



Cooperation Experience within Business Comprehensive Accompaniment as Contribution to the Reintegration Process in the Post-conflict Process

COOPERATION EXPERIENCE WITHIN BUSINESS COMPREHENSIVE ACCOMPANIMENT AS CONTRIBUTION TO THE REINTEGRATION PROCESS IN THE POST- CONFLICT PROCESS¹



Experiencia de cooperación en el acompañamiento empresarial integral en el territorio como aporte al proceso de reintegración en el posconflicto

Experiência de cooperação no acompanhamento empresarial integral no território como aporte ao processo de reintegração no pós-conflito

RECIBIDO: 11 DE NOVIEMBRE DE 2015

EVALUADO: 11 DE FEBRERO DE 2016

APROBADO: 18 DE MARZO DE 2016

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to contribute a point of view to post-conflict processes through the understanding of the experience acquired through business comprehensive accompaniment (with international cooperation resources) to people in the process of reintegration within civil life. The majority of these people belonged to paramilitary groups called AUC (for its name in Spanish). The methodology applied was qualitative of a descriptive type and we narrate their experience and present the lessons learned throughout this process that could be applied again during the post-conflict. At the same time, when executing the business accompaniment project, we applied the following methodological tools: 1) Documental analysis of specialized literature, 2) Newspaper file, 3) Base line development, and 4) Diagnostic instrument application by

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RESUMEN

Este artículo pretende aportar a los procesos de posconflicto a través del entendimiento de la experiencia en el acompañamiento empresarial integral a personas en proceso de reintegración en la vida civil pertenecientes en su mayoría a grupos paramilitares de las denominadas Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), con el apoyo de recursos de cooperación internacional. La metodología aplicada fue de carácter cualitativo de tipo descriptivo, en cuanto se relata la experiencia y se presentan las lecciones aprendidas de este proceso que pueden ser replicables en el posconflicto. Paralelamente en la ejecución del proyecto de acompañamiento empresarial, tuvo la aplicación de las siguientes herramientas metodológicas: 1) Análisis documental de literatura especializada. 2) Archivo hemerográfico. 3) Elaboración de

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RESUMO

Este artigo pretende aportar aos processos de pós-conflito, através do entendimento da experiência no acompanhamento empresarial integral a Pessoas em Processo de Reintegração à vida civil pertencentes na sua maioria a grupos paramilitares das denominadas AUC, com o apoio de recursos de cooperação internacional. A metodologia aplicada, foi de carácter qualitativa de tipo descritiva, em tanto se relata a experiência e apresentam-se as lições aprendidas deste processo e que podem ser replicáveis no pós-conflito. Paralelamente na execução do projeto de acompanhamento empresarial teve a aplicação das seguintes ferramentas metodológicas: 1) análise documental de

¹ Este artículo es resultado del proyecto Acompañamiento Empresarial Integral de la Alta Consejería Presidencial para la Reintegración, que fue financiado con recursos de agencias estatales y con aportes de cooperación internacional de la Agencia de los Estados Unidos para el Desarrollo Internacional y la Organización Internacional para las Migraciones. El proyecto fue ejecutado por la Institución Universitaria Esumer durante el periodo 2009-2011.

means of a questionnaire and an interview. The results obtained are basically oriented to findings of human, population, business, and institutional types. This experience showed the way that by accompanying a reintegrated person –by means of international cooperation and reintegration projects (in this case, by promoting an entrepreneurial culture)– it is possible to contribute to Colombian post-conflict reality in such a way that those who opt for this alternative could get another chance.

línea base. 4) Aplicación de instrumento de diagnóstico mediante cuestionario y entrevista. Los resultados obtenidos se orientan fundamentalmente a hallazgos de tipo humano, poblacional, empresarial e institucional. La experiencia ciertamente reflejó cómo a partir del acompañamiento al desmovilizado la cooperación internacional y la apuesta por proyectos de reinserción en la civilidad, en este caso desde el fomento a la cultura del emprendimiento, se puede aportar al posconflicto colombiano de modo que quienes opten por estas alternativas consigan oportunidades en la legalidad.

literatura especializada. 2) Arquivo hemerográfico. 3) Elaboração de linha base. 4) Aplicação de instrumento de diagnóstico mediante cuestionário e entrevista. Os resultados obtidos orientam-se fundamentalmente a descobertas de tipo humano, populacional, empresarial e institucional. A experiência certamente refletiu, como a partir do acompanhamento ao desmobilizado, a cooperação internacional e a aposta por projetos de reinserção à civilidade, neste caso desde o fomento à cultura do empreendedorismo, pode-se aportar ao pós-conflito colombiano de modo que quem optem por estas alternativas consigan oportunidades na legalidade.

Keywords: Demobilization, urban armed conflict, self-defense, Medellín, cooperation, post-conflict.

Palabras clave: desmovilización, conflicto armado urbano, autodefensas, Medellín, cooperación y posconflicto.

Palavras chave: Desmobilização, conflito armado urbano, autodefesas, Medellín, cooperação e pós-conflito.

PARA CITAR ESTE ARTÍCULO / TO CITE THIS ARTICLE / PARA CITAR ESTE ARTIGO:

Martínez Peña, B. I. y Duarte Herrera, L. K. (2016). Experiencia de cooperación en el acompañamiento empresarial integral en el territorio como aporte al proceso de reintegración en el posconflicto. *Panorama*, 10(18) pp. 67-82.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to systematize the experience of the comprehensive business intervention model applied to ex-combatants of self-defense groups, which is geared towards the generation of income through entrepreneurship within the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration policy².

The experience presented here was carried out in Medellín and its Metro Area during the period between 2009 and 2011 with contributions from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), state agencies and business assistance from Institución Universitaria Esumer, both in the conception of business ideas and in the support of ideas managed by demobilized ex-combatants on their own as part of the program.

The article is organized in four parts: the first explains the methodological component containing the tools used in the development of the project and in the preparation of the article. The second part develops the framework of reference for the project and describes the history of political armed conflict in Colombia in detail. In the third part we present data specific to the context under study or, in other words how the period of violence and the demobilization process took place in Medellín, a city that took in a significant number of demobilized ex-combatants from self-defense groups. Finally, the fourth part exposes the

experience of offering comprehensive business assistance to participants of the reintegration process, as well as testimonial evidence. The findings and lessons learned during the intervention are exposed in the conclusions.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research is descriptive to the extent it exposes the characteristics and events related to the experience of comprehensive business assistance for the social and economic reintegration of demobilized ex-combatants of the United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia (AUC) in Medellín and discloses at the same time the lessons learned and findings from this process with the purpose of assessing the challenges that lie ahead in a possible post-conflict scenario.

The business assistance project was implemented through the following methodological tools: 1) a documentary analysis of specialized literature on the subject under study; 2) a newspaper library to systematize violent actions perpetrated in Medellín and present the context under study; 3) the preparation of a baseline to identify important aspects of the business intervention; and 4) the application of a diagnostic instrument to determine the weaknesses and needs of productive units.

It is important to highlight that the data systematized in this experience correspond for the most part to the 2009-2014 period to the extent the project was executed within said period. Regarding Institución Universitaria Esumer, one of the project's operators we found that it served a

extensively explains the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration policy and the components of the general and legal context related to conceptual definitions and procedural guidelines.

²The public policy instruments that guide and regulate disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes in Colombia are provided by Law 548 of 1999, directed by CONPES document 3554 of December 1, 2008, which

population of 100 beneficiaries, which included both demobilized groups and demobilized individuals.

The execution of this project made it possible to establish descriptive, logical and analytical deductions and relationships and also to reach the conclusions and assumptions expressed here.

FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE

Colombia's history is marked by inequality and unfairness that still remain latent today to the extent that a consensual, coherent and continuous solution integrating all the demands and disagreements of the population has yet to be found.

It is important to focus on one of the most painful periods in Colombia's history, the period of *la Violencia*, which affected big cities such as Medellín and where the situation worsened with the consolidation of drug trafficking and the emergence of illegal armed actors that are still part of the city's dynamics.

Camacho (1988) argues that the Colombian violence of the 1940s and 1960s materialized in the socio-economic, socio-political, socio-cultural and territorial spheres. The first refers to the struggle over material resources and inequitable distribution; the second to the armed and violent struggle for the power of the State; the third has to do with the lack of social tolerance towards those who talk about or disagree with the current political and economic order, and the fourth relates to the struggle for territory and the fight against those who represent capital accumulation models, take

the resources away from the inhabitants and generate regional imbalance and migration.

Palacios and Safford (2002) explain the period of *la Violencia* in Colombia from the construction and periodization of four large continuous and interrelated phases: 1) "The violence of bipartisan sectarianism" (1945-1953); 2) "The violence of the mafia" (1954-1964); 3) "The revolutionary guerrillas" (1961-1989); and 4) "The violence of the 1990s".

The first was characterized by the political struggle between liberals and conservatives for power, which left hundreds dead in the countryside and in cities. One of the most unfortunate events in the political history of the country was the assassination of the leader and presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán on April 9, 1948, which unleashed a massive and bloody urban revolt known as *el Bogotazo*. The liberal resistance formed the first armed groups known as the Guerrillas del Llano during this period.

The second phase was characterized not only by the bipartisan struggles of the previous phase, but also by the control of the land market and the prosperous coffee business, coveted by traditional party forces. For the authors, these circumstances led to a wave of violence for predominantly economic reasons, which is why the main victims of this second phase were small landowners and smallholders of the *haciendas*.

The armed conflict gained strength during the third phase, while the revolutionary struggle of the guerrilla organizations focused at the beginning on the transformation of the social order and the State. The country was engulfed in a deep, systematic

violence leading to a dramatic increase in the number of homicides. The National Liberation Army (ELN), the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the People's Liberation Army (EPL), the Socialist Renewal Current (CRS), the April 19 Movement (M-19) (a guerrilla group that followed an urban model at the beginning) and the Quintín Lame Armed Movement (MAQL) were born at this time. It should be noted that some of these groups have already demobilized and that in fact, it is estimated that 4853 combatants from different irregular groups have laid down their arms (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2007).

The fourth phase was characterized by the extensive presence of drug trafficking, which led to the establishment of criminal forces such as organized crime, paramilitary groups and phenomena such as forced displacement and social cleansing of marginal populations.

The national armed conflict intensified in this decade with the escalation of drug trafficking activities and the increasingly active presence of a diverse group of actors that began to forge alliances or rivalries that ended up unleashing different scenarios of violence including the mafia and insurrection, leaving the civilian population defenseless in the midst of the conflict.

For Palacios and Safford (2002) this phase has not ended yet, as many of the insurgent structures, which were born in the previous decades remain on the scene and have gradually increased their military strength.

Undoubtedly, violence and drug trafficking result in migration and have increased the problem of

forced displacement from the countryside to the city. For this reason, it is worthwhile to clarify the concept of *urban armed conflict*, understood as an expression that derives from and has a close relationship with the political armed conflict at the national level.

To study the conflict, and in particular urban armed conflict we need to analyze the antagonistic and asymmetric relations existing within the urban space, which is the same space that brings together different people that coexist and interact with each other and with the social order and leads to the development of opposing objectives.

Medellin has been defined as an urban space with notorious social, economic and political inequalities, which has led to an increase in the natural fragmentation that often characterizes urban environments (Vélez, 2001, p 62). This fragmentation and polarization has determined and continues to determine the way people relate to each other and the structure of the urban space as well.

For Franco (2004) the lack of regulation and planning of urban space in Medellin as a direct responsibility of the State led to “the formation of two urban models, one that was planned and another that was spontaneous, informal, illegal and a permanent source of conflict” of all kinds (p.70), which evidence the typical and atypical actions of each actor but also the actions resulting from the confrontation of everyone against everyone else. Coexistence and the urban environment are affected in both spheres of violence and the civilian population considered as a permanent resource of war is ultimately subjected to control and surveillance processes by armed actors in conflict.

The conflict in Medellín is broadly characterized by being systematic, structural, dynamic and violent. It is systematic to the extent that the conflict has been going on for a long time although it displays clear peaks and variations in its intensity. Its systematic attribute means that the conflict exhibits self-sustaining and self-reproducing dynamics that permanently produce a social state of conflict tension. The conflict is structural insofar as it is culturally assumed and reproduced as a subsystem in which antagonistic relations converge within the social system of conflict, a matter that brings about the loss of the collective sense and the absence of ethics in social relations. It is dynamic because the conflict experiences variations and changes during its evolution represented by substantial modifications or the introduction of new variables. Finally, it is violent to the extent the actors of the conflict (*sicarios*, paramilitary groups and militias) have established different spheres of violence: their own and those derived from the effects of the confrontation and collision between the different actors of the urban armed conflict.

In short, and following a reflection by Bonilla (1995) the urban conflict in Medellín has materialized in several outbreaks of violence which include the following: 1) The economic crisis in the region; 2) The presence of drug trafficking in all levels of society; 3) The crisis of role models of collective identity; 4) The reinforcement of concepts such as strength and easy money; 5) The irruption of urban military expressions; 6) The existence of youth gangs; and 7) The intensification of social atomization and segmentation of cities expressed in the appropriation and use of space in parceled form.

THE CONTEXT OF VIOLENCE AND DEMOBILIZATION IN MEDELLIN

As provided for above, Medellín has a history of widespread violence associated with the drug trafficking business to an important extent. There are several illegal armed groups within the city's perimeter that have emerged and become established and which include guerrilla militias, self-defense groups and *sicarios*. It should be noted that the latter form part of the category of actors in the urban armed conflict since they have become *de facto* powers in the city's communes with financing from drug trafficking forces and allied with paramilitary groups (which demobilized within the peace process with self-defense groups in 2003).

Any reference to the context of urban armed conflict in Medellín implies a review of the history of one of the actors with the greatest presence in the city: the AUC. The foregoing to the extent the experience systematized in this article has to do with the Integral Business Assistance project whose target audience was the participants of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process of self-defense groups in Medellín.

According to Palacios and Safford (2002), self-defense or paramilitary groups emerged as an anti-subversive force in "self-defense". However, over time some self-defense groups began to receive support from old and new landlords such as drug traffickers. The AUC acquired mobility and offensive power and became an organization whose main motivation was above all a desire for revenge, the fight against subversive groups and their legitimate defense.

Death to Kidnappers (MAS) was the first of the self-defense groups created in the city at the service of mafia and landlord leaders against the actions of the guerrillas. This ominous precedent was the tip of the iceberg for the consolidation of a series of groups that included the Pepes, the Metro Block, the Heroes of Granada Bloc, the Cacique Nutibara Bloc and the Magdalena Medio Bloc, as well as for the irruption of a significant number of private surveillance cooperatives such as the Cooperatives for Private Surveillance and Security (Convivir), which charged fees and exercised “social control” (Moreno, 2003) in the city with procedures and actions that were not very clear before the law.

The Cacique Nutibara Bloc brought together various illegal expressions that were taking hold in Medellin. Don Berna³ was the contact point between drug trafficking and the AUC's General Staff since he assumed control of several collection offices in Medellin, Itagui Bello, Sabaneta and La Terraza gang following the death of Pablo Escobar. La Terraza was absorbed by the Cacique Nutibara Bloc (according to the testimony of Doblezero in Cívico, 2009). This is how in 2001 said block began to surround the 13th commune, an area where guerrilla militias of the ELN and the FARC were present and which had exercised territorial control since the 1990s.

Moreno (2003) points out that once the self-defense groups took hold in the city, they gradually began to grow until they were able to place under their orders the majority of the *sicario* groups and recruited criminals who had deserted other illegal armed groups.

Table 1 shows the violent actions perpetrated in Medellin during the 2001-2006 period according to the illegal actor who executed them. In that sense, it is clear that the violent actions executed by the guerrilla militias almost disappeared from the local territory. This was not the case of *sicario* groups, which increased their actions as seen in 2005 and 2006. Regarding paramilitary groups, it could be noted that their actions were significant in 2002 and 2003. However, the violent actions of this group began to weaken throughout the local territory with the demobilization process.

Table 1. Violent actions registered in Medellin according to a newspaper library prepared for the 2001-2006 period

<i>Illegal actor</i>	<i>Records</i>					
	<i>2001</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2006</i>
Sicario groups	09	26	14	19	25	44
Guerrilla militias	19	31	04	10	0	0
Paramilitar y ⁴	16	17	23	11	04	04
Total records per year	44	74	41	40	29	48
Percentage represented per year	15.9	26.8	14.8	14.5	10.6	17.4

Negotiations between the national government and the General Staff of the AUC began formally in 2003, within the process known as Justice and Peace for the entire national territory. The AUC claimed and always presented themselves as legitimate political participants of the armed conflict that conducted violent actions to support the counterinsurgent political project that, they argued, brought them together. However, the truth

³ Alias of Diego Fernando Murillo, head of the Cacique Nutibara Bloc.

⁴ The actions performed by different blocs operating in the city were grouped under the ‘paramilitary’ category.

is that this group gave up on their true purpose when they decided to join drug traffickers and gain greater participation in the business to the point of putting the paramilitary structure at the service of these structures for profit.

The Justice and Peace process advanced by the National Government ended with the demobilization of 31,671 men throughout Colombia (2003-2006) (Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, 2006). 10,194, equivalent to 32% of the national total operated in the province of Antioquia. This means that Antioquia and its capital Medellín contained a significant number of demobilized ex-combatants resulting from this peace process. This represented great challenges for the local, province and national administrations as well as for civil society, given that in long term these demobilized ex-combatants were going to demand assistance in education, stipends, employment and opportunities for a legal life.

The first bloc to demobilize was Cacique Nutibara, which operated in Medellín. 868 of its members committed to stop their illegal activities and delivered 497 short and long-range weapons. Heroes of Granada was another bloc that operated in Antioquia, which demobilized in 2005 and of which 2033 men delivered 1120 weapons (Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, 2006).

The characterization of Medellín as a host city for demobilized ex-combatants is supported by the available data on collective demobilizations:

The gradual dismantling of 38 armed structures began [in Medellín] with 31,671 demobilized ex-combatants (6% women) and 18,051 weapons delivered. In the general framework of the negotiation process with the AUC, Medellín was the first city to face a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration program and, in addition the Colombian city with the largest number of demobilized ex-combatants. One month before the end of the period for the demobilization process, 2,885 ex-combatants in the city (26% of the total) were served by the Peace and Reconciliation Program. The figure corresponded to 868 men from the Cacique Nutibara Bloc, 1617 from the Heroes of Granada Bloc and 400 from the Catatumbo, Pacific, Bananero and other blocs (Alonso and Valencia, 2008, p. 15)5.

It should be noted that it was only until the end of 2003 (November and December), the period of demobilization of the Cacique Nutibara Bloc that the number of violent actions perpetrated by paramilitary groups began to decrease. In 2004, 2005 and 2006 there was a noticeable decrease as shown in Table 1.

The national and local governments (Medellin) promoted programs to generate spaces for the demobilization of active subjects (the members of illegal armed groups) to the extent an effective and well-executed disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process helps to promote individual or collective demobilization.

However, the central objective of any disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process is to consolidate social security in the short term and stimulate the country's sustainable socio-economic development in the long term. To achieve this purpose there should be measures in place intended to allow the successful integration and permanence

(Córdoba) 940, Cauca (Antioquia) 728, Turbo (Antioquia) 646, Puerto Boyacá (Boyacá) 600, Valencia (Córdoba) 505, San Pedro de Urabá (Antioquia) 467, Carepa (Antioquia) 412 and Apartadó (Antioquia) 439 (Mapp/OEA, 2006, cited in Alonso and Valencia, 2008).

⁵ The geographical location of demobilized ex-combatants in 2008 was the following: 32% in Antioquia, 14.5% in Córdoba, 10.5% in Cesar, 8.6% in Magdalena and 6.8% in Santander; others in the rest of the country. The distribution of demobilized ex-combatants in the cities was the following: Medellín 3037, Montería 1859, Valledupar 1548, Santa Marta 1228, Tierralta

of the demobilized population in a lawful life through coordination mechanisms with productive chains either through job placement or entrepreneurship.

Experiences in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes worldwide indicate that they can be understood in two senses: one which takes into consideration individual demobilized ex-combatants and their families and another which focuses on the relevant communities. The first is characterized by the development of long-term strategies applied to each person (life plan) or group of individuals. This approach, which includes the promotion and development of academic, vocational and civic capacities necessary for peaceful interaction in society is the most common, given that it is less expensive and easier to implement. The individual or group approach is the one that is currently being implemented both in the Colombian context and at the local level in the case of Medellín.

The second approach is based on the need to create spaces for communication between host communities and demobilized ex-combatants to facilitate the latter's adaptation to civilian life through coexistence, construction of citizenship, reconciliation and socio-economic reactivation strategies for communities affected by violence. This approach has the additional benefit of bringing about a deeper integration with development, peace consolidation and victim reparation policies while being the least applied due to its high costs.

Host communities as scenarios in which demobilized ex-combatants operate are considered by the theory as part of the implementation of

actions planned within the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration policy. Demobilized ex-combatants, insofar as they are integrated into local development dynamics and cease to be illegal armed actors, can become citizens that have returned to civilian life.

The people that are part of the reintegration process in Medellín are spread apart and live in neighboring communities where they can develop their social, human and, in many cases, business plans. This makes them actors of local development. However, the sustainability of these projects requires the participation of national and international actors, of the community and society, which can accept or reject this interest, and of public and private institutions in charge of supporting and creating an environment ideal for the development and consolidation of the process, as well as donors who contribute the necessary funds.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE BUSINESS ASSISTANCE MODEL

Agreements and projects aimed at promoting development in the current international system are developed through cooperation mechanisms. According to Duarte and González (2015) cooperation is presented as an efficient tool to correct evident disparities, deficiencies and specific shortcomings of specific historical territories and contexts.

Demobilization processes arouse the interest of the international community, due to which the IOM has implemented the Community-Focus

Reintegration Program since 2006 with the support of USAID to strengthen the human and entrepreneurial abilities of people in the process of reintegration. A process was developed through an agreement with Institución Universitaria Esumer and within the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration policy to strengthen abilities that allowed people in the process of reintegration to improve their business skills to support their life plans through prior training programs.

The purpose of the Comprehensive Assistance for the Economic and Social Reintegration of Demobilized Population project in the municipalities of Medellín and the Metro Area of the Aburrá Valley is to provide business assistance and income-generating mechanisms through entrepreneurship. Esumer, through an agreement with the IOM and USAID served a population of 100 demobilized ex-combatants, both collective and individual⁶.

Bearing in mind that the purpose of the project is the social and economic reintegration of demobilized ex-combatants through the generation of income with entrepreneurship the IOM and USAID contributed to the strengthening of each productive unit with economic support, which, on occasion could amount to USD\$1500. Esumer provided comprehensive assistance in administrative, productive, marketing, commercial and human development aspects to ensure participants acquire the tools they need to connect to formal, legal, economic, commercial and business dynamics.

In short, the Comprehensive Business Assistance project seeks to strengthen each productive unit in a comprehensive manner (including administrative, productive, marketing, commercial and human development aspects) so that participants acquire the tools they need to connect to formal, legal, economic, commercial and business dynamics. This process is included in the context of the National Social and Economic Reintegration Policy set forth in Law 418/97 and Decree 3043/2006, among others.

Of the three components of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, the reintegration stage of demobilized ex-combatants exhibits the greatest difficulties since the institutional, economic, political and social strength which is usually lacking in States emerging from armed confrontation, especially if such situation continues as is the case of Colombia is crucial for that process.

According to the National Social and Economic Reintegration Policy, to promote a successful reintegration process it is essential to:

- Create conditions that allow demobilized ex-combatants to become autonomous citizens;
- Strengthen the social, economic and cultural foundations of the host communities;
- Promote peaceful coexistence and national reconciliation (Conpes 3554, 2008).

The National Social and Economic Reintegration Policy of Armed People and Groups is based on the three conceptual pillars referred to above. Put in other terms, these pillars mean that demobilized

ex-combatants are armed actors of the AUC who surrendered as part of a group process based on the decisions of their commanders.

⁶ For the project, the so-called individual demobilized ex-combatants come from guerrilla groups and their process occurs spontaneously and on a personal basis. Collective demobilized

ex-combatants needs to be integrated into social dynamics from the standpoint of civility; secondly, that he or she engages in lawful activities to make a living through entrepreneurship or job placement⁷ and no longer needs state aid; and, thirdly although neither the Colombian Agency for Reintegration nor the operator have the capacity to substantially affect host communities, that he or she can contribute to peaceful coexistence and national reconciliation to the extent their support of demobilized ex-combatants contributes to their full reintegration into civilian life, meaning one less person involved in armed confrontation.

The intervention process is consistent with a model developed and validated through entrepreneurial assistance activities for different populations and socioeconomic contexts of entrepreneurs and microentrepreneurs, which approach focuses on the principle of “learning by doing”. The intervention process is disaggregated in figure 1 below by means of a generic model, which was applied and adjusted to specific contexts to guide integral business interventions with people in the process of reintegration.

Figure 1. Generic intervention process



IOM and Esumer signed a cooperation agreement with the objective of serving a number of demobilized beneficiaries enrolled in the program of the High Council for the Social and Economic Reintegration of People. The process is comprised of several stages:

- Selection of beneficiaries;
- Awareness workshops;
- Assessment;
- Baseline;
- Improvement Plan and Business Plan;
- Assistance, advice, human and business training;
- Knowledge transfer;
- Final baseline, indicator system.

The business assistance process consisted of group and individual training that sought to strengthen each production unit in a comprehensive manner (administrative, productive, marketing, commercial and human development aspects), so that participants acquire the tools they need to connect to formal, legal, economic, commercial and business dynamics. Each productive unit was periodically visited throughout the process by an advisory structure comprised of administrative-financial, marketing and technical advisors.

The experience with demobilized ex-combatants in the process of reintegration has been carried out in different moments and contexts, both in the city and in municipalities of the province of Antioquia. During the execution period, 310 people from different origins and with certain characteristics became part of the process at different times.

⁷ Job placement is provided by the Colombian Agency for Reintegration, which connects institutional and business

demand with the offer of personnel trained in the performance of activities that do not require skilled labor.

Given the context of demobilizations in Medellín and Antioquia and the implementation of the reintegration plan led by the Colombian Agency for Reintegration, collective demobilizations only took place as of 2006 due to negotiations with the AUC. The Intervention Program was comprised by a majority of collective demobilized ex-combatants (AUC), who represented 89% of the intervened population, with only 11% of individual demobilized ex-combatants (guerrillas). Of these figures, 76% were men, while women represented 24%; it should be noted that most women demobilized individually from guerrilla groups and made the decision at their own risk.

Taking into account the number of beneficiaries, it was found that the beneficiaries of the project are located in several communes of the city, except in commune 12 (La América) and commune 14 (El Poblado). 49% of the population in the process of reintegration is located in the northeastern (communes 1, 2, 3 and 4) and northwestern (communes 5, 6 and 7) areas of the city, while 26% is in the central-eastern zone and 6% in the central-western zone. A significant percentage of beneficiaries live in townships and other municipalities of the Aburrá Valley or in municipalities outside the city (16%). It is important to note that women, who are mostly demobilized ex-combatants from guerrilla groups, are located in rural areas or in municipalities outside of Medellín.

combatants, who are mostly young people are very important to the extent 86.8% are between 19 and 35 years old. It was also found that the level of education is good, since 42% have secondary education and 50% have technical training, which is explained because in the reintegration process, schooling and vocational training are a requirement to “graduate” from the program⁸. One of the relevant characteristics in the process is marital status since 63% have partners and are either married or living together in a de facto marriage.

FINDINGS AND LESSONS

LEARNED

The business assistance processes conducted by Esumer were framed in one of the institution’s philosophical principles: corporate social responsibility. Lessons learned in human and business terms from the experience made it possible to conceive its incorporation into future business intervention processes, both in this type of contexts and in others. Below are some of the lessons learned:

FAMILY AS SUPPORT FOR THE REINTEGRATION PROCESS

The family is oftentimes recognized as the main motivation for demobilized ex-combatants to begin their reintegration process. Both the recipients and the professionals carrying out the intervention agree on this, and in the words of a female demobilized combatant:

Panorama | There are three communes (communes 6, 7 and 8),
pp. 67-82 | which historically have been affected by armed
Volumen 10 | actors and where demobilized ex-combatants live.
Número 18 | Similarly, issues such as the age of demobilized ex-

Enero-junio | ⁸ A graduate is a person in the process of
2016 | reintegration who overcomes the stages proposed
to return to civilian life.

That awareness of family [...] becomes a crucial factor when they decide whether or not to demobilize [...]. I saw my daughters and said to myself: I have to provide for them, and I started working for others and I think we're doing okay (interview with participant 1, 2011).

Their families, especially spouses and children, intervene as mediators for participants to commit to the reconstruction of their life plans within civilian life and in a lawful manner. For them, the first step in the reintegration process has to do with the reestablishment of family ties that have been broken because of their affiliation to an illegal armed group. The program and the project offer them spaces and conditions to reconcile with their families and to reinforce the family ties and peace lost due to their participation in the armed conflict. This is how the sense of family is recovered as a space for the formation of a society that promotes the improvement of the general living conditions⁹.

I see that my family admires me a lot [...] because of my tenacity and my courage in taking care of so many responsibilities at the same time. It has been very positive more than anything, for example towards my children, because they say: my mom provides for us, she gets up early and goes to school [...] It has had a positive impact on them (interview with participant 2, 2011).

Family is the driver of the reintegration process of recipients, which is why it is taken into account in the design and implementation of actions and in the creation of spaces that involve families in the economic and psychosocial reintegration process. Families make the commitment of recipients to the development of their productive units and a new social life much easier: "Families are the main support and we need to reinforce that" (interview with M. Londoño, 2011).

Family affection is a catalyst that makes it possible to build new life options in some cases because it is the key to transforming the values of the armed conflict. However, it can also act as an inhibitor of the process, since it is possible for family problems to affect participants emotionally and psychosocially and lead them in some cases to abandon the process: "Family plays a fundamental role [...]. If they have family problems, individuals sink into depression and give up and leave" (interview with Carlos Eduardo Romero, 2011).

Experience indicates that the participation of demobilized ex-combatants' families should be a key principle of the reintegration process to the extent that the reconstruction of their life plan is not only the responsibility of the individual but also of his or her family.

CONSTRUCTION OF NEW NEIGHBORHOODS

The restoration of social relations and neighborhood ties has been vital for project participants to be effectively involved in the reconstruction of the social fabric and citizen coexistence during the process of social and economic reintegration. New neighborhood relations entail the transformation of intolerant, aggressive and violent behaviors and practices into civil attitudes: "The greatest success is when the person really gives up his or her criminal lifestyle and adapts to a new way of living. The project has contributed to the participation of citizenship and civility [...] and for them to peacefully coexist in society based on lawful habits" (interview with Carlos Eduardo Romero, 2011).

⁹ Notes in the *Informe de percepción del proceso de intervención con desmovilizados* presented to the project by Esumer business advisor in Medellín in May 2011

Participation in the social and economic reintegration process makes it possible for demobilized ex-combatants to be seen and legitimized by their communities as part of community development to leave behind their perception as aggressive and violent people.

In the new social and neighborhood relationships, demobilized ex-combatants have become visible as social actors recognized by the community. The comments of some these ex-combatants are proof of this: “For example, many people admire me and tell me ‘you are so pretty, how did you manage to start again?’” (Interview with participant 3, 2011).

With such comments, one would think many of the reinserted ex-combatants are convinced of their new role in their communities, and as such promote among their neighbors the construction of community life plans, alternatives of neighborhood coexistence and lawful lifestyles: “They are role models in the community for the construction of alternatives and of lawful [economic] production” (interview with Carlos Eduardo Romero, 2011).

Some sectors of the communities approach demobilized ex-combatants in order to reestablish social and neighborhood relationships lost when they joined armed groups. Reinserted ex-combatants have assumed their new role during the reintegration process and they recognize that, as in previous periods, they continue to be examples for the construction of a different society, this time not through violent means: “They help neighborhood children with their homework [...] and others help families that need assistance” (interview with Carlos Eduardo Romero, 2011).

Ultimately, the purpose is for the relationship with communities to be based on the recognition of their present situation and their work towards the construction of a more civil and human society within their new life plans.

DISCIPLINE AND PERSISTENCE FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC REINTEGRATION

The discipline developed and incorporated during their affiliation to an illegal armed group, is identified as a key aspect for participants to sustain themselves during their social and economic reintegration. Military life forces individuals to follow orders and fulfill their purposes until the very end and, in this sense those participating in the project have stated that their decision to build a new life plan requires them to commit and be disciplined to achieve this goal.

Demobilized ex-combatants are willing to do everything possible from a physical, mental and emotional standpoint to remain in the reincorporation process, due to which they have the skills, abilities and values necessary to build and consolidate a new life plan.

Their perseverance and determination to take on a new life helps demobilized ex-combatants face the adversities that arise during the reincorporation process to the extent their objective is to consolidate a new way of life, to reestablish family and neighborhood ties, to feel they are citizens and part of a society in which crime and armed confrontation are constantly decreasing. In addition to the manifest commitment, reintegration requires the discipline of not giving up: “Even though I started to receive proposals [to

return to armed groups] [...] I did not want to go back to that, I did not want to go back” (interview with participant 3, 2011).

Finally, it is important to highlight how the reintegration process affected they way demobilized ex-combatants act, relate to others and make decisions (those who were at the base of the militias of the armed groups obeyed orders), which is reflected in the behavior and the paradigm shift they experience to the extent they have to act as individuals responsible for advancing in their own path of reintegration in civilian life. One of the business advisors defines this in the following terms: “They come from a group dynamic and then move on to become individuals and this is reinforced in the program; that is, there is a tendency to lose the ability to work as part of a team and in a collaborative manner” (interview with Elkin Raúl Orlas, 2011).

BUSINESS ENHANCEMENT CONTEXT

The qualification as entrepreneurs of demobilized ex-combatants includes advice and training as an efficient strategy to the extent it is provided based on the recognition of the particularities of each initiative; that is, from their specific needs and interests to provide the necessary theoretical, methodological and operational tools.

The specific treatment given comprises the possibility of developing and improving the skills required in technical-productive, administrative, financial-accounting and marketing aspects: “We have learned to work on demand, obviously by creating the offer based on a reflection of issues that should be taken into account for the purposes of

business enhancement” (interview with Diana Cristina Correa, 2011).

However, the assistance process makes it possible to identify trends towards certain preferred economic activities for productive units, which arise from the training process for the work provided by the program. Some take the courses as a likely alternative for their life plans and a few take them as a requirement to access the economic aid offered by the Government. However, many choose their economic activity based on a family tradition or for pleasure. In addition, there are also other key factors taken into consideration when starting a business:

- Market opportunities;
- Favorable personal and family conditions;
- External incentives such as programs and projects aimed towards specific activities; that is, starting as a response to the potential determined by others and not of one’s own accord;
- Experience in the activity.

There are also different tendencies to the performance of certain activities that have social significance. For example, collective demobilized participants who served in urban areas, have a marked tendency to open businesses related to motor vehicles such as sale of motorcycle parts, maintenance and repair workshops, repair workshops for household appliances and computers and shops. Individual demobilized ex-combatants, on the other hand who are mainly of rural origin, are forced to learn new trades. For this reason, a large percentage chooses to provide some sort of service: Internet cafés, corner stores and selling food (stores and fast food restaurants). The

foregoing is observed in the type of business and the actions of participants in the business intervention processes conducted between 2009 and 2011.

It can also be said that some of the participants, while conceiving their business idea have projects that are clearly outlined and which are perfected over time or are not finally included in the project, given that the chances of success are very slim. During the implementation of the project there were three cases in which the business was not implemented as a result of a poor selection process, given that beneficiaries do not always provide objective information.

The experience showed that a key factor of the success and sustainability of a business is the capacity for self-management, a term that refers to those who developed productive activities with their own resources and without the seed capital provided by the Colombian Agency for Reintegration. They were people who had experience in an art or trade and were convinced that entrepreneurship was an alternative to make a living in addition to conceiving it as a life plan.

In the approach offered through advice and assistance, the following characteristics are common for most entrepreneurs:

- Low levels of schooling;
- Marked tendency of tax evasion and informal work;
- Disorganization in the management of accounts and information;
- Decision-making without business criteria;
- Little knowledge of market mechanisms and business life;
- Low tolerance to frustration;

- Authoritarianism of military life (especially in collective demobilized ex-combatants), which is transferred to business and family practices.

If demobilized entrepreneurs fail to treat these recurrent characteristics consciously, that is if they are not understood as an aspect that requires determination, learning and hard work sooner or later businesses tend to fail or stagnate, which can increase frustration. This is a clear threat given that it is a highly vulnerable population due to the uncertainty of the programs they belong to and the disbelief in promises that are not usually fulfilled. In addition, there is distrust and flaws in everyday business practices, which in some cases constitute strong barriers to success.

LESSONS LEARNED IN RELATION TO THE POPULATION

Demobilized ex-combatants take on positions of non-verbal communication that allow those who interact with them to identify their origin. Collective demobilized ex-combatants have a certain way of dressing, use certain accessories and employ certain turns of phrase, among other defining characteristics. Their traits and behaviors show particular relationships with the past, as they make it possible to establish differences between those coming from a rural environment versus larger cities.

The origin of demobilized ex-combatants in this type of business assistance programs makes it possible to establish specific treatments which, instead of trying to standardize the treatments and the expected responses adapt to the singularities of groups and individuals to set the path for the

success of these projects during a potential post-conflict period in Colombia.

LESSONS LEARNED IN THE HUMAN ASPECT

The cultural characteristics of demobilized ex-combatants constitute a confrontation between the educational level they have had access to and the hierarchical rank that they had in the respective organization. Their social background, academic and political education, as well as preparation for work or professional experience became apparent during the training and assistance processes.

Individual demobilized ex-combatants have greater strength, insistence, persistence and the capacity to fight to achieve their personal civility, reintegration and sustainability objectives.

In the family-business relationship it is clear that demobilized ex-combatants who have support from the family group to start a business are productive units with a potential for growth and better economic sustainability indexes. On the other hand, those productive units associated with family break-ups tend to lead to the deterioration of business activities and even to the closing of the business.

Finally, another very frequent feature associated with personal reintegration processes is following new guiding patterns of social behavior: the affiliation and practice of a religion. “The need to believe in an ideal or to cling to a belief makes these ex-combatants turn to spirituality, to change their religion and seek to practice their discipline there” (interview with Elkin Raúl Orlas, 2011).

BUSINESS EDUCATION

Entrepreneurship requires the capacity to insist and persist in the project such that it becomes a way of life. The main purpose is then to create such a project. However, this is not enough since this process requires good business practices, which implies a great deal of learning for demobilized ex-combatants.

Demobilized ex-combatants who started a business on their own display higher levels of economic sustainability. Causes are related to their attitude toward economic independence. Those who see entrepreneurship as a way to obtain seed capital from the program require further intervention measures regarding the establishment of a business-oriented mentality and the search for solutions, as well as their role within a lifestyle that becomes more demanding.

Finally, for future experiences the program should incorporate the promotion of a culture of entrepreneurship so that those who opt for these alternatives are successful and are able to achieve economic sustainability and good living conditions by providing jobs for other people and overcoming the circumstances that led the subject to become part of projects outside the law in the first place.

The testimony of one of the beneficiaries is cited below as a conclusion:

I see the hope of a better tomorrow with a prosperous business, but I'm aware that everything is a gradual process.

With my life, all I want is to be free of this conflict that in one way or another still haunts us; I want to be able to be with my family while I'm still here in this world, to be able to become a good and productive man for society.

In terms of my business, I plan to make it last and use it to pay for my studies, I only need a few more classes to get my professional degree and I don't want to lose everything I've learned. One of the most important plans that I have is to offer employment opportunities and economic sustainability to many people who need it.

What I want you to know is that I thank you very much for the support you have given us (interview with participant 7, 2012).

The systematized experience certainly reflected how we can contribute to the Colombian post-conflict by providing support to demobilized ex-combatants, international cooperation and the commitment to reintegration projects, in this case through the promotion of entrepreneurship to ensure that those who opt for these alternatives have a chance at a lawful life.

EXPERIENCE IN POST-CONFLICT STRATEGIES

The Colombian State should be the main promoter of a lasting and sustainable peace through a successful post-conflict strategy that, in the words of Morales (2015), should be established in a maximum period of ten years in two cycles of five years each: one for the construction of peace where the implementation of peace agreements takes place considering their legal, economic, social and environmental components, and another for the consolidation of peace with the promotion of public policies and proactive reforms, as well as with the intervention and leadership of local governments.

consideration in strategies proposed for the period following the agreement. It is important to deal with the differences between the knowledge and experience of war in urban and rural environments. As expressed by the Jesuit priest Francisco de Roux:

The urban country does not know what war is; it sees snippets on television as if it were a film and fails to comprehend the enormous human and ethical responsibility that we have in terms of such suffering. The urban country knows violence at school, within families, against women and is aware of the insecurity in our streets and in our public transportation, among other things because there is a lot of administrative corruption and drug trafficking, but war is full-fledged cruelty where 80% are civilian victims, as evidenced by the National Center for Historical Memory. There have been 1,982 massacres of which the paramilitaries perpetrated 1,166 and the guerrilla 343; 27,000 kidnappings, 90% executed by the guerrillas, 23,000 selective killings, 5,000 cases of missing persons, 5,000 actions carried out against civilian property, hundreds of "false positives" and thousands of victims of antipersonnel mines; the urban country is not aware of any of this (Criollo, 2014).

The foregoing establishes obvious challenges for Colombian society, universities, companies and institutions. In that same sense, De Roux claims:

There is fear and yes, there are legitimate concerns from the business community and confusion among the public, but above all a great resistance to the structural changes arising from the agreements signed in Havana which are not that radical and are needed to overcome exclusion, inequality and corruption. These changes are highly opposed, however and there is also a widespread resistance to restorative justice; everybody agrees that there can be no impunity, because every person who was in the war caused serious damage to society and that we have to compensate for that, but if we insist on doing so with revenge, and believing that the path is criminal justice, there will be no way out (Criollo, 2014).

It is important to take into account the fact that in Colombia has experience in negotiation processes with illegal armed groups, which is why it is crucial

not to forget the country's own experiences, the successes, the mistakes and lessons learned, as well as the experiences of other countries. Even though it is true that the Colombian conflict is unique due to its duration and multiple participants, it does allow for the incorporation of own and external lessons learned from others that have gone through similar processes.

One of the most important lessons learned has to do with the involvement of the victims, an issue that has been worked on from Havana. The National Center for Historical Memory acknowledges that, according to its director Elizabeth Lira: "The peace process will be successful to the extent that people make it their own" (*Verdadabierta.com*, 2016). In the same way the reconstruction of the social fabric and trust is an even greater challenge and represents difficult work for judicial institutions because what ends up happening will be important for the victims and crucial for society and for peace, to the extent Colombian society is capable of guaranteeing due process and correctly prosecuting people, including the responsibility of the State in deficiencies in the guarantee of rights.

On the other hand international cooperation during the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process is fundamental as is this experience and many others that were carried out throughout the country financed by the IOM and USAID (2006- 2015), the Peace Laboratories (2002-2010) and the New Territories of Peace (2011-2016) financed by the European Union, which constitute an important component of post-conflict policy.

Regarding the agreements signed in Havana, there are five items in the agenda: 1) Rural development; 2) Political participation; 3) End of the conflict; 4) Fight against illicit drugs; and 5) Recognition and reparation of the victims. These items will be difficult to achieve without the cooperation and political will of the country, the work of Colombian diplomacy during the post-conflict and the vindication of the image of the country as an economy emerging from a 50-year conflict.

A Colombia where the armed actors have given up their arms and that promotes its natural wealth, macroeconomic stability and its agricultural potential make it attractive for investment and development. But this is not the only thing expected from cooperation; there are also expectations as to the help and support of the international community in terms of developing strategies to establish lasting peace, reduce the inequalities between cities and the countryside, make institutions stronger and be guarantors of the process of transitional and restorative justice so as to enable all persons engaged in the reintegration process resulting from negotiations in Havana to form part of participation and reconciliation mechanisms and the development of lawful activities to guarantee their sustainability in civilian life. This document contains discussions with ex-combatants that can be considered as successfully reintegrated into civilian society, with all the problems and lessons learned throughout the process.

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