Forced Displacement in Colombia:
Public Policy, Gender and Initiatives for Reconstruction

Donny Meertens

National University of Colombia

Colombia

1. Introduction

In Colombia, one of the most dramatic social consequences of the armed conflict among guerrilla, paramilitary groups and the army during the last two decades has been the forced internal migration of about two million people who flee, mostly in a scattered way, from the countryside to urban areas, be it towns, cities or the national capital Bogotá. In the context of ongoing conflict, increasingly complex dynamics of war, regionalisation of motives and actors, and rapidly changing territorial configurations, the search for experiences of social reconstruction is not an easy task. Nevertheless, even in the midst of conflict, the affected population display initiatives that express resilience to violence, constitute acts of resistance or enhance new life projects, in spite of a general tendency to withdraw from public life, out of fear. Women play an important role in these initiatives. Gender relations and gender roles tend to change in the context of conflict, as women and men experience in a different way the traumas of war, the violations of their rights and the opportunities for rebuilding the social texture. In the following paragraphs we will develop a gender-sensitive analysis of the processes of uprooting, displacement and reconstruction of life projects by Colombian women and men.

2. The dynamics of conflict and displacement

Violence is considered an endemic feature of Colombian history. During the last few decades, violence has extended itself to all levels of society and moved from the remote corners of the country, involving a conjunction of political violence perpetrated by guerrilla forces, the Army and paramilitary groups, drug-related violence steeped in terrorism, vendettas, mercenaries and, in between, all kinds of so-called ordinary criminality. During the nineties, the annual number of violent deaths oscillated between 25.000 and 30.000, representing a national rate of 80 per 100.000 inhabitants, one of the highest rates in the world (Cubides et al. 1998:285, 286). At least 13% of these yearly deaths (3000-4000) are due to *political* violence, that is, massacres, disappearances or homicides perpetrated by state agents or members of one of the armed groups in conflict against, overwhelmingly, civilian population (Comisión Colombiana de Juristas 1996:4).

Several specific elements and features of the conflict have to be taken into account in order to understand its present dynamics. First of all, Colombia has a long history of violence as a way of political and social conflict resolution. In particular the period of extremely cruel war between Liberals and Conservatives during the 1950s and 1960s, known as *La Violencia*, had a profound effect on the lives of thousands of peasant families. In that time, rural civil population became highly involved both as actors and victims, and entire peasant families belonging to the opposite political party were massacred. It created memories of hate, spirals of vengeance and generalized mistrust among the new generations of rural populations. Secondly, the multiplicity of actors, the de-ideologization of war strategies (i.e. the use of terror instead of search for social support), and the fuelling of the conflict by drugs trafficking have led to its utter degradation in terms of international humanitarian law and to its complete territorial fragmentation. Therefore, even the smallest regions and communities (with the exception of some indigenous communities who try to resist the armed actors) are becoming internally divided and subjected to the arbitrary rule of guns employed by frequently shifting local power holders. This territorial and communal fragmentation in the midst of conflict constitutes one of the major obstacles to a comprehensive strategy towards social reconstruction.

Forced displacement - as a consequence of massacres, selective killings, threats or forced recruitment by one or all of the armed groups - has followed the irregular and highly unpredictable territorial pattern of the conflict. The dominant form of displacement in Colombia is dispersal, based on the movement of individual households. Collective, organized displacement occurred during the 1980s in the Magdalena Medio region. However, on-going persecution and repetition of the displacement-return cycle finally led to the weakening of social and organizational ties, and displacement lost its collective character. During recent years there seems again to have been an increase in the incidence of massive displacements, mostly to a town or small city near the expulsion zone. Sometimes a collective return may be negotiated within a relatively short period. The much more common individual movements are mostly rural-urban, though during the last few years they may have become repetitive or circular, and increasingly there have been reports of displacements between or within towns or cities. Displaced people may cover an enormous distance between the conflict zone and the city of arrival, like the family that travelled from the southern Pacific Coast to Bogotá, or, by contrast,

move only a short stretch, from one rural neighbourhood to another. The simultaneous presence of very different forms of displacement and the magnitude of dispersals and individual household movements constitute a particularly important feature of displacement in Colombia.

For most displaced people, return is not a realistic option, given the continuously escalating conflict and the involvement of the civilian population as the most significant victim of armed actions. Not even the IDPs themselves see it as a viable life project after displacement, as only 13% indicate a preference for return. There have been some examples of return movements, generally with international monitoring. Nevertheless, official figures show the incidence of return reducing from 37% in 2000 to a mere 11% (21,172 persons) in 2001. Rural resettlement schemes seem to be even less an option, as only 2,039 IDPs made use of this possibility.[1] With respect to a third option, that of rural re-settlement, its implementation up to now by the land reform institute *INCORA* has been totally insignificant: only 2000 formal beneficiaries since 1999. Persistent violence, economic non-viability and poor selection of beneficiaries have frequently led to -again violent- dissolution of communal enterprises for the resettled, and to a repetition of displacement - a very bitter experience for the IDPs who in these cases are left without any possibility to renewed government assistance.

This means that urban integration constitutes not only the dominant strategy for spontaneous economic and social reconstruction, but also the most realistic one, although this still is not fully recognised by public institutions.

The current situation has been shaped by a difficult and changeable political context: the collapse of the peace dialogue during the Pastrana government (1998-2002) with the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) guerrilla and the dismantling of the demilitarized zone in February 2002; the election by absolute majority of Alvaro Uribe as new president in May of the same year; the suspension of the peace dialogue with the other guerrilla force, ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional); and the internal division and re-alignment of the paramilitaries, the AUC (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia). After the new president took office in August 2002, a series of new and highly contested measures were taken by the new

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[1] Grupo Temático de Desplazamiento, *Estado de situación del desplazamiento...2001*

government: the declaration of a state of emergency (*estado de conmoción interior*),[2] provision for a million civilian informants or "collaborators" paid by the government, and the creation of "zones of rehabilitation and consolidation" (*zonas de rehabilitación y consolidación*) covering more than half the country, in which a series of restrictions on civilian rights are implemented,[3] including restrictions on the free movement and residence of all inhabitants and provision for military control of foreigners, including journalists and members of international NGOs.[4]

Not only the political situation, but also the economic conditions have deteriorated during the last few years, with Colombia in a period of deep recession since 1998. The percentage of the total population below the poverty line increased from 56.3% in 1999 to 60% in 2000, and 82% in rural areas.[5] The fall in production in the war-torn countryside and the impact of incoming IDPs on urban resources and social services have combined to reduce the living standards of the poor even further. Indeed, according to UNDP's latest report on human development Colombia descended to number 68 in the ranking of 173 countries.[6] A survey of IDPs in six regions of the country showed that their income is just above the misery line (defined as half the poverty line average income).[7]

Finally, the recent dynamics of the armed conflict have been such as to demonstrate that displacement is not the only expression of the humanitarian crisis. Increasingly, communities are surrounded by armed actors and not even allowed to flee - these are the so-called "communities under siege". In these cases of extreme vulnerability, all forms of access to their villages and townships are blocked and the transport of food, medicines, fuel and agricultural necessities prohibited. In other cases, particularly in the indigenous communities in the departments of

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[2] Colombia, *Decreto 1837 de 2002*, Bogotá, 11 August 2002
[3] Colombia, *Decreto 2002 de 2002*, Bogotá, 14 September 2002
[4] See Decretan la Conmoción Interior, *El Tiempo* [Bogotá], 12 August 2002; Restricción en medio país, *El Tiempo* [Bogotá], 15 September 2002
[5] Colombia, Departamento Nacional de Planeación, *Coyuntura económica e indicadores sociales*, Bogotá, December 2001
[6] United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2002: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*, 2002.
[7] International Organization for Migration, Diagnóstico sobre la población desplazada en seis departamentos de Colombia, Bogotá, 2001.

Cauca and Valle, new common fronts have been formed in order to keep out all armed actors from their territories. These new initiatives are known as "communities in resistance".[8]

3. The Populations Displaced by Violence: differential needs and rights

The question of the exact magnitude of the phenomenon of displacement has always generated - and probably will continue to generate - strong discrepancies between governmental and non-governmental sources. In 2002 the Red de Solidaridad Social (RSS - Social Security Network), the official entity that coordinates the National System for Assistance to IDPs, estimates the total number of internally displaced over the last 17 years at 720,000. At the same time, CODHES[9], the best known of the NGOs that provide monitoring and information on internal displacement, presents a figure of two million IDPs. This numerical disparity is not only due to different methodologies in data collection, problems of reliability or political bias in data interpretation. It also reflects different visions of the phenomenon in terms of its starting point in time. Whereas official figures use 1995 as a baseline, because this was the year when public policy first officially recognized the existence of a "displacement problem", CODHES takes 1985, ten years earlier, as its starting point.

For the year 2001, statistics show that internal displacement increased by 48% compared to the previous year. Although individual and family displacement continues to be the dominant form, the occurrence of mass exodus has substantially increased. Estimates of group displacement vary strongly between ngo and government or UN sources, probably due to the greater presence of governmental and international organizations on the occasions of mass exodus and subsequent concentration of IDPs in improvised collective shelters, which facilitates their counting and registration. It is very likely, on the other hand, that the scattered, individual or family displacement is severely under-registered as many IDPs do not trust the authorities, stay away from official registration and limit their contacts to NGOs or church organizations.

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[8] Grupo Temático de Desplazamiento, *Estado de situación del desplazamiento...2001*
[9] *Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento* (Consultants on Human Rights and Displacement)

Therefore, given the enormous complexity of population movements and the tendency to under-register them, the real number of IDPs will probably be closer to the non-official figures.

Displacement has a gender-differentiated impact on the population and also affects particularly the Afrocolombian and indigenous populations, which are over-represented amongst IDPs.

Women and girls constitute half of the displaced population. However, they are slightly over-represented in the reproductive age categories between 18 and 45 years. Three categories of women in particular have to be taken into account, because their situations are specific to, or aggravated by, the armed conflict and displacement, namely widows, female heads of household and women and girls who are victims of sexual violence. Female heads of household represent between 34.6% and 49.7% of all displaced households, a much higher percentage than the national average that oscillates around 24%. Moreover, young girls in a situation of displacement are particularly vulnerable to adolescent pregnancies.[10] The social and political experiences of women and men before displacement gave them both different weaknesses and abilities to rebuild their lives in the aftermath, as we will analyse in the next chapter.

The indigenous populations represent 8% of the displaced, compared to only 2% of the total population of Colombia. Displacement of indigenous people is to some extent invisible, partly because it tends to take place within their own territories or between communities that belong to the same ethnic group. For them, displacement means not only loss of territory, but also, and even more, loss of autonomy, the disturbance of traditional life rhythms and the deterioration of (material and non-material) culture.

Afrocolombians constitute 25% of IDPs, compared to 11% of the total Colombian population.[11] They are concentrated along the Pacific Coast (in, from north to south, the

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[10] Profamilia [G. Ojeda and R. Murad], *Salud sexual y reproductiva en zonas marginadas: situación de las mujeres desplazadas*, Bogotá, 2001
[11] Secretariado Nacional de Pastoral Social, Proyecto RUT sobre Desplazamiento Forzado en Colombia, Bogotá, December 2001 [Database]

departments of Chocó, Valle and Nariño), where they live in a very specific habitat of rainforest, river, and human settlements. During recent decades, the Afrocolombian population has started an important process of organization and in 2001 received communal land titles, in accordance with its rights as stipulated in Colombia's new constitution of 1991.[12] Several communities have returned, after displacement, and formed "peace communities" and "communities for life and dignity". In spite of the cohesive force of their new communal land titles, many of these communities are under serious threat of new displacement, due to the intensification of territorial disputes between guerrilla and paramilitary forces in the region.

4. Surviving after Displacement: popular initiatives

Upon arrival in the cities, the first step for displaced families is to contact kin or *paisanos* (people with the same geographical origin). Usually they live with them for a couple of days, a week or sometimes several weeks. Then they have to leave, because the receiving family also lives in poverty and can not sustain the feeding of so many mouths for an extended period. Sometimes the newly arrived have no contacts at all. In those cases, they might seek help from a priest, and will then be received by one of the Church organizations, like the Casa Migrante in Bogotá, where they can stay for six weeks. The second step is, for many but not for all, to register as a displaced family (the *declaración*) and visit the government organizations in order to get help. While waiting for the decision that enables them to be included in the national register, they start to look for work, or they start street vending or whatever survival strategy (*rebusque)* that belongs to informal economic activities. However, the displaced are in an even more disadvantaged position than those who have lived for a longer time in the urban environment - cynically called the "historical poor" by some analysts. In effect, most of the displaced previously worked in agriculture or related activities: this group amounts to 70%, according to various studies.[13] The remaining 30%, however, worked in urban environments or urban related activities, as shopkeepers, teachers, chauffeurs, hairdressers etc. These people

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[12] Regulated by law in 1993, Colombia, *Ley 70 de 1993*, Bogotá, 1993
[13] Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento, *Un País que huye: desplazamiento y violencia en una nación fragmentada*, Bogotá, 1999.

usually find work more easily than those with an exclusively rural background. For the latter, arrival in the city means a big change in occupational and gender roles.

When they arrive in the cities, the displaced not only need material conditions (work, income, housing) in order to survive and rebuild their lives, they also must give meaning to their past experiences and their present situation, in order to connect these in a realistic way to their hopes for the future, to their life projects. The unpredictable character of terror and the senseless violence of which they have become victims, make these processes extremely difficult.

While there are some similarities in the way men and women deal with their situation, it is more noticeable that there are substantial differences in the processes of reconstruction they undertake. Displaced women tend to be responsible for family survival in the cities and more easily than men take up all kinds of survival activities (street vending, domestic services), which, although the incomes they generate are precarious, give them an advantage over men, who suffer badly from unemployment and consequently from a loss of status as household providers.[14] Most of the men previously worked in agriculture and livestock breeding, which are not very useful occupations in their new urban environment. It usually takes them some time to get trained as construction workers or guards, and for them the displacement therefore is felt as a disruption of their occupational experience. Men's attitudes towards work are different from those of women: in their former agricultural jobs they were accustomed to well-defined tasks demanding physical strength and therefore would hardly apply the term "work" to the hazardous and irregular day-to-day activities of cleaning, vending or begging. This change of economic provider roles - and therefore of gender roles - is a widespread phenomenon amongst the displaced.

Displaced Afrocolombians and indigenous groups usually mobilise their own traditional networks after displacement, in the city as well as in the countryside. In Bogotá, each ethnic group has set up its own organisation. These migrant and ethnic organisations have created an

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[14] Meertens, Donny. Populations déplacées en Colombie et insertion urbaine, *Les Annales de la Recherche Urbaine* no. 91:118-127*,* Paris; Meertens, Donny. The Nostalgic Future: Terror, Displacement and Gender in Colombia, in Moser, C. and Clark, F. (eds), *Victims, Actors or Perpetrators? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*, London: Zed Books, 2001, pp 133-48; Meertens, Donny. Victims and Survivors of War in Colombia: Three Views of Gender Relations, in, Bergquist, C., Peñaranda, R. and Sánchez, G. (eds), *Violence in Colombia 1900-2000: Waging War and Negotiating Peace*, Wilmington DE: Scholarly Resources, 2001, pp.151-69

interesting vision of survival and reconstruction of ethnic identity: they have formulated strategies for income generation in the urban context, but which at the same time give them the possibility of maintaining commercial and cultural relationships with their communities of origin. Living close together is a prime requirement for such plans, and both organisations have therefore presented proposals for collective housing projects to the *Red de Solidaridad Social*, the official entity responsible for the coordination of State assistance to the displaced population.[15] However, in spite of their advantages in social cohesion and collective identity previous to displacement, the different ethnic groups -particularly the women- are more vulnerable in the urban context as they suffer triple discrimination because of culture, gender and up-rootedness, often felt as a loss of moral belonging and citizenship[16].

5. Surviving after displacement: the State response

The framework for current government policy towards IDPs is Law 387 of 1997. This law establishes the overall parameters for the National System for Integrated Assistance to IDPs and outlines which entities will participate in it and the ways the system has to be coordinated. In 1999, an Action Plan for Prevention and Assistance Concerning Internal Forced Displacement was formulated and its coordinating entity, the *Red de Solidaridad Social,* adopted a Strategic Plan for the Management of Internal Forced Displacement. In this Plan, reintegration (or "re-establishment") of IDPs consists of five interrelated strategies, for the success of all of which public order should have been restored and social organisation strengthened: Promotion of voluntary return of communities; Resettlement of communities and families; Socio-economic stabilisation; Access to land and security of tenancy; Housing and environmental management; Special attention to the needs of women and children.

The differential approach (taking into account gender, age and ethnic differences) is very poorly provided for in the Law: the only specific mention of women and children is made in

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[15] Meertens, Donny, *Encrucijadas Urbanas: Población Desplazada en Bogotá y Soacha, una mirada diferenciada por género, edad y etnia*. Bogotá, ACNUR, 2003.

Article 17, on re-establishment measures, referred to above. Specific attention to displacement among ethnic minorities has only lately become an important issue. In 2001 the Colombian Parliament issued a questionnaire on displacement in the Afrocolombian populations, and during 2002 UNHCR and the national indigenous organization ONIC put together some reflections and recommendations about the specific needs of indigenous people.[17] On the violation of rights and the specific needs of displaced women and girls, the UNHCR organised a sub-regional consultation with displaced women and girls, in Bogotá in May 2001. In addition, the Working Group on Women and Armed Conflict, organized the visit of the UN special Rapporteur on Violence against women in November 2001. In her report, the Special Rapporteur makes some recommendations for the integration of the human rights of women.[18]

In the course of the Pastrana government (1998-2002) legislation, policy formulation, inter-institutional coordination at the central level and financial allocations all substantially improved. Nevertheless, the gap between the demand for protection and assistance by IDPs and the effective institutional response steadily increased during the same period. Although this statement is valid for the whole National System for Integrated Assistance to IDPs, it is particularly true for the prevention and reintegration components. Factors that contribute to this gap are to be found in the political and economic context, as well as in the conceptual weakness of the formulation of policies and strategies, but above all in the wide range of obstacles related to implementation.

The political context of continuation, intensification and brutalization of the armed conflict, its geographical expansion and the spread of feelings of mistrust and fear amongst the civilian,

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[16] See for a fascinating analysis of the social representations of the displaced: Malkki, Liisa, National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees , in *Cultural Anthropology* vol.7, no. 1,1992, pp.24-44

[17] Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Recomendaciones frente al problema indígena, Bogotá 2002 (unpublished document); Colombia, Red de Solidaridad Social, Ministerio del Interior, Defensoría del Pueblo, Directriz para la atención a población indígena en riesgo o en situación de desplazamiento, Bogotá, 2002(unpublished document)

[18] Grupo Temático de Desplazamiento, *Consulta con mujeres desplazadas sobre principios rectores del desplazamiento,* Bogotá: UNHCR; OCHA, May 2001. See also United Nations, Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Integration of the Human Rights of Women and the Gender Perspective: Violence against Women, E/CN.4/2002/83/Add. 3, 11 March 2002; Working Group on Women and Armed Conflict, *Report on Sociopolitical Violence Against Women and Girls in Colombia*, Bogotá: ILSA, November 2001.

particularly the rural, population, sets serious limits to the effectiveness of prevention programmes and to the viability of the return or rural resettlement options in the re-establishment program. The economic context, of recession since 1999, has in turn had a negative impact on the availability of government funds, the generation of employment opportunities and the success of income creating projects for IDPs, both in rural and urban environments.

The financial response from the state, within the framework of the National System for Integrated Assistance to IDPs, has risen to 126,582 million pesos (approximately US$47 million). Of this, 52% has been spent on re-establishment, 37% on humanitarian emergency assistance, 6% on institution building and only 4% on prevention. However, these funds were insufficient to cover the target population of formally registered IDPs. In the economic stabilization component, for instance, target population coverage has only been 19.5%, and in housing even less, 3.7%, while the most successful component, humanitarian emergency assistance, still did not reach more than 43% of the registered IDPs.[19] This deficit in the allocation of resources undoubtedly reflects a lack of political prioritisation. Meanwhile, the Colombian government relies heavily on the presence of several United Nations agencies in the country .

At the conceptual level of policy design, there are four major points to be made. First, the definition of the national policy as directed at "the displaced population" and not at "the problem of displacement", a formulation that hampers the inclusion of receiving populations in the policy design, as has been pointed out by the author of a recent policy assessment document.[20] Second, the definition of IDPs as a vulnerable group, and particularly a transitory one. This focus emphasizes assistance and in practice excludes actions to re-establish the rights of IDPs (to truth, justice, moral and material repair, and, above all, to life and dignity). One of its manifestations has been the difficulty to get recognized psycho-social support and counselling (a form of moral repair) as a necessary and integral part of the assistance process, from emergency to re-establishment. Moreover, the displaced are submitted to severe timing

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[19] Forero, *Balance de la política de atención al desplazamiento interno forzado en Colombia 1999-2002,* Bogotá, UNHCR.

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requirements in order to qualify for assistance: up to three months after displacement for emergency aid and up to one year after displacement for participation in re-establishment programmes. It is not realistic to expect a displaced person to rebuild his or her life within such short time periods; nor are the official institutions capable of complying with them, because of operational difficulties.[21]

Third, all through legislation and policy formulation on re-establishment,[22] priority has been given to the return option, in spite of this being both the less viable one in the Colombian context and the option least wanted by the IDPs themselves (less then 20% in all studies). This strong emphasis on return could endanger its voluntary character - one of the internationally agreed principles of protection of IDPs. One of the most serious bottlenecks for re-establishment programmes related to return or resettlement of rural communities is access to land and security of tenancy. Ensuring land property rights for returnees is an important goal in cases where land titles previous to displacement did not formally exist. This may be an opportunity, not only to restore, but to enhance gender equity, making use of the legal provision for "joint property rights for spouses or partners" (*titulación conjunta)*, already established in the 1988 land reform legislation.[23] There have been several proposals, like the creation of "peasant reserves" or the Bank for Land Exchange, but it has not been possible to put these into practice. Legal action by the State in order to confiscate landed properties acquired with drugs money and allocate these to IDP resettlement schemes is seriously hampered by judicial counter-action and has consequently turned completely inoperative.

It appears likely that the new Uribe government will continue this focus and even strengthen the option of return for IDPs in the framework of the president's pacification model (called "democratic security") through the creation of "zones of rehabilitation and consolidation". Institutional strategies for urban integration remain weak and incoherent.

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[20] *Ibid.*
[21] As shown in the present author's recent study on displaced men, women and ethnic minorities in Bogotá.
[22] Colombia, *Ley 387 de 1997*; Colombia, Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social, Document No 3057 and Document No 3115
[23] Colombia, *Ley 30 de 1988*, Bogotá, 1988; Deere, C. D. and León, M., *Género, propiedad y empoderamiento: tierra, estado y mercado en América Latina,* Bogotá: Tercer Mundo Editores; Universidad Nacional, 2000

On the other hand, the spontaneous re-establishment strategies undertaken by the majority of the displaced themselves in the urban centres of arrival are not taken into account by policy makers. Moreover, assistance to IDPs in the urban centres is faced with special difficulties. The problems come from both sides: IDPs tend to arrive one by one in the cities, without any cohesion, as they come from all regions of the country; they often feel fearful and are hesitant to lay open their case to official authorities; without access to reception facilities and always in search for new survival opportunities, their patterns of urban settlement tend to be unstable, mobile and invisible; they are very heterogeneous in the cultural and ethnic sense, but have in common low levels of formal education and work experience limited to rural environments. On the response side, the start of re-establishment activities by RSS came late, in 1999, and passed through some negative experiences with individual income generating projects without analysis of sustainability or financial monitoring. The enormous time-gap between emergency assistance and re-establishment has had very detrimental effects on the organized activities of IDPs in urban areas. Many households left their organizations in a desperate search for individual survival possibilities.

Fourth, the ideas of re-establishment and economic stabilization have not been clearly conceptualized in relation to prior (emergency) and posterior (development and reconstruction) phases. There is no clear design of a post-emergency phase with flexible programmes for short-term employment, income generation, food security and capacity building; nor are strategies envisioned that would link the post-emergency phase with a more definitive establishment phase in the context of regional and local development plans. This lack of a more comprehensive vision of the requirements of a post-emergency phase, means that administrative procedures appropriate for normal situations have not been revised or adapted and thus remain slow and too complex for a situation that requires flexibility and agility.

6. Conclusions: Re-weaving the social fabric

It is clear from the foregoing analysis that a reintegration programme for IDPs requires a range of differentiated strategies that include both the urban and the semi-urban, the individual

and the collective, the IDPs and the receiving communities, and takes account of the special needs and capabilities of women, young people and ethnic minorities.

The design of strategies that include the receiving communities takes on special significance in the light of the recent statements by the new Uribe government, in which programmes specifically for IDPs in the cities are categorized as undesirable "positive discrimination", which must be replaced by "normal" local development and anti-poverty plans. Formulated in this way (that is, as the end of positive discrimination), the statements might not sufficiently take into account the right of repair for the IDPs. To remain inclusive, the idea requires a two-way approach. On the one hand, the inclusion of IDPs in "normal" anti-poverty programmes must bring with it an increase in social investment and an adaptation of requirements for access to the programmes in the light of the IDPs' special conditions. On the other hand, extending post-emergency programmes for IDPs to include receiving populations, requires careful formulation of the bases for inclusion.

Research in the urban centres suggests that displaced women play a much more prominent role than men in interacting with local communities. Support for women's networks around housing, social services, health and sexual/reproductive rights, as well as income generative projects in the *barrios*, could be an important strategy for re-establishment and reconstruction of the social fabric in the cities. Additionally, three situations related to IDPs demand special attention: the switch in economic provider roles between displaced women and men upon arrival in the cities; the until now unexplored possibility of joint property rights for peasant spouses, applicable to rural return or resettlement scenarios, and the role of women's organizations for the defence of their rights in situations of displacement and war.

In a polarized country divided by mistrust, organizing IDPs is a difficult process. IDP associations tend to have a high degree of volatility but nevertheless play an important role in the reconstruction process, both as subcontractors and as interlocutors with the government. Networks based on ethnic elements or common geographical origin (*paisanaje)* may constitute building blocks for reconstruction.

Finally, the present conflict situation in Colombia gives little room for optimism. The breakdown of the peace talks, the continuing intensification and brutalization of the armed conflict and the military measures taken by the newly elected president set a very restrictive context for what has been the main theme for this paper: the social and economic reintegration of people internally displaced by violence. In this context, the internationally applied "post-conflict reconstruction" terminology is of only limited use. In its place, new and creative concepts and strategies have to be adopted in order to visualise ways of reconstruction in time of war, and through them, create possibilities for future peace. In practical terms, this means that all IDP reintegration activities must be embedded in a strong framework of protection.