

Colombia: Small grants, big impact

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This case study is based on a mission to Colombia undertaken by the CSO Division and the Transition Recovery Unit in late May 2005 to assess the work of a pilot small grants programme aimed at strengthening the capacity of CSOs in post-conflict environments. It examines the mechanisms and tools used to enhance partnerships with CSOs, and identifies some lessons learned from this programme.

I. Background

The UNDP BCPR-BRSP initiative with civil society organizations in post-conflict environments, launched in 2002, seeks to develop the capacity of CSOs to create effective and sustainable partnerships with UNDP in peace building. A pilot small grant programme covering Colombia, Liberia and Sri Lanka, now ongoing, involves partnerships between UNDP country offices and CSOs in building peace through dialogue, recovery of democratic and civilian institutions and economic revitalization.⁴ By the end of 2005, the BCPR/BRSP Small Grant Programme (SGP) expects to have achieved a number of results, among them:

- A mapping assessing national CSOs active in the above areas to identify preferred partners for future cooperation.
- Enhanced participation by CSOs in policy dialogue with government, multilateral agencies and other civil society actors.
- Strengthened and sustained cooperation and partnership between UNDP country offices and CSOs.
- Improved CSO capacity to implement effective peace building initiatives.

The projects began implementation in June 2004. This case study examines the progress of the small-grant programme in Colombia eleven months since its launch.⁵

The BCPR/BRSP Small Grants Programme (SGP) is housed within the Reconciliation and Development Programme (REDES) in the country office, and focuses on strengthening institutions and laying the groundwork for the design of public policies. REDES does this by promoting alliances between the State, the international community, the government and CSOs, and supporting civil society participation in peace and development initiatives. The small grants programme strengthens the civil society dimension of REDES as it provides tools for identifying key actors and direct support to CSO peace initiatives that range from the local to the national levels. It has also enabled REDES to diversify their support to other types of CSO-led peace initiatives as well as to other regions.

The UNDP National Human Development Report (NHDR), *Callejón con Salida* (2003), focused on the conflict in Colombia, identifies some of the major challenges facing civil society and provides key recommendations for working with CSOs in peace efforts. Although the NHDR dates back to 2003,

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⁴ For more information on the initiative and the programme document, including criteria for selection of countries, see: <http://www.undp.org/cso/areas/bcpr.html>

⁵ The BRSP/BCPR mission team would like to thank the country office for their contributions to this case study.

it continues to play a significant role in the country office's overall programme direction and is regarded as a current and valuable reference document. It provides a platform for debate on issues of peace and reconciliation, the role of CSOs, and human rights.

II. Political context in Colombia

Colombia is a middle-income country, with a working democracy, rule of law and an ongoing 40-year conflict. Colombia is also one of the largest recipients of US aid, with much of it directed towards military spending. The effects of drug trafficking and the large tracts of money being channeled through armed groups add a complex dimension to the country's conflict. In 1997, the possibility of signing peace agreements between the armed groups and the Government fell through. A hard-line approach to the conflict was adopted, which the current Government has intensified.

Nevertheless, recent political dialogue – known as the London (2003) and Cartagena (2005) process – has set the scene for an international cooperation strategy, in addition to guidelines and a mandate for working on peace agreed upon through consultation with multiple actors.⁶ The London/Cartagena process brought together the Government of Colombia, the international community, the Church, the business sector and CSOs to debate and agree upon a set of principles and areas of intervention.

The country's civil society has benefited from this process as it provides support and a road map for engagement. So has UNDP, which is viewed as a critical facilitator and partner in the follow-up. The London/Cartagena process has legitimized the UNDP role in strengthening peace and development programming and networks, developing local and regional initiatives, building the capacity of CSOs, strengthening CSO alliances, and scaling up local and regional work to the national level. UNDP is also the secretariat for the G-24, a group of 24 countries cooperating with Colombia and the European Commission.

III. Mechanisms and tools to enhance engagement

The Local Selection Committee

A key component of the small grants programme is the Local Selection Committee. This multidisciplinary group composed of partners and experts from civil society serves in an advisory capacity to UNDP throughout the programme. The committee defines the selection criteria for the CSO initiatives to be supported, reviews the CSO proposals for support, and makes recommendations for implementation.⁷

The committee has created a transparent and consultative selection process and is actively involved in programme implementation. Members strongly support the programme, recognizing the importance of such initiatives in strengthening civil society actors in preventing conflict, strengthening legal institutions, and ensuring civic participation and respect for human rights. In keeping with the principal mandate of the committee, UNDP convenes it to meet in connection with

⁶ The London Conference took place in July 2003 followed by the Donors Conference II (Coordination and International Cooperation) in Cartagena in February 2005.

⁷Members: Augusto Ramírez Ocampo, former Minister of State and former Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, currently international affairs analyst. Ana Teresa Bernal, director and legal representative of the national peace and reconciliation network REDEPAZ. Jorge Londoño, Mayor of Usme (locality of Bogotá). Elisabet Hellsten, director of international cooperation for the Swedish International Development Agency of the Swedish Embassy in Bogotá. Carlos Ivan Lopera, mapping consultant. Raúl Rosende, coordinator of REDES, Reconciliation and Development Programme of UNDP Colombia. (Hans Petter Buvollen from the UNDP office in Guatemala participated in one Local Selection Committee meeting during his mission in September. The BRSP/BCPR mission team and Olmo Guillermo Liévano, peace adviser to the Governor of Huila, participated in a meeting in May.)

CSO activities supported by the small grants programme. The committee's guidance and advice have improved the CSO-led activities and scope of work.

The committee has provided recommendations on how the BCPR/BRSP SGP could benefit from and/or relate with other ongoing work in the country office, such as the *Banco de Buenas Practicas* (Bank of Good Practices), a database of good practices in the arena of peace and development, which is housed in the NHDR office.

The committee in Colombia has become a key forum for regular interaction between UNDP and civil society actors. It has provided overall guidance to the programme direction and has enhanced UNDP capacity in CSO partnership building. For UNDP, there are clear benefits of a committee made up of civil society actors that can act as a sounding board and feedback mechanism in UNDP programme development. The committee is expected to be enlarged with an enhanced mandate to serve as a vehicle for a more institutionalized relationship between CSOs and UNDP, an overall goal of the CSO Champions' Initiative, launched at UNDP headquarters in 2003.⁸

The CSO mapping exercise

The CSO mapping exercise to identify potential partners, conducted by a consultant affiliated with a national CSO network, REDEPAZ, and familiar with key civil society actors in Colombia, has resulted in a detailed register of 154 CSOs and CSO-led peace initiatives. The information gathered, based on a questionnaire, included details such as thematic area of work, strengths, weaknesses, challenges and successes of the initiatives. Following field visits to assess their capacity, 34 CSOs were invited to submit a proposal. A total of 21 proposals were received and six were selected. The selection committee identified the CSOs, using criteria from the project document and additional criteria suggested by its members.⁹

The mapping highlighted successful CSO-led activities and made those experiences visible. It also allowed for the identification of CSO-led peace initiatives other than those that the country office and REDES were familiar with. It has thus allowed the country office to enlarge its network and incorporate these CSOs into other processes. In addition, the mapping allowed the country office to understand the full range of CSO-led peace initiatives and their affiliations with national and regional platforms. The mapping has become an important resource for the country office – and will be an ongoing database.

The country office has since continued to seek out and identify additional CSO-led peace initiatives that were not included in the first round of mapping through consultation with other UNDP offices and other UN agencies.¹⁰

IV. The CSO-led peace initiatives

The small grants programme is supporting six CSO-led peace initiatives in various regions of the country and is engaged in a diverse set of peace building activities. The initiatives involve a range of sectors including youth and women at the local, regional and national levels. Broadly speaking, they

⁸ The CSO Champions' Initiative seeks to showcase innovative CSO partnership building at the country level and promote mechanisms to enhance those partnerships. For more information, see: <http://www.undp.org/cso/champions.html>

⁹ An evaluation form was designed by Hans Petter Bulloven, UNDP Guatemala, to facilitate the selection process, and included considerations for relevance, impact and sustainability (technical, financial, and political).

¹⁰ Efforts are being made to broaden the mapping to include CSO initiatives documented in the *Banco de Buenas Practicas*, active participants in the human development area (and in the implementation of the 2003 NHDR), and those referred to by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Humanitarian Situation Room and their monthly geo-referenced report.

work with vulnerable groups, construct alliances, strengthen networks and support social cohesion. They seek greater participation in decision-making and work to unite people, deepen democracy, promote dialogue, and ensure greater local and national ownership of political processes. The initiatives propose alternatives to conflict and violence, based on a set of common principles and values decided in consensus.

The committee set out that the selected CSOs should be carrying out peace activities working on three levels: national, regional, and local. The selected national CSO-led peace initiatives are rooted at the regional and local levels and the local ones are linked politically at the regional and national levels. All CSO-led peace initiatives have been selected because they present a clear peace agenda and have the mechanisms and capacity to follow up on peace processes. They have established indicators to measure impact and influence in the peace process. The initiatives have a multiplier effect as they can be replicated in other areas and circumstances. They were selected for their political and technical sustainability, a key component for survival and continuity.

For example, the community for peace and development (CORDESPAZ) youth initiative¹¹ provides support to local youth clubs that train young people and leaders in conflict resolution skills and developing a culture of peace. It also supports young leaders in schools and in marginal communities, student ombudsmen and youth networks, mobilizing others in the practice of non-violence.

In the southern region of Huila, the CSO-led peace initiative¹² entitled *Consolidación del proceso de asamblea constituyente* (Consolidation of the Constitutional Assembly Process) provides support to a constitutional assembly at the municipal level. A constitutional assembly is an organized group of people within a community exercising its constitutional rights to actively participate in decision-making at the local level. The initiative in Huila focuses on civic empowerment, mobilizing civil society sectors and the development of the constitutional assembly as a new governance model. The assembly unites all sectors of society ranging from women and cooperatives to youth and indigenous peoples. The work includes capacity development of leaders, information dissemination, and exchanges with the other assemblies. The assemblies enhance people's ability to participate, identify key issues of concern and develop an agenda for work; i.e., participation in the development plans of the municipality and budgets. A strengthened constitutional assembly also promotes civic resistance to the armed conflict.

Similar work is being supported through the small grants programme to the *Asociación Mogotes Pueblo Soberano* (Association of the Sovereign People of Mogotes) in the region of Mogotes and Olivil, where support is provided to local village assemblies that feed into a constitutional assembly at the municipal level.

REDEPAZ, *la Red Nacional por la Paz y Contra la Guerra*, a national network for peace and against war, has been selected to receive support to expand and consolidate its social movement for peace based on social justice, democratic values, respect for human rights, life and diversity. The work engages multiple groups and actors to develop a political strategy and a common platform for action built through consensus. The communications strategy includes a commercial for television.

An alliance of women's organizations, *Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz* (IMP), the Initiative of Colombian Women for Peace, seeks to enlarge its network and strengthen women's networks to influence municipal policies and follow up on the municipal plans. IMP seeks to strengthen women's organizations as valid interlocutors in decision-making and ensure the inclusion of women

¹¹ The BRSP/BCPR mission team visited the CORDESPAZ youth initiative in Facatativá.

¹² The BRSP/BCPR mission team visited the CSO initiative in the municipality of La Argentina in Huila.

in national and local peace and development programmes funded by the international community and the Government.

Madres de la Candelaria (Mothers of Candelaria) seeks to raise awareness and sensitize the public at large about Colombia's victims, the disappeared and the internally displaced. The work involves organizing workshops on human rights and providing psychosocial care to victims' families. The mothers of Candelaria meet every week to march and ensure the visibility of the victims.

Six local committees have been established to monitor the activities and finances of each of these peace initiatives and evaluate implementation of each project. Each committee is made up of a representative of UNDP/REDES, the UNDP administrative and finance officer, a CSO representative, and a representative of the beneficiaries of the project. The committees strengthen the administrative, financial and organizational capacity of the CSOs.

The small grants programme facilitates links between the six peace initiatives and broader national political processes. In May 2005, UNDP with other donors organized a CSO forum entitled *Iniciativas de Paz: Una Lógica de Vida* (Peace Initiatives: A Framework for Life), which brought civil society actors in a dialogue with the Government.¹³ The intention was to share CSO good practices and provide a space for exchange with Government authorities. The forum highlighted the innovative work of various local and regional peace initiatives emerging from indigenous peoples, afrodescendant communities and women's coalitions, among others. Representatives of the six CSO-led peace initiatives participated in the forum.¹⁴

V. Emerging lessons

Civil society in Colombia is multiethnic, highly mobilized and organized, and is a critical player in rebuilding the country's social fabric. CSOs, particularly those from vulnerable groups such as indigenous peoples, afrodescendants, women and youth, are very important actors as they are allied across regions, and present alternative strategies and innovative initiatives. These communities tend to be the most affected by the conflict, and it is at the community and grassroots level where peace emerges.

The CSO-led peace initiatives have developed a culture of participation and civic mobilization that could eventually reach power structures.¹⁵

Building and strengthening partnerships across sectors, and with the international community, including donors, international NGOs and the United Nations system, is critical in Colombia. These cross sectoral partnerships enable the exchange of experiences, knowledge and practices, and are key for opening spaces for dialogue between government and CSOs, and creating a safe environment.¹⁶ The United Nations in particular plays an important role in Colombia, as it is a trusted partner and is greatly supported by CSOs. Its role as facilitator and impartial broker can therefore be further bolstered. Nevertheless, how best to utilize that neutral space remains a challenge.

¹³ The BRSP/BCPR mission team attended the CSO forum in May.

¹⁴ In preparation for the forum, UNDP organized a capacity development workshop for CSOs. The workshop served to strengthen CSO networks, exchange practices and knowledge, develop common positions and identify next steps.

¹⁵ Presentation by peace advocate and writer, Esperanza Hernández at the CSO forum in May 2005.

¹⁶ International observers accompany local and national CSOs in their work as their presence helps to deter violence. This is commonly known as protective accompaniment.

It is critically important to build networks with the potential of bridging the work at the local, regional and national levels. Strengthened CSO networks can also act as a mechanism to prevent conflict.

Ensuring that local CSO initiatives can possess influence and that they are linked politically to national processes have become evident as key criteria for partnership. Strengthening the capacity of CSOs and empowering them to articulate their demands and rights are critical steps for enhanced engagement. Scaling up local and regional processes to the national level is key. National level forums are important arenas for local and regional CSOs to interact more broadly, make their initiatives visible and provide a space for their voices to be heard.

Creating a means for political dialogue among actors is a key element in the REDES work, but demonstrating that spaces for dialogue are beneficial and worthwhile is a major challenge. Political fatigue with the prospects for peace also poses a significant challenge for the country office and its efforts.

The challenge for the country office lies in applying these lessons in other programmes and with other actors. Promoting development at the local level as a means to break the pattern of poverty, conflict and violence will also be an ongoing challenge.

VI. Preliminary conclusions

The BCPR/BRSP SGP in Colombia has provided the UNDP country office with an incentive to work with CSOs outside of the Peace and Development Programmes¹⁷, traditionally supported by REDES. It has been catalytic in enhancing the relationship between the country office and CSOs. The selection committee and a comprehensive mapping have laid a solid foundation for the country office's future engagement with CSOs.

Further, the small grants programme has benefited from being housed within a larger country office programme, and from the visibility it has gained by being situated within a bigger context. It has allowed the office to work locally, broadened its outreach, and deepened the civil society dimension of the work of REDES. It has also developed tools for measuring and evaluating the success and impact of the work. At the same time, REDES has gained an expanded scope and direct lessons from the ground.

The mapping component of the small grants programme has emerged as an immensely relevant tool for the country office. The country office has decided to reopen the process to ensure that the mapping includes as many relevant CSOs as possible, therefore making it a more robust tool, and one that will better complement and enrich other similar initiatives within UNDP and elsewhere in the United Nations. After the mapping, it became evident that it would be useful to revise the categories of potential partners to better reflect needs. The country office plans to update and maintain this database as a live and dynamic resource, with additional information such as CSO involvement in civil society networks or alliances.

¹⁷ Peace and Development Programmes have been in existence for nearly 10 years. They were established by small groups of organized farmers and communities concerned with poverty and violence in their communities and led by local churches. These incipient forms of social organization grew to become larger social structures enabling communities to feel less vulnerable. Local and regional entrepreneurs, and CSOs became increasingly interested in such initiatives and found them to be fertile ground for peace building and development. These initiatives soon became an ambitious and promising set of socioeconomic, cultural and political incentives for peace building as opposed to isolated social experiments.

The six selected CSO-led initiatives have grown empowered from their experience on a number of different levels. They have networked among one another, interacted with Government officials and benefited from advice from the Local Selection Committee. Regular contact between them and the country office has also led to mutual learning and frank exchanges. The local committees established at the project level are an innovative accountability mechanism.

Overall, the small grant programme shows that small funds can go a long way. But it needs more time to deliver real results and establish a solid foundation for partnership. The one-year timeframe is to be revisited.

In conclusion, the small grant programme epitomizes the core principles articulated in the 2003 *National Human Development Report*, which underscored that peace must embrace a whole range of groups and entities that seek it. The programme fosters broad participation to engender a more balanced point of view on the conflict and a repertoire of options for building peace. As stated in the NHDR, "Civil society is a power, that power exists to be used and using it well will help bring peace." The programme is demonstrating the benefits of dialogue with authorities and the documenting of best practices in establishing peace. Above all, it is proof of the important role CSOs play in building peace and preventing conflict, the benefits of partnership with civil society, the need for a set of tools, and the clear benefits of working with diverse actors.