008, p. 9). More generally, a distinction between a DDR *process* and a DDR *programme* should be made here for clarification. The *process* requires long and individualized reintegration schemes, whereas the *programme*, owing to a constellation of reasons, is limited in what it can provide for *process* needs. A careful balance must be attained in which a DDR *programme* addresses most pressing and volatile needs in the DDR *process*.

A second paradox stems from the interrelationship between the different tracks in the reintegration programme, in particular between the psychosocial and employment schemes, and between reintegration more generally and community reconciliation. To be able to take part in the employment scheme, an ex-combatant needs to attend the psychosocial workshops and other activities, both during the training phase and during the assistance that the ACR provides to find employment in the private sector.⁴⁹ Given the limited interest that the private sector has in employing ex-combatants, some demobilized fighters would prefer their histories not to be known publicly. However, the requirement that participants attend psychosocial workshops makes this impossible: it is noticed by employers if you need time off work to attend these classes. Attending these workshops thereby undermines the employability of ex-combatants, as well as potentially damaging their ability to integrate as citizens.

In a similar fashion, reintegration activities can have a perverse effect in areas where new criminal gangs have surfaced and have managed to recruit large numbers of demobilized fighters. Those ex-combatants who wish to continue in the reintegration process and steer clear of crime find that they are cutting off links to social life so as to avoid threats from former colleagues, or the suspicions of members of the public. This self-imposed isolation is seen as an effective response to local realities, but it is far from contributing to broader reconciliation across the community (Toledo Peace Centre 2009, pp. 113–114).

Economic hurdles (1): business suspicions

Economic reintegration is a vital component of the reintegration process and is often considered the final stage of support for ex-combatants to become self-sufficient civilians. Unfortunately, income generation has been a tough nut to crack. As one of the interviewees said: it has been “the weakest part of the government policy”.⁵⁰ In part this is attributed to a lack of interest from the ACR, which has focused more on psychosocial and educational programmes. However, it seems that other factors play a greater role, since the ACR has embraced a very business-friendly model, partly because of the role played by Frank Pearl, a former businessman who was appointed High Commissioner for Reintegration (Godnick and Klein 2009, p. 25). Indeed,

⁴⁹ Interview with former combatants in Bogotá, 09/09/10.

⁵⁰ Interview with member of international community, Bogotá, 07/09/10.

the ACR has organized several mechanisms to engage the private sector more systematically, such as the Time Bank and the Social Benefits Investment Fund.

In spite of these efforts, the results have not been outstanding. The number of former combatants hired by private companies, whether taken on directly as an employee, as a SENA apprentice or as an intern, is low compared with the total number of demobilized people who need to be reintegrated (Puentes et al. 2009, p. 41).⁵¹ One of the main reasons for this is the private sector's lack of interest in employing ex-combatants. A preliminary study of private sector participation in reintegration strategies, carried out by the *Fundación Ideas para la Paz* in 2008, shows that only 20 per cent of companies surveyed (in a non-representative sample of 361 companies) were involved in some way in the reintegration programmes (Puentes et al. 2009, p. 34). This finding was confirmed by other surveys at the time (Observatorio de la Reintegración 2009). Of those companies, 73 per cent were involved through direct employment, whereas the rest were engaged in other ways, such as through consulting services, contributions to education, sponsorship, operating productive projects or investing in community reintegration. A more recent survey by the IOM of over 1,000 businesses across the country found that only 13.7 per cent of businesses would offer direct employment to ex-combatants;⁵² according to the country's main chambers of commerce, businesses are only interested in recruitment when there is a clear need to fill vacancies.⁵³

The reasons companies gave for not getting involved were a lack of government support, but also fears over safety and possible retaliation by armed groups (Guáqueta 2006, p. 298; Puentes et al. 2009, p. 35). Interestingly, in the case of those companies that did get engaged, the reasons for doing so were related less to state support or subsidies than to the firms' sense of social responsibility and their commitment to peace (Puentes et al. 2009, pp. 37, 38). Moreover, when ex-combatants are hired, this is mostly in manual labour (62 per cent) or security (22.41 per cent). The latter is problematic, not only because ex-combatants are not allowed to carry weapons, but also because working as a security guard is not necessarily the best way to become reintegrated into peaceful civilian life. Furthermore, local communities tend to resent the presence of demobilized fighters around business installations, which can give rise to tensions.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Fundación Ideas para La Paz found in a survey among companies in Colombia in 2008 that only 645 combatants had been hired in some capacity, which is low compared with the over 50,000 demobilized combatants who need to find jobs (Puentes et al. 2009, p. 41).

⁵² 'Solo el 13% de empresarios daría empleo directo a desmovilizados', *El Tiempo*, 14/09/10.

⁵³ Interview with Bogotá Chamber of Commerce, 06/09/10.

⁵⁴ Interview with International Alert official, Bogotá, 07/09/10.

Economic hurdles (2): land and poverty

In rural areas, economic reintegration faces an additional daunting challenge. Many income-generating schemes are agricultural, and require land. However, access to land is an extremely thorny issue in Colombia, particularly in the areas most affected by the conflict. At least 4 million people are estimated to have been displaced, and their lands confiscated by armed groups, drug traffickers and large landowners.⁵⁵ Although under the JPL these lands should be returned to the victims, this is happening in fits and starts; by 2010, five years after the law's introduction, only 21,000 hectares of lands stolen by paramilitary forces had been returned out of an estimated one million hectares.⁵⁶

Recent reports show that land seizures and population displacement are far from over, with a clutch of different motives and interests conspiring to perpetuate the problem. Land remains a valuable commodity – for agriculture (in particular palm oil production), for drug production and trafficking, but also as a status symbol – and has repeatedly been a cause of social conflict and criminal activity. Concentration of land in the hands of large landowners (*latifundistas*) is now more extreme than ever, with farms of over 500 hectares in size accounting for 62 per cent of all arable land in Colombia, even though the productivity of the farm sector has languished.⁵⁷ In response, the government of President Juan Manuel Santos has placed the land issue at the heart of its political programme. The draft Victims' Law that was presented to Congress in September 2010 is intended, among other things, to return 500,000 hectares of land to its rightful owners in each of the next four years.

Reintegration programmes in rural areas must thus steer a difficult course. Official bodies are extremely cautious about using land for productive projects, given the uncertainty over the true ownership of the property. USAID, which works closely with the IOM in group-based production projects in rural communities, typically spends eight to ten months reviewing proposals, and applies a special protocol to check the status of land being used.⁵⁸

Even when land is secured through an official body for use in a project, ownership may be claimed by other parties through fair means or foul. In one instance, a legal claim has been filed against a palm oil project for ex-combatants run on land confiscated from a drug trafficker in El Retén, in the region of Magdalena.⁵⁹ Controversy has also centred on 3,000 hectares of property that belonged to former paramilitary leader Salvatore Mancuso, which was handed over for victims' reparations as part of the JPL but which is being used in part by groups of ex-combatants in a production project.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, in Ayapel, a rural area in the north-western

⁵⁵ For an in-depth discussion of the process of land-grabbing during the conflict, see: Reyes Posada 2009 and CNRR 2009.

⁵⁶ Estimates of the total amount of land seized over the past 20 years varies from 1.2 million to 10 million hectares. Most experts agree that the true figure lies in the middle of this range.

⁵⁷ See for a more detailed discussion: 'La Tierra Prometida', *Semana*, 06/09/10 pp. 22–28.

⁵⁸ Interview with international official, Bogotá, 08/09/10.

⁵⁹ See 'Reclaman Tierras donde se financia proyecto de palma de aceite', *El Tiempo*, 23/05/10.

⁶⁰ See 'Bienes de víctimas se devalúan', *El Espectador*, 12/09/10.

region of Córdoba, criminal groups have forced ex-combatants and victims out of a farm that was handed to them for a project. In Turbo, close to the border with Panama, a military contingent is tasked with protecting a cocoa bean project that began in 2008.⁶¹

But land is just one of the underlying structural problems that make it extremely hard to create jobs for former fighters. High unemployment, at about 13 per cent of the total labour force in 2009 (ECLAC 2010), is another complicating factor. Moreover, the programme of economic reintegration is geared towards integrating ex-combatants into jobs in the formal economy, while an estimated 55 per cent of Colombia's workforce works in the informal economy (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung 2010a, p. 59).

Greater progress in securing employment for ex-combatants has been made in the big cities, which partly explains the government's preference for placing individually demobilized fighters from the FARC and ELN in these areas. One of the most prominent examples of success offered by a former head of Bogotá's reintegration programme involved a community of former guerrillas buying property in the neighbourhood of Santa Rosa with their start-up capital, and establishing a thriving community.⁶²

However, in smaller cities or semi-rural areas in peripheral parts of Colombia, which are the main areas where demobilized paramilitaries return or choose to live,⁶³ conditions for reintegration are much more forbidding. One powerful obstacle in the way of smooth reintegration is that these regions are poorer; narco-trafficking and other illicit activities may also have a stronger presence, reinforcing the temptation to return to a life of crime. In some cases, former paramilitaries may operate in the grey area between informal and criminal labour, as is the case for the *mototaxi* drivers in the Córdoba region, who carry out jobs such as surveillance and small-scale transport of goods. In Colombia's big cities, ex-combatants are involved in "transporting drugs and weapons, patrolling city neighbourhoods, and intelligence activities" for criminal gangs (MAPP-OEA 2010, p. 15). A number of ex-combatants engaged in these activities may also continue to attend ACR classes as a means to 'launder' their new jobs in the eyes of the local police (Toledo Peace Centre 2009, pp. 110–111).

Contradictions in the community

Although the Colombian government, with support from the international community, has placed great emphasis on community reintegration and on the decentralized approach, the process has not run altogether smoothly. Base-line assessments – step one of the community reintegration programme – have been carried out in a participatory fashion, but coordination and cooperation between the ACR and local authorities is very limited. Municipalities are

⁶¹ Interview with international experts and officials, Bogotá, 07–09/09/10.

⁶² Interview, Bogotá, 02/09/10.

⁶³ The clear exception here is Medellín, where 11 per cent of the demobilized populations lives – the largest share of ex-combatants in any part of the country. Most other areas with high percentages of the total ex-combatant population are in poorer and peripheral zones such as Valledupar, Cucutá, Turbo, Santa Marta, Monteria, Sincelejo, etc. For an overview of zones with high percentages of ex-combatants, see Toledo Peace Centre 2009, p. 96.

reported to have only very rarely devised proposals for community projects, and were described by one analyst of community issues as “usually not interested”.⁶⁴

A recent report from MAPP-OEA likewise found that local authorities in some areas were “uninformed, uninterested and disconnected from the reintegration process” (MAPP-OEA, 2010, p. 14). In return, the ACR is reluctant to give resources to municipalities to carry out projects, preferring to contract other operators, often large national NGOs, who may not necessarily be familiar with the local context. This reflects widespread scepticism throughout central government over the probity and efficiency of state structures at the local level, even though overly centralized management tends to undermine the sustainability of local programmes. The broader significance of the tensions between central and local government for DDR will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter.

Thus, programmes are still often perceived as having been ‘parachuted’ into communities without any real connection to local need. This view is reinforced by the limited duration of the activities, which lasted one year. Many communities have been utterly fragmented by the conflict and, in some cases, the material incentives provided by the drug trade. According to one UN official with extensive experience across the country, “communities have been totally fractured, and public demands to the authorities are like letters to Father Christmas: everything comes from ‘me’.”⁶⁵ In other words, a highly individualist attitude prevails in many of Colombia’s regions. In such radically degraded social contexts, reconciliation, and the creation of a true sense of community, require a long-term commitment.

The activities that the community reintegration programme includes – civic training, small-scale community projects and symbolic activities – may be seen as small ways to start a process of local dialogue, and minor steps towards sustainable peace, but they cannot be expected to achieve sustainable reintegration. In the opinion of one European official closely involved with these activities, they achieve “small and precarious areas of understanding”, but do not necessarily have lasting effects in light of the economic and social conditions in which they take place.⁶⁶ Efforts to engage more deeply in the reconstruction of social bonds have been limited, although the UNDP has been active since 2007 in an ambitious project of reconciliation focused on five municipalities through its *Programa de Convivencia*. This programme has attracted funds from various European donors.⁶⁷

A final challenge for community reintegration revolves around the lack of involvement of ex-combatants.⁶⁸ Many ex-combatants face threats from criminal gangs or other armed groups, and as a result prefer to stay out of the public eye, or move regularly from place to place, adopting

⁶⁴ Interview, Bogotá, 03/09/10.

⁶⁵ Interview with UN official, Bogotá, 03/09/10.

⁶⁶ Interview in EU delegation, Bogotá, 07/09/10.

⁶⁷ The programme document from 2007 laid down an initial planned three-year budget of US\$5 million. Programme activities are reported on the website <http://www.programapromociondelaconvivencia.org/>

⁶⁸ Interview with international official, Bogotá, 31/08/10.

what one international official called “an unstable, nomadic existence, constantly following the news from projects in other places”.⁶⁹ Participating in a reintegration project would brand them as ex-combatants within the community, and could cause them to be stigmatized or even killed. Although understandable, given the prevailing levels of insecurity, this reluctance to participate seriously undermines the effectiveness of a programme that seeks to rebuild social cohesion and trust.

The isolation and restless movements of former combatants can also be linked to the very nature of a demobilization process, in which few efforts have been made to establish a public presence for former paramilitary combatants, whether through NGOs or through political parties.⁷⁰ Donors who are committed to community reintegration recognize these flaws, but are adamant that alternative approaches, such as forcing ex-combatants and local people to work together, would do even more damage to social relations.⁷¹

An unfavourable security context

The ACR runs its reintegration programme in less than ideal circumstances, given the imperfect, and in some cases worsening, security situation in Colombia. As a result, the reintegration process takes place alongside ongoing conflict with guerrilla movements, and against the backdrop of the rise of the new criminal forces. This poses major risks for the sustainable demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants.

In the first place, many ex-combatants face threats from armed groups. Those that have emerged from guerrilla groups may be at the receiving end of intimidation and death threats from their former comrades in arms, who see them as deserters and traitors (IKV Pax Christi 2006). This forces them and their families to adopt a low profile, but may, in the opinion of the military office that runs their demobilization programme (PADH), also help to secure a more rapid integration into normal society as a means of ensuring anonymity.⁷²

New criminal groups, meanwhile, tend to regard demobilized paramilitaries (and in some cases former guerrillas, too) as a well-trained and experienced reserve from which they can recruit. Monitoring of the demobilization process has revealed that in regions known for the presence of criminal activity, “demobilized combatants report constant offers for them to return to illegality” (MAPP-OEA 2010, p. 15). In a case study in Tierralta, Córdoba, a clear majority of ex-combatants involved in a local ACR reintegration programme had been offered the possibility of joining new criminal operations (Toledo Peace Centre 2009, p. 111).

⁶⁹ Interview, Bogotá, 08/09/10.

⁷⁰ The one outstanding exception to this, the Corporación Democrática in Medellín – which at one stage had 4,500 demobilized paramilitaries on its books and was contracted by the local government to carry out reintegration projects – has ceased to exist following the recent rise in violence in the city. It now appears that the organization operated throughout as a front to conceal continuing criminal activities. See ‘El ocaso de la Corporación Democrática’, Verdad Abierta, 22/03/11: <http://www.verdadabierta.com/rearmados/50-rearmados/3107-el-ocaso-de-la-corporacion-democracia>

⁷¹ Interview with European embassy, Bogotá, 06/09/10.

⁷² Interview with PADH, Bogotá, 10/09/10.

Recruitment, and the threat of violence if an ex-combatant does not wish to cooperate, is one of the reasons explaining the high murder rate of demobilized paramilitary members: official figures show that from 2003 to June 2010, 1,645 demobilized fighters had been murdered (out of a total of 52,000), the vast majority of them ex-paramilitary.⁷³ However, it is still difficult to assess the precise extent of the level of threats towards the demobilized, because, as MAPP-OEA states, most former combatants do not report threats against them or the attacks that they suffer, either because they are engaged in illegal activities and do not want to attract attention, or because they mistrust the security forces and the state, or because they are afraid of being stigmatized as ex-combatants (MAPP-OEA, 2010, p. 14). The security department of the ACR for its part deals with about 1,000 security alerts a year regarding individual ex-combatants.⁷⁴

If threats from new criminal gangs are not enough, then, as mentioned earlier, the financial incentives attached to enrolling in the criminal networks may turn out to be more persuasive. Even during the reintegration programme, the stipends paid for attending courses are relatively low (around 500,000 pesos, or about €200), compared with potential rewards offered by gangs and criminal activities, where wages may go up to two million pesos (about €800) (Toledo Peace Centre 2009, p. 110). As one recent report puts it: "Either employment opportunities are not sufficient and/or illicit activities remain too attractive an option for young men with low levels of education." (Godnick and Klein 2009, p. 26).

⁷³ Interviews with security department of ACR and with PADH, 10/09/10. The CNRR, meanwhile, gives a figure of 2,210 ex-combatants murdered, although this includes those who died in police operations against suspected criminals (CNRR 2010, p. 82).

⁷⁴ Interview with ACR security department, 10/09/10.

4. Community security and DDR in Colombia

This report has so far focused on the origins and components of Colombia's DDR programmes, the security and economic contexts in which they have been applied, and the role that has been given to local communities within these programmes. However, the distinctive themes of the research discussed in the introduction have yet to be addressed in depth: namely the actual and potential links between these DDR programmes and community security. In this regard, security is taken to have a much broader and richer meaning than physical security, referring to communities that are peaceful and that provide opportunities for work and welfare for their members.

This chapter will explore these issues by turning the focus away from the field of policy-making, and towards the perceptions of security and DDR that are voiced by local communities, ex-combatants and civil society representatives. It reports on research carried out in some of Colombia's more troubled and violent regions, including Medellín, Montes de María and Cauca, where interviews were held at the local level to find out what DDR means in practice for communities and ex-combatants. The research highlights flaws in the DDR process as perceived by the grassroots, and the ways in which the technical process of DDR has not always been embedded in the political, economic and social realities of these communities. In many cases, the interviewees described the consequence as a return of criminal violence in new guises, albeit with some old faces.

Aside from the overarching focus of this research programme, there are a number of sound reasons, based purely on consideration of the Colombian context, that justify a focus on the links or lack of links between DDR and community security.

First, demobilization and reintegration have made ample use of a discourse of decentralization in recent years, without necessarily steering their practice in the same direction. Both the collective and the individual DDR programmes were highly centralized at their inception, with local authorities often being given very little notification over demobilization activities due to take place in their vicinity. In 2007, the ACR attempted to redress the disconnection between DDR programmes and local communities by expanding the number of local service centres, or CROs. It also introduced its community reintegration programme, which aims to promote local participation of civil society based on the understanding that "reintegration had to follow national policy but be implemented in a decentralized fashion with strong local commitment". (Guáqueta and Arias 2008) Whether this is effective – especially from the perspective of the communities and local actors themselves – remains contested.

A second consideration stems from the current distribution of violence in Colombia. Whereas the country's big cities were throughout the 1980s and 1990s epicentres of insecurity, the onset of the Democratic Security Policy, and of a more active municipal approach towards the protection of public spaces and civil behaviour, brought a sharp reduction in urban violence. Although these trends have since been reversed, particularly in Medellín and Cali, the extremes of insecurity generated by new criminal groups are felt more in the Colombian periphery than in the country's main cities. As a result, it is crucial to understand how more isolated and marginal communities are affected by high levels of insecurity, what resources they may have to respond to threats of violence, and what support they receive from the state and DDR process.

Lastly, it is undoubtedly true that sustainable peace in the Colombian context cannot be conceived without progress towards reconciliation between perpetrators and victims, alongside restoration of the *tejido social*. At the same time, a number of interviewees with extensive and intimate knowledge of Colombian community life voice scepticism over whether this would be possible. Indigenous communities have been held up by some as a model for reintegration of ex-combatants, especially in terms of the ways traditional rites are used to 'cleansé' the sins of ex-combatants and pave the way for re-entry into normal village life (see Box 2). At the other extreme stand communities that have been scarred by displacement, criminal activity and narco-trafficking. At times, self-interest and mutual suspicion appear to be the prevailing modes of interaction, despite the valiant efforts of civil society activists to restore some sense of collective purpose.

Box 2: Reintegration in indigenous communities

Indigenous reintegration of former combatants can be regarded as a community-based approach, as its components are embedded in local practices and *integridad cultural* (cultural integrity). While still suffering the effects of violence and illegality, indigenous communities preserve their own practices as a means to reintegrate mainly former FARC combatants from their own groups. This process is facilitated by traditional authorities in the communities, or the *cabildo*. The *cabildo* presides over the reintegration process and communicates to the FARC which people have demobilized from their ranks, as well as dealing with state authorities. Former combatants are involved in *minga* (community work) to restore social ties within the community. The *cabildo* also works towards prevention of recruitment through awareness-raising in the community.

One outstanding issue remains managing the funds collectively in keeping with communal practice, since the ACR only provides reintegration funds individually. On the other hand, one example of cooperation between the ACR and an *indígena* community was provided in April 2011. A reconciliation ritual took place, which was supported by the ACR and led by *autoridades indígenas*. This particular ritual entailed marches, the recovery of public spaces, ex-combatants fixing the homes of their neighbours, planting trees, donating blood, performing cultural events, and apologizing publicly to Colombians for deeds committed during mobilization.

Ensuring the long-term success of DDR programmes entails serious consideration of how these atomized communities can reconcile and settle grievances. Transformation of these localities' political and economic structures may be an essential precondition for reintegration of ex-combatants and for sustainable peace; though the latter of course forms a far-reaching agenda, and one that is rather more ambitious than the ACR's community reintegration policy. This issue is considered in more depth at the end of the chapter.

In the meantime, it is vital to take on board the diverse perceptions of community members, and through them come to a fuller understanding of the way security concerns and the resurgence of violence are embedded in real, lived social existence; how security is weighed against other goals; how different groups have different conceptions of demobilization, and how it should be improved; and how power-holders at the local level respond to the demands made by central government.

This chapter looks in turn at the perceptions of three key sectors: civil society, ex-combatants and state officials. In each case, it explores their view of security, of the progress of DDR, and the way they see the links between the community and the reintegration process.

Civil society⁷⁵

Perceptions of security

Most civil society representatives and communities say they have witnessed a reduction in large-scale violence, in the form of massacres and mass displacements, over the last decade. Many, however, bemoan the conditions in which they live, and point to the dynamics that are undermining security when this is understood as something more than direct violence.

Security at the community level is seen in broader terms than "so-called physical security, as provided by the Democratic Security Policy and 'territorial consolidation'".⁷⁶ With its focus on physical or 'national' security, this approach leaves many in the country's periphery feeling they are left alone to deal with the legacy of years of violence and conflict. Stable jobs, access to affordable education, access to land to farm, social cohesion within and between communities, and responsive state institutions on all levels are seen as equally (or more) important ingredients for long-term peace and stability at the local level. However, civil society members insist that the focus on hard security has drawn attention away from these issues. Civil society representatives argue that the attraction of joining an armed faction increases when socio-economic security diminishes, while resilience to violence decreases as development is thwarted. Without community security in the broad sense, the presence and legitimacy of the

⁷⁵ Civil society here refers to NGOs, community-based organizations (CBOs) and representatives of society at large. Colombians not belonging to a state institution or armed force are the principal sources used in this chapter. See also footnote 2.

⁷⁶ Interview with civil society, Sincelejo, 01/09/10.

state, as well as the success of the DDR process, can never be assured, and violence and insecurity are liable to transform rather than disappear.

One feature of this transformation of violence is what is known in Medellín and Montes de María as 'the democratization of violence'. After the paramilitary blocs demobilized, their leaders were arrested and in some cases extradited to the United States on charges of drug trafficking, most notably following the decision by President Uribe to extradite 14 paramilitary leaders on 13 May 2008. As a result of these extraditions, a power vacuum was created that has quickly been filled with criminal entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs were, at least initially, less hierarchical than the paramilitary. A case in point is that of Diego Fernando Murillo, alias Don Berna, leader of the paramilitary bloc Cacique Nutibara in Medellín,⁷⁷ who was able to control and secure areas of the city, generating relative stability – a system that came to be known as *donbernabilidad*.⁷⁸ Even after he was imprisoned following the start of the DDR process, he was able to control 'his' areas from jail, but once extradited to the United States the power vacuum he left behind prompted a violent struggle between several potential successors, causing a sharp increase in rates of urban violence and insecurity. For instance, in the Medellín neighbourhoods of *comuna* 6 and 13, the security situation is volatile. In place of *donbernabilidad*, the *comunas* are now under the influence of less centralized gangs that divide up areas of territorial control. The 'invisible borders'⁷⁹ that result make it impossible to move without the greatest caution, and severely restrict economic development and the deepening of social ties. Thus, the possibly romanticized view of Don Berna's reign by some members of civil society holds that he presided over an era "where we at least knew who the perpetrator was, and what the rules were".⁸⁰ Once Don Berna, and others like him across the country, were removed, the security situation became much more unpredictable.

Violence can also appear and reappear in other guises. Civil society members in Popayán, capital of the Cauca region, reported a relative increase of violence within their cities in the wake of the arrival of ex-combatants taking part in DDR programmes. Another oft-mentioned feature of the transformation of violence was the shift of violence from the public to the private domain. Frustrations over losing weapons, a fighting role and an identity on the part of former combatants is reported to increase levels of domestic violence.⁸¹ The breakdown of the *tejido social* at the community level was frequently cited by civil society representatives in explaining levels of insecurity. In their opinion, decades of violence and incursions by armed groups has, among other things, led to a corrosion of the social fabric and mutual trust in Colombia, while the new criminal organizations, as discussed in chapter two, have made control over the population central to their strategies.

⁷⁷ Don Berna was extradited to the United States in 2008.

⁷⁸ This is a play on words: 'governance' in Spanish is 'gubernabilidad'.

⁷⁹ Interview with CBO, Medellín, 26/08/10.

⁸⁰ Interview with CBO, Medellín, 27/08/10.

⁸¹ Interview with CBO, Sincelejo, 06/09/10.

Perceptions of DDR

Civil society perceptions of DDR are shaped by personal experience, relations with former combatants, and geographic and social differences, and therefore vary widely across Colombia. However, one widely shared observation was that DDR “rewards the perpetrators”⁸² and that “they [the government] treat perpetrators as victims and victims as perpetrators.”⁸³ The slow application of the JPL, and its failure to include state officials as possible perpetrators, has cemented the feeling in many communities that their needs as victims have not been properly addressed. Furthermore, many Colombian citizens deem DDR to be exclusively an issue for the state. It was rarely considered desirable, or possible, for civil society to play a role in the reintegration of former combatants. Because citizens were never included in DDR decision-making, they do not feel obliged to participate in the reintegration process. On the other hand, civil society organizations that do want to participate in reintegration efforts tend not to see any opportunity to develop programmes within the framework of official policy. One NGO in Sincelejo described DDR as a “ready-made programme from the state that did not allow for contextual variation”.⁸⁴ Others see it as a means for the state to evade responsibility for the recurring paramilitary phenomenon by claiming the militia came to an end with the demobilization of the AUC.⁸⁵

Civil society also identifies a number of problems in the implementation of DDR programmes. The presence of pretend ex-combatants in the collective DDR programme is a source of ridicule. Observing peaceful neighbours all of a sudden appearing in uniform on television to hand in a weapon as part of a paramilitary organization is not an uncommon experience.⁸⁶ This phenomenon is characterized by civil society as ‘getting a favour’, and regarded as a way to cement local allegiance to former combatants and/or new criminal groups. Many members of civil society testify to the way combatants return to paramilitary or criminal activity after demobilization, but are reluctant to discuss the issue in depth, owing to fear of possible repercussions.

The public at large, meanwhile, is barely aware of what DDR programmes precisely entail, leading to rumours and misconceptions regarding their impact. Practical information concerning where former combatants live, for instance, is held back for security reasons. For the general public, this lack of information is often interpreted as a threat to their safety, and has led to violence in Bogotá.⁸⁷ It also strengthens the sense that DDR is exclusively state-led, without room for influence from civil society. The perception that the programmes are ready-made,

⁸² Interview with CBO, Zambrano, 10/09/11.

⁸³ Interview with victims assistance organization, Cali, 17/09/10.

⁸⁴ Interview with NGO, Sincelejo, 06/09/10.

⁸⁵ Interview with researcher on paramilitaries, Medellín, 23/08/10.

⁸⁶ Interview with CBO, Medellín, 39/08/10.

⁸⁷ Interview with ex-combatants and related CBO, Bogotá, 19/08/10.

coupled with the sense that the negative consequences of failed reintegration are left on the public's doorstep, tend to shape a very hostile view of DDR.

As stated in the previous chapter, the ACR's community reintegration programme, which was created to increase the involvement of communities in the DDR process and redress the sense that demobilization and reintegration are 'dropped on communities from above', is widely regarded as inadequate. The programmes are judged to be too short, and limited in scope and flexibility. An indigenous NGO that reintegrates former guerrilla combatants into their communities now struggles to get the individual reintegration benefits converted into collective payments. The NGO reasons that collective usage of these funds is better suited to their culture,⁸⁸ but official refusal to comply has underlined the sense that civilians are excluded from the process.

Links between the community and DDR

Many Colombians do not see a positive relation between DDR and community security. On the contrary, it is felt that violence has merely transformed as a result of demobilization, and that security in the broader sense, including socio-economic security, has not been addressed. As a result, reintegration cannot be sustainable, since there are few alternatives to a life of violence for ex-combatants. An additional concern expressed by community-based organizations relates to their exclusion from the design and implementation of DDR programmes. Many local organizations complained that they were not taken seriously by state officials. This feeling of neglect within civil society is heightened by the fact that reliable information on DDR programmes is rarely made available to the general public. These generally negative perceptions confirm the general assessment of organized civil society that DDR is the prerogative of the state. Colombian citizens have to live with the consequences of programmes that do not connect with specific problems at the local level, and in some cases do not reduce levels of insecurity.

Former combatants

Perceptions of security

Ex-combatants also have concerns over current levels of security. Because of the high murder rate among demobilized ex-combatants (see previous chapter), the fundamental security concern for both individually and collectively demobilized people is their survival. Murders are attributed to both former colleagues and former foes. In the case of individual demobilization, the chance of being threatened by former colleagues was seen as higher, whereas collectively

⁸⁸ Interview with NGO, Cauca, 15/09/10.

demobilized paramilitary run more risk of being harmed by former adversaries.⁸⁹ An acute problem mentioned by former guerrillas is that they often need to flee their area of operation because of threats from former comrades.

A security problem faced by both individually and collectively demobilized combatants are threats conveyed by 'community vigilantes', such as those contained in leaflets in Bogotá in 2010 threatening to kill 'subversive elements', named as former combatants, prostitutes, and drug-users, in neighbourhoods where they try to reintegrate into society.⁹⁰ Another common security threat encountered by ex-combatants are the emerging criminal structures that regularly contact them with 'job offers'. As former combatants know how to use a weapon, they are seen as a useful asset for these groups. However, the demobilized combatants interviewed for this research indicated that security for them goes far beyond concerns for their immediate safety. They claim only to be secure from the moment they feel accepted by society, and have an alternative source of income that feeds and houses them and their family. Such security has a dampening effect on the pull from emerging criminal groups.

Thus, the possibility of a return to a life of violence is also influenced by the extent to which former combatants feel welcomed by society.⁹¹ Stigmatization of former combatants is not uncommon in Colombia, especially within the national media: the media in Medellín, for instance, preferred to report on one ex-combatant robbing a bus rather than on 30 former fighters receiving their school diplomas on that same day.⁹² Former guerrillas also find that the official discourse used throughout the past decade reduces the complexity of many conflicts into one of 'the state against the terrorists', and is not conducive to a warm welcome for demobilized rebels from host communities.⁹³

At a more micro-level, ex-combatants indicate that they face many livelihood problems as a result of being demobilized. One example is that of a former combatant within the AUC who took part in the Bogotá DDR programme. During his time with the paramilitary group he feared for his personal safety, but was able to send his 'earnings' to his wife and children. After he demobilized he could only send part of the benefits acquired through the programme. These were significantly lower than what his family had become used to during his spell with the paramilitaries. Currently he still fears for his life as a demobilized combatant in Bogotá, while his wife and children have left him because he could not provide for them. This situation increases the chances of him returning to his former group, or to anyone who makes him a better offer. Thus, part of the problem is that the benefits earned by ex-combatants in the DDR programme are also seen as insufficient to ensure security in a wider sense, although interestingly, many former combatants realized that the DDR programme

⁸⁹ Interview with ex-combatants and related CBO, Bogotá, 19/08/10.

⁹⁰ Interview with CBO, Bogotá, 08/09/10.

⁹¹ Interview with former combatants, Bogotá, 09/09/10.

⁹² Interview with reintegration expert, Medellín, 30/08/10.

⁹³ Interview with former combatants, Bogotá, 09/09/10.

handed them more benefits than internally displaced people (IDPs), victims of violence and the 'average' citizen in Colombia receive.

The perceived and actual lack of security is accentuated by a loss of identity. Handing in a gun also means handing in power and respect. On this issue, there are clear differences between guerrilla and paramilitary combatants. As the paramilitary demobilized collectively, many individuals were simply told to hand in their weapons and lacked any personal motivation to reintegrate into society. The individually demobilized, however, often made a conscious choice to hand themselves in, or at least stay demobilized after being captured, and are often more committed to seeing the process through.⁹⁴

Moreover, the individually demobilized ex-combatants often encounter additional problems in successfully reintegrating, owing to the fact that their DDR process is treated as a counter-insurgency tool in the ongoing armed conflict with guerrilla movements. Despite international human rights standards which indicate that after demobilization former combatants acquire the same status and rights as every other citizen, it is not uncommon to have DAS (*Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad*, Security Administration Department) operatives call on ex-combatants after demobilization to ask them for information on guerrilla positions. When an ex-combatant gives this information, he or she receives promises of remuneration, although these are not always honoured.⁹⁵ There are cases where former guerrillas had to accompany army patrols on aerial missions to indicate where their former groups had operated. Such a counter-insurgency focus has a negative impact on human security: the individually demobilized are targeted because they are seen as informants, and at the same time there is a perverse incentive for the demobilized to deliver false information to acquire privileges.

Perceptions of DDR

The perceptions of many former combatants regarding the DDR programmes were very negative. The main reason given by ex-combatants throughout Colombia was disappointment with the assistance provided as they made their transition to civilian life. Almost all former combatants claim that the government had not kept its promises. This complaint was related to the changes in DDR policies over recent years, as well as a lack of clear communication with former combatants. It also stemmed from the short time frames of reintegration, and the sense that the Colombian DDR programmes do not connect with their real needs.⁹⁶ Many of the essential components of reintegration are left to organizations outside the official DDR

⁹⁴ This difference is confirmed by the military-run programme for individually demobilized combatants, the PAHD. Interview, Bogotá, 10/09/10.

⁹⁵ Interview with demobilized guerrillas, Bogotá, 09/09/10. See also the description of the payments for strategic information in Chapter 2.

⁹⁶ Mentioned among the needs are, in no particular order: a steady job, security from former colleagues and *bacrim*s, housing, reconciliation with and acceptance by society, and not being blamed for each incident of crime or violence.

programmes, such as schools and businesses, which tend not to be overly enthusiastic about being involved in the process, and certainly not without assistance from the government.

Ex-combatants mentioned that cases of corruption and misappropriation of resources, especially in economic reintegration projects, had added to their frustration. One example given during the research was the so-called 'CERAGO' project. Individuals sold cows to demobilized combatants as a long-term investment for about one million Colombian pesos (about €400) a cow, with an additional charge for leasing the grazing land. However, after five months the lease of the land was terminated, leaving the demobilized investors in Bogotá with a 'choice': either rent a new place, because holding cows is impossible in the city, or sell the cows back to the original owners. The price that was offered now by the former owners was only 80,000 pesos, and many ex-combatants lost much of their investment.⁹⁷ Another way in which former combatants feel that financial support for economic reintegration is misappropriated is through the provision of vouchers for clothes or other essentials that can only be used in certain shops. These stores are more expensive than the norm, and thus are seen as profiting from the DDR programme.

All in all, ex-combatants feel they are treated like "a hot potato that nobody wants to handle".⁹⁸ Many claim that it is only due to parallel and informal initiatives on reintegration that they are not returning to the bush. For others, solely the financial benefits keep them on board with the programme. A frequently heard threat is that once these benefits run out, the best option will be to return to armed violence.

Linking the community and DDR

There is a major contradiction between the ex-combatants' view of themselves as victims of war, and the public opinion of them as beneficiaries of generous funds and policies. These perceptions pit former combatants and recipient communities against each other, and consistently hinder constructive dialogue between the two - even if positive examples of post-conflict understanding can be found in Colombia. Many former combatants lamented their plight after handing in their weapons, but there are manifest differences rooted in the groups to which combatants belonged. During the research it became clear that the threat of returning to former or emerging criminal groups came from ex-AUC members rather than guerrillas. Former guerrillas, on the other hand, often pointed out that the same offers were made by new criminal groups to former paramilitary and guerrilla alike. Anecdotal evidence, however, suggests that personal experiences and circumstances play a pivotal role in determining the eventual success of reintegration. Put more simply, people who have participated in massacres will have more problems integrating into civil society than people who only had supportive roles in former

⁹⁷ Interviews with former combatants, Bogotá, 19/08/10.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

groups. This finding is backed up by analysis of reintegration processes in other countries (Humphreys and Weinstein 2007, p. 533).

The insecurity of reintegration, both physical and socio-economic, combined with the perception of broken promises on the government side, a sense of being stigmatized by society and constant offers to return to criminal activities, make for an extremely difficult and turbulent process. The loss of identity described by many former combatants in this research after they quit a life of violence adds to the problems. Hence, when seen from the perspective of former combatants, the link between DDR and the construction of secure and peaceful communities remains weak at best.

The state – national vs. local authorities

Perceptions of security

In general, state officials tend to simplify the security situation in Colombia. For example, under the Democratic Security Policy, former president Uribe framed Colombia's security issues in the binary language of a national conflict between the state and terrorists, downplaying the complexities of Colombia's internal conflicts. However, a change in this approach has become apparent more recently, and state officials at the national level are willing to acknowledge the evolutionary character of armed violence. For example, in a statement in February 2011, Interior and Justice Minister Germán Vargas Lleras connected the recent increase in violence, extortion and kidnappings in Medellín, Montería, San José del Guaviare, Santa Marta, Villavicencio and Sincelejo with emerging criminal groups.⁹⁹

Still, local government actors tend to have a more detailed and finely-grained understanding of security than national state actors. Authorities in Medellín, for instance, maintain that the complexity of the local security situation is not sufficiently understood by national policy-makers. Illegal activities include, for example, expanding micro-trafficking in narcotics, the division of *comunas* into distinct areas of operation by the *bacrim*s and groups that are successors to the AUC, the theft of oil from pipes running through Antioquia, blackmail of transport companies, and coca production in the north-east of Medellín.¹⁰⁰ In Popayán, meanwhile, the main security issues concern large amounts of displaced people, a transplantation of violence from rural areas towards the city, fumigation of coca crops by the national authorities, confrontations between the Colombian army and guerrillas, violence and extortion in resource-rich areas by criminal groups calling themselves *Aguilas Negras*, and forced displacement as a result of resource extraction.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Quoted in 'Neo-paramilitary drug groups increase control: Govt.', Colombia Reports, 14 February 2011: <http://colombiareports.com/colombia-news/news/14357-neo-paramilitary-groups-increase-control-over-countryside-govt.html>

¹⁰⁰ Interview with city government officials, Medellín, 10/08/10.

¹⁰¹ Interview with city government officials, Popayán, 10/09/10.

Good communication, a clear division of labour between local authorities and national policy-makers, coordination between local government and army units, and legitimate governance at all levels are widely seen as necessary conditions for addressing these variegated security issues in a coherent and 'joined-up' fashion. Despite a number of moves towards greater coordination at the central government level, such as the increasing collaboration between the ACR and the National Police over security threats to demobilized combatants, or through civil-military operations in the programme of Territorial Consolidation, these linkages appear not to run so smoothly between local and national representatives.

National authorities are reluctant to delegate responsibility for security issues to the local level, as policy-makers perceive that local governments lack the capacity and/or interest in addressing the problems. Moreover, they feel that local authorities in many cases are co-opted or infiltrated by criminal elements, making them part of the problem rather than the solution. Meanwhile, local administrations regard the national government as failing to understand local dynamics, and thus not being able to address 'their' problems in a constructive way.

In spite of this mistrust between the different levels, all sides share the understanding that none of them on their own can deal with the full spectrum of security issues, and that any specific topic, be it DDR or IDP assistance, needs to be addressed in a comprehensive and coherent way.

Perceptions of DDR

The most common criticism of DDR programmes is that they lack a long-term vision, and that the 'government' is not committed to DDR. Interestingly, both national and local actors agree on this, albeit from different perspectives. The view from Bogotá is that local authorities are not interested in DDR, or are too embroiled in criminal structures to develop a sustainable vision of reintegration; the view from local government is that the Colombian state is too strict in its policy formulation, and leaves little room for local involvement.

These differences are manifest in the debate over why, in spite of a commitment to do so, the DDR programme has not been more effectively decentralized. National authorities, as well as a significant number of foreign donors, regard their local counterparts as unwilling or unable to take on more responsibility: they are seen as corrupt, unrepresentative of the local populace, and infiltrated by paramilitary and criminal elements. A similar reluctance to hand over powers to the local level - or to claw back competencies that were handed over as a result of the highly progressive 1991 Constitution - has been evident in numerous other policy areas, for very similar reasons (Castro 2011). These include the planned reform of the extractive industries tax, the structure of the policy of 'territorial consolidation' (which largely bypasses local governments), and tighter controls over the funds passed to local government for social services. Similar systems of close central control are likely to be seen in the application of the new Victims' Law.

Local power-holders, on the other side, have felt left out of the DDR process for a long time, and have lost the appetite to participate. Furthermore, a number of mayors do not want to get involved with ex-combatants for personal reasons. In one case this was because a mayor's father was a former M19 combatant who was shot after demobilization. In other cases, local authorities want to protect citizens by not attracting untrustworthy criminals.

There is also a large discrepancy between national and local authorities over what DDR programmes have achieved. The perception in Bogotá seems to be one of relative satisfaction: the DDR programme is regarded as having generated many positive outcomes. The prevalent perception in Medellín, on the other hand, is one of disappointment following the euphoria that accompanied the first results of demobilization. Furthermore, whereas national authorities stress the total number of former combatants who have passed through educational programmes and found employment, local governments commonly express fear over renewed violence once the financial benefits for ex-combatants eventually run out.

These different perceptions of how DDR should be organized, and what effects it is having, strain the already complicated relation between central and local governance over a number of policy issues. In the case of the DDR programmes in Medellín and Bogotá, it seems possible to talk of turf battles in recent years.

Linking the community and DDR

The perceived linkages between community security and DDR illustrate the tensions between different levels of governance in Colombia, and point to substantial mistrust and miscommunication between these different layers. In general terms, the dynamic seems to be the following. At the national level it has been decided that DDR programmes are needed to enhance security throughout Colombia. The planning process is completely centralized for reasons of control, and out of fear over paramilitary and criminal influence, should responsibility and funding be handed to local government. Both local governance actors and civil society were confronted with ready-made programmes, and this in part explains why many are not enthusiastic about working on DDR. The result, however, is to starve local communities of involvement and interest in the process.

At the same time, members of grassroots civil society recognize that most Colombians do not have a sense of political participation. Whether it revolves around participatory politics, or participating in DDR initiatives, "there simply is no culture of participation".¹⁰² Many judge this to be part of the country's history, grounded in the dominance of powerful political and business clans at the local level. Others see it more as a result of the overpowering sense of

¹⁰² Interview with CBO, Medellín, 26/08/10.

capitalist individualism. This is often complemented with the notion that ‘when the state is not taking care of you, you should take care of yourself’.

Whatever the sources of this belief, the central government’s tight control over DDR certainly serves to reinforce local communities’ sense that participation in reintegration activities does not bring any benefits, nor serve any purpose. Therefore, a strong social fabric can be seen as one of the crucial missing links for an effective DDR process in Colombia. If this existed, it would act as a constraint on the actions of local authorities, and thereby enable Bogotá to move towards greater decentralization and participation, when this is understood as addressing localized security issues within a national policy framework, and implementing programmes in context-specific ways and with strong local commitment. At the same time, even if social capital is weak, moves towards decentralization could at least help to encourage greater civic engagement by local people and counter the prevalent sense of political disenfranchisement. In spite of the high levels of mistrust at present, both central and local government seem to recognize that the different levels must necessarily work together.

Moving beyond DDR: a broader community security agenda

DDR processes are part of a wider reconstruction process after violent conflict. If they are to be viable and achieve sustainable peace they must also aim at consolidating the end-state of community security, which can be understood to mean communities that are peaceful, enjoy strong levels of mutual trust and provide economic opportunities to their members. Moreover, demobilization and reintegration should ideally be part of an amalgam of broader security and development policies that all contribute to this goal. Such a process inevitably shapes how the state and its citizens relate to one another, and how issues of post-conflict reconciliation are addressed. It is to these issues that this report turns now.

State–society relations

Throughout the history of Colombia, power in many areas has been established by groups operating outside the formal state. As a result, people have been obliged to choose whether to trust in the Colombian state’s theoretical monopoly on the use of force, or to be more pragmatic, and seek out forms of understanding with *de facto* power-holders. Of course, framing the choice in these stark terms does not depict reality: the ‘choice’ is mostly made for communities through violent intimidation by non-state actors, thereby turning citizens into the prime targets of rival armed groups. A current example of this comes from the territorial consolidation policy: in the areas where the state has sought to impose its authority through a joint civil and military presence, locals appear uncertain over how much they can trust the new institutions, especially in light of continuing acts of guerrilla, criminal and neo-paramilitary violence (Isaacson and Poe 2009, p. 14 and p. 23).

In order for the state to regain a legitimate monopoly of force, three priorities stand out. The first is the creation of responsive state institutions, through which insecurity in all its forms can be addressed. This goes beyond simply having people in offices. It means establishing reciprocal contacts between civil society and state institutions through which a new working relationship between the two may gradually be formed. For all their defects, it is interesting to note that the local service centres (CROs) run by the ACR can be seen as an example of a responsive and welfare-oriented state presence in remote areas of the country.¹⁰³ At the same time, it is apparent that Colombia's historical deficit in this regard has been huge.

Second, it is evident that large areas of the country, notably the peripheral regions of La Guajira, Guaviare, Cauca and Nariño (Corporación Arco Iris 2010, p. 5), will only benefit from the territorial presence of the state once the guerrilla presence has ended. In this respect, it is worth questioning whether the goal of achieving an end to the armed conflict can be met without some sort of peace accord. Eliminating virtually all possibilities of legitimate dialogue between the guerrillas and the state is not the best means to bring the parties together. Early signals from the government of President Santos suggest that some progress might be made on this front.

In the third place, there is a pressing need to separate legal from illegal practices. Formal state structures have for many years been subject to capture or co-option by armed groups, while para-political scandals have over the last decade revealed the interweaving of legal and criminal at both local and national levels. Although progress has been made at the central level in prosecuting these politicians, a party representing paramilitary interests retains a presence in Congress: the *Partido de Integración Nacional* won close to a million votes and nine congressional seats in the legislative elections of March 2010.

The situation is more dire at the local level, where a large number of municipalities have undergone intense pressure from paramilitary and criminal groups aimed at extracting money from the decentralized social services budgets, public works contracts or from the resource royalties tax, whose revenues are currently handed to the municipalities where extractive industries operate. A recent report from one of these municipalities, La Jagua de Ibirico in the north-western region of Cesar, revealed that the town had received over €150 million since 1995 in these latter revenues, had seen five former mayors prosecuted for fraud, and still had no proper water supply or sewage system.¹⁰⁴

Decentralization as a whole, which has been a central part of Colombia's political dynamic since the 1991 Constitution, brought with it a number of benefits at first, such as improved service provision, before its demise began in the late 1990s amid a deepening crisis of corruption and institutional capture centred on the intimidatory power of the paramilitary (López 2010, pp. 53–

¹⁰³ Interview with DDR expert, Bogotá, 06/09/10.

¹⁰⁴ La Jagua de Ibirico is located in Colombia's main coal-producing region (see 'El pueblo más robado de Colombia', *El Espectador*, 12 September 2010). President Juan Manuel Santos has supported a bill to change the distribution of the tax in favour of a centrally managed system. By May 2011 this bill was still in the last stages of its passage through Congress.

65; Konrad Adenauer 2010b). As mentioned earlier, central government and the international community have grown wary of local authorities, while citizens also appear to mistrust them, as the abjectly low turn-out rates in certain municipal elections suggest. Interior Minister Germán Vargas Lleras for his part has warned that in October's regional elections, polls in 60 municipalities (out of a total of 1,120) could be affected by neo-paramilitary gangs.¹⁰⁵

Pressing ahead with the decentralization agenda will clearly involve deep political reform, although current government efforts seem focused on reassuming control over municipal finance. A danger exists that, as in the ACR's reintegration programme, suspicion of municipal actions will reverse decentralization, and impede progress towards a more participatory democracy. This in turn could provide the seeds of future conflict.¹⁰⁶

Reconciliation and reparations

An issue that is both at the heart of Colombian political debate, and intimately tied to the future wellbeing of communities, is that of reconciliation and reparations. A new Victims' Law (*Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras*), approved by both houses of Congress and signed into effect by President Santos in June 2011, has been hailed by some as a landmark attempt to provide such redress.

The law defines victims as those people who have suffered since 1985 (or 1991, in the case of victims who have been dispossessed of their land) at the hands of guerillas, paramilitaries or state forces in Colombia. Estimates for the number of people who could be considered victims number at least four million, and it is expected that some three million hectares of land could be returned as a result of the law (*Semana* 2011b). These who qualify under the new law will become eligible for financial compensation from the state – with a ceiling of around €8,000¹⁰⁷ – or for support through various new judicial mechanisms for efforts to regain ownership of their land. One of the most significant measures in this respect is the reversal of the burden of proof: instead of the victims having to prove that land was once theirs, the new owners need to prove how they obtained ownership. The law also lays out provisions for the improvements of services and protection of human rights in the communities to which victims of conflict return. The estimated costs of putting all the measures of the bill into effect currently stands at US\$20 billion.¹⁰⁸

However, concerns have been voiced in civil society over the reach of this effort to redress the harm done by Colombia's wars. Many victims of violence do not have the money to make their way to registration offices in order to be included on the official victims' list. Also, although the burden of proof when it comes to land ownership no longer lies with the victims, the evidence

¹⁰⁵ 'Entregan lista de municipio en que bandas podrían altera elecciones', *El Tiempo*, 14 February 2011.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with expert on community life in Colombia, Bogotá, 03/09/10.

¹⁰⁷ The ceiling is defined in terms of the national minimal wage, which is adjusted each year in line with inflation: the upper limit on compensation from the state is thus in fact 40 times the minimum monthly wage.

¹⁰⁸ 'Colombia da un paso hacia la paz con la Ley de Víctimas y de Restitución de Tierras', *El País*, 12 June 2011.

needed to prove initially that one is a victim (which needs to be done before any claims to land or other reparations can be made) has to be brought by the victim. As many do not have the time and capacity to conclusively make their case, it remains to be seen what number of people are able to prove they are eligible. In practical terms, moreover, the new law requires an enormous implementation effort, for which the necessary institutions and capacity are not yet available.

A fundamental reason behind the hesitancy of civil society towards the new proposals for reparations is its mixed opinions over previous initiatives in transitional justice, and an abiding sense that perpetrators get treated better than victims. Through the Justice and Peace Law (JPL), Colombia took promising steps towards weighing the value of security against that of judicial redress, and made a radical break with its long tradition of blanket amnesties. The progress made through this law in establishing the truth about the armed conflict in Colombia has been immense: the confessions that are a fundamental part of the law have shed light on over 44,000 killings and 1,417 massacres (MAPP-OEA 2011, p. 11). The law has also served to reveal the dimensions of paramilitary influence in the country's political structure.

But on a number of counts, the JPL has fallen short. Although over 4,000 former combatants are now having their cases processed through the law, only two sentences had been handed down by the middle of last year.¹⁰⁹ Only a small number of the 300,000 victims who are officially registered have any legal representation, and the total number of prosecutors and investigators tasked with following up the cases once confessions are made is far below what is required. Civil society members also point out that the JPL has explicitly excluded state actors (unlike the new Victims' Law), and that around 19,000 former paramilitary combatants have neither been dealt with under the terms of the legislation nor faced charges under the conventional judicial system.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, the law appears to be focused on convicting individuals rather than uncovering the structures in which they operated. This is corroborated by the fact that "prosecutions in Colombia generally do not serve to expose chains of command and criminal structures; rather, they concentrate on direct perpetrators, and generally fail to target those most responsible for crimes committed as part of a particular criminal apparatus or state practice" (Lyons and Reed-Hurtado 2010).

With these experiences in mind, there is some scepticism in civil society regarding the Victims' Law. Most importantly, there is already concern that the key role to be played by the judicial system in deciding the return of stolen land could slow down progress, and even open the way to new abuses (Linares Prieto 2011).

¹⁰⁹ Information from Verdad Abierta special report on fifth anniversary of Justice and Peace Law, 30 July 2010. See <http://www.verdadabierta.com/justicia-y-paz/2602-a-los-cinco-anos-de-la-ley-de-justicia-y-paz->

¹¹⁰ See also <http://www.semana.com/noticias-conflicto-armado/tanto-ha-funcionado-justicia-paz/134765.aspx>

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Colombia is one of the most experienced countries in the world in the processes of disarmament. Since the 1950s, it has carried out several rounds of disarming, demobilizing and reintegrating numerous armed groups. The latest – and largest – two processes are the collective DDR programme for members of the different paramilitary *frentes* and *bloques* that officially ran from 2003 to 2006, and through which 31,671 combatants demobilized, and the ongoing individual demobilization of members of guerrilla groups and other armed factions that did not take part in the collective DDR process.

These DDR processes take place in less than ideal circumstances. The security situation in Colombia, although it improved markedly during the paramilitary demobilization, remains mercurial. On the one hand, the government and guerrilla groups of FARC and ELN never reached a peace agreement, and are still at war. The individual DDR programme thus takes place amidst an ongoing conflict, and is designed more as a counter-insurgency strategy than an effort at creating sustainable peace. At the same time, new criminal groups – some of which are the descendants of demobilized paramilitary units – are emerging, and striking deals with the state, guerrilla groups and each other in a struggle for the control of territory, people, the drug trade and other income streams. These groups, the so-called *bacrim*s, often attempt to recruit ex-combatants. As a result, the security context in which the DDR programmes are implemented poses many challenges for successful and sustainable reintegration of ex-combatants.

Policy dilemmas

Since its creation in 2006, the ACR has attempted to respond to the many flaws identified in earlier DDR processes by designing a holistic programme. The provision of healthcare, education and psychosocial assistance to ex-combatants, social programmes that allow ex-combatants to work in communities as a way of offering reparations, economic reintegration activities – including professional training and income generation – and community projects make up a multi-layered approach to the reintegration process. Until this process is judged complete, and for as long as ex-combatants take part in reintegration activities, they receive a monthly stipend from the state. The ACR has also attempted to tailor its activities to the social and economic realities in each region by decentralizing to regional offices, or CROs.

Although this programme represents an improvement on earlier DDR processes, which were limited in time and completely centralized, the ACR has encountered internal paradoxes and external challenges. Because of the difficulties faced by ex-combatants and other citizens in finding stable jobs in the formal sector, given the economic situation in Colombia, and particularly in poorer and more peripheral regions of the country – which is where many of the demobilized paramilitary combatants have clustered – the programme risks creating

dependency: it is often easier to participate in yet another reintegration activity and receive the associated benefits, than it is to go out and establish an independent means of living.

Second, being part of reintegration programmes may paradoxically prevent reintegration into civilian life. The requirement to take part in psychosocial assistance classes so as to qualify for other (economic) reintegration activities makes the status of ex-combatants visible to potential employers and communities. Some ex-combatants feel this stigmatizes them. Being part of these classes can also provide easy access for criminal groups that attempt to recruit former combatants. As a result, numerous observers and participants in the process note how ex-combatants, far from reintegrating into community life, adopt a low profile, have no public organization to defend their interests, and move from town to town in search of new opportunities that are communicated along the demobilized grapevine.

Furthermore, economic reintegration is hampered by a lack of support and interest from business, a shortage of employment opportunities in peripheral regions, and the difficulties associated with acquiring land to use for agricultural projects in rural areas. Access to a stable and secure income is a crucial ingredient for successful reintegration, and all the more so in a context where new criminal groups offer benefits that are often higher than those provided by DDR programmes.

Working with communities

Whereas security is often understood in its narrow sense as the absence of physical violence, the concept of community security can help shine some light on the causes of Colombia's cyclical violence by pointing to what is missing in local civic life: not just physical security, but also economic opportunity and social capital. Representatives from civil society, ex-combatants and state officials interviewed for this research all agreed that DDR programmes failed to tackle a number of these issues.

Civil society representatives recognized that DDR programmes had led to a reduction in armed violence, but felt that issues of development and economic opportunity had not been addressed, to the detriment of sustainable reintegration. Violence was seen to have been merely transformed and 'democratized', with many more new criminal groups fuelling insecurity. Many civil society members also felt that DDR programmes had been parachuted into their communities by the state, with very little space for input from local communities.

Ex-combatants tended to feel insecure and threatened by new criminal gangs. They also defined security more broadly, including having a stable income and acceptance by society, and felt that DDR programmes did not meet their expectations in this regard.

Meanwhile, officials from central government and local municipalities expressed distrust of one other, hampering decentralization and the tailoring of DDR programmes to local needs. Policy-makers at the central level were reluctant to decentralize programmes through existing

structures, such as municipalities, because of a perception that these layers of government had been thoroughly co-opted by criminal and paramilitary elements. As a result, the ACR's attempt to decentralize was carried out through the establishment of CROs as a totally new kind of body at the local level. Local authorities for their part felt they had been bypassed in decisions on demobilization and reintegration by Bogotá. This mutual distrust and lack of cooperation has seriously impeded the crafting of a flexible DDR programme, and has confirmed the sense shared by many Colombians that they have no voice in public affairs.

The community reintegration component of the ACR's reintegration programme – although an important innovation – had been conceived as an attempt to break through some of these misunderstandings and suspicions. But it had been judged by many as too limited in scope and time to make any serious contribution to lasting reconciliation. It is therefore vital to move beyond the use of community as part of the DDR process – notably through community reintegration activities – towards a fuller sense of safe communities as an objective to which reintegration can contribute. This raises a host of issues that stand at the root of Colombia's history of conflict, including the issues of land, redress for victims, the presence of responsive state institutions, and an end to criminal infiltration of these bodies.

The JPL was a promising first step towards addressing these issues. However, implementation remains painfully slow, and the deep structures of illicit activity remain untouched. The Santos government's new Victims' Law appears to address some vitally important issues of reparation and reconciliation, but it remains to be seen whether in practice it will be able to deal with the grievances caused by the conflict, or overcome the flaws in the judicial system.

Policy recommendations

Although Colombia has one of the most developed DDR programmes in the world, it is clear that significant improvements can still be made, especially when it comes to linking DDR with community security, both by including communities in the design and implementation of the different components of the DDR programmes, and by ensuring that DDR works towards the end-state of community security. Two interrelated sets of recommendations stand out.

i. The relations between central government and the regions

Serious thought must be given to reforming the way local and central structures of government in Colombia interact. The failures of the country's project of decentralization are now well recognized, and are apparent in the high levels of mistrust between the centre and the localities, which gravely affect the DDR process and diminish the ability to frame a coherent, multi-level response to the security crisis.

But there is much less agreement on how these fault-lines can be remedied. Current policies on DDR, as well as planned reforms to the distribution of royalties charged on extractive industries, all point towards a trend of centralization of public sector management and finance. At the same time, this process runs the risk of moving too far towards the concentration of power unless it manages to support good practice in local government, respect the particular needs of communities and stimulate local political participation, which has traditionally been very low.

Debate on these issues is now well under way in Colombia. Without wishing to interfere with a process that is central to the way the country's domestic political life is managed, and is intimately related to the structure of local power and political parties, it is worth mentioning findings regarding the links between centre and periphery that derive from the research into DDR programmes. Addressing these issues in a systemic fashion would represent a huge boost to efforts to bring about sustainable reintegration and prevent the emergence of new forms of violence.

- **Mechanisms must be found to boost public participation in local and national political life. Where distrust in local political institutions is chronic, policy-makers must consider alternative structures that both respect local wishes and avoid contact with criminally contaminated authorities.**
 - Lessons learned and practical insights can be found with reputable civil society initiatives that enhance social fabric such as CBOs, NGOs and educational organizations.
 - Excessive centralization will only aggravate the underlying sense of disenfranchisement reported across civil society.

- **National programmes, such as DDR, should be able to adopt a performance-related system in their relations with local authorities.**
 - Although this incurs a certain amount of risk, those local governments that perform well should be entitled to handle more resources, with greater autonomy and control over project design. Credible investigations into fraudulent practices and linkages with criminal structures must take place. Sufficient political will, finances and human resources must be mustered to impose a credible threat to illegal practices.

ii. Improving security

The findings in the research also point to a number of recommendations aiming to enhance security in Colombia through DDR. These recommendations can be grouped into four categories: tackling dependency, eliminating the stigma attached to former combatants, connecting with locally driven approaches that provide alternatives to violence, and strengthening the links between civil society and the state.

- **Dependency of former combatants is, to an extent, inherent in DDR programmes. In Colombia, this dependency might be countered by creating more alternatives to violence. Proposals include:**
 - Focusing on social and economic ties to civilian life to increase the attraction of non-violence. Examples of practical inroads were given through the footwear industry in Bogotá and the indigenous reintegration track (see boxes in the paper). These initiatives worked specifically because context analysis was connected with viable alternatives to violence.
 - Devoting more attention and finance to dismantling emerging criminal structures so as to protect society and ex-combatants alike. Political commitment to structurally increase the capacity and scope of implementation of the Justice and Peace Law should be a first step.
 - A comprehensive approach against *bacrim*s who recruit among former combatants and pose a paramount threat to security at the local level and stability at the national level. This approach should include: credible criminal investigations at all levels, socio-economic approaches including community-based initiatives to increase resilience to conflict through providing alternatives to criminal practices, and democratic oversight of security measures to ensure constructive approaches to fighting *bacrim*s within the local context.
- **Removing the stigma attached to ex-combatants, particularly through the redeployment of the powerful publicity machines employed to encourage demobilization from guerrilla forces. Other proposals to reduce the stigma include:**
 - Consulting with civil society on the inherent trade-off between security and justice within the local context, and guiding policy development and communication strategies based on these perceptions. This can be done (at least in part) by making better use of the widely available research capacity in

Colombia, which can provide information on the local dynamics of and local perceptions of DDR.

- Constructively engaging both former combatants and society at large in security promotion and reconciliation. Consistent and clear information must be given to demobilized people and to civil society to prevent feelings of resentment, and feelings of being cheated by the government, and to provide a realistic projection of the reintegration period and related procedures and benefits.
- **Adopting a proactive, locally driven approach to encouraging alternatives to violence instead of focusing solely on more active policing of ex-combatants.**
 - Supporting and strengthening community reintegration programmes and making sure time frames and finances allow for reconciliation at the community level and the stimulation of social fabric and political participation.
 - Devising a comprehensive set of indicators aimed at analysing what the role of DDR programmes is in security promotion. These may include the ability of former combatants to maintain a formal job, the number of former combatants associated with *bacrim*s, and how DDR is perceived by both former combatants and society at large.
 - Allowing complete access for international observers to the DDR and justice process to monitor all DDR components, enhancing the credibility of the process among the population and the international community.
- **Exploring means to encourage civil society to act as a bridge between central and local levels of authority, and to participate more actively in the final stages of the reintegration process. Civil society can make inroads by:**
 - Sharing lessons on reintegration projects and formulating coherent policy advice to the Colombian government on implementing national policies in a localized fashion.
 - Sharing insights on how community reintegration and the (re)creation of the social fabric can be pursued.
 - Increasing cohesion, as far as possible, between civil society initiatives that are divided by a discourse which determines that each organization is either leftist or pro-government. Greater cohesion within civil society will make it more attractive for the Colombian state to share responsibilities within the reintegration process.

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