What Works in UN Resident Coordinator-led Conflict Prevention: Lessons from the Field

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This case study is part of a broader research project, carried out by the UNU Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR) with the support of the UK Mission to the United Nations, on the role of UN Resident Coordinators in Conflict Prevention. The project aimed to extract lessons from case studies of Resident Coordinator-supported preventive action in nine countries (Bolivia 2000-09; Colombia 2012-16; Guinea 2009-15; Guyana 2003-15; Kenya 2008-17; Kyrgyzstan 2010-17; Malawi, 2011-17; Nepal 2007-15; and Tunisia 2011-17). All case studies, and the resulting policy paper synthesizing lessons and findings can be accessed at cpr.unu.edu.
Introduction

In 2016, the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP), negotiated a peace deal that marked an end to a half-century of conflict. The peace deal was a result of four years of intensive talks in Havana, Cuba, where the two sides negotiated agreements on an agenda. Following several rounds of failed negotiations in prior decades, as well as unsuccessful attempts at solving the conflict militarily, the peace deal marked a major milestone in Colombia’s history and has – despite ongoing implementation challenges – been widely hailed as a (relative) peacebuilding success story.

The negotiations constituted direct talks between the national actors, with no third-party mediator and limited international involvement. The UN had no permanent seat in the room, yet it managed to play a secondary role, largely from the sidelines, in support of the peace process. Strong UN Resident Coordinator (RC) leadership and a significant UN Country Team (UNCT) field presence in Colombia, where over 2,000 overwhelmingly national UN staff work, enabled the UN to meaningfully support nationally-led prevention efforts. The aim of this case study is to draw lessons learned from the UN’s experience in Colombia in the lead-up to and during the peace process, to offer guidance to RCs and UNCTs in other transitional contexts regarding how to support nationally-led prevention efforts.

The case study first provides context on the causes and consequences of Colombia’s conflict with the FARC-EP, as well as the 2012-16 peace process. It then analyses the historical role of the UN in the country, and the reasons for Colombia’s sometimes ambivalent relationship with the world body. Against this backdrop, it lays out the strategy and vision of RC Fabrizio Hochschild (who was RC in Colombia from 2013-16), focusing on how he oriented the UNCT toward supporting the peace process, established entry points with national actors for a more substantial UN role, and mobilised resources and capacities for prevention. The case study then zooms in on a select number of RC-led, interagency prevention-oriented initiatives, aiming to understand the entry points, substance and impact of each. Finally, the case study ends with lessons learned from Colombia regarding how RCs and UNCTs can contribute to nationally-led prevention efforts in transitional contexts.

1. Country Context

History and causes of the conflict

For decades, the conflict with the FARC-EP has been one important piece of a larger picture of interconnected political and criminal violence afflicting Colombia and causing humanitarian problems. The causes of these forms of violence are varied, though a prominent factor that contributes to the conflict with the FARC-EP is the uneven presence of state institutions, particularly in the peripheries where many marginalised groups live. In these territories, a confluence of political and criminal violence has emerged, with the state confronting – and sometimes having colluded with – a range of conflict actors.

Historically in Colombia, land ownership has been concentrated in the hands of a few, with marginalised groups being pushed toward the unclaimed peripheries beyond the full reach of state institutions and the formal economy. During a decade-long conflict (1948-58) between the dominant political parties – Liberal and Conservative – known as La Violencia, rural Liberal and Communist groups mobilised campesino self-defence guerrilla groups, which the Conservatives fought with hired assassins and counter-guerrilla forces. A coup in 1953 brought to power General Rojas Pinilla, Colombia’s commander-in-chief, whose anti-Communist position escalated the conflict with the guerrillas. The Liberal and Conservative parties cooperated to overthrow the Pinilla regime in 1957 and backed the installation of a military junta in its place. Soon thereafter, the Liberal and Conservative parties formed the National Front, agreeing to a shared monopoly of power, thereby closing the space for other social and political movements.

The National Front’s limited progress on agrarian reform converged with the radicalisation of university students in the 1960s, giving rise in 1964 to the Cuban-inspired National Liberation Army (ELN). In 1966, Communist Party-influenced campesino self-defence groups remade themselves into the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC, later renamed FARC-EP for Ejército del Pueblo, or People’s Army). Other guerrilla groups cropped up, and throughout the 1970s began employing extortion and kidnapping methods to finance their activities. In the 1980s, a paramilitary-led “dirty war” against the FARC-EP’s political arm, the Patriotic Union (UP), poisoned prospects for a peace deal that would transform the guerrilla group into an unarmed political party. Throughout this period and continuing into the 1990s, right-wing paramilitary groups proliferated, acting as defensive forces for landowners, especially cattle ranchers, to fight guerrilla groups and counter land reform efforts.

Drug trafficking also increased toward the end of the 1970s, with the peripheries beyond the reach of state control providing ideal conditions for illicit crops. By the early 1980s, big drug cartels had emerged, dominating criminal markets and representing the main source of insecurity in Colombia. Paramilitary groups engaged in drug trafficking and illicit mining. In many cases, they also provided private security for drug cartels. By the 1990s, taxing, producing and trafficking coca had also become a source of revenue for the FARC-EP, helping sustain its conflict with the state. Organised crime also corrupted the state itself: in 1995, for instance, the country’s president was accused of having accepted campaign contributions from the Cali cartel.

The state, with US military support, fought powerful drug cartels throughout the 1990s, eventually dismantling the
national structures of those in Medellin and Cali. Rather than disappearing, however, these cartels crumbled into localised “mini-cartels” across the country. Bogotà and Washington stepped up their collaboration in 2000 with the launch of Plan Colombia, a controversial, military-heavy counter-narcotics initiative that in practice spilled over into counter-insurgency. Plan Colombia targeted coca cultivation while attempting to extend state authority to areas under FARC-EP control.

The Pastrana government’s (1998-2002) attempted peace negotiations with the FARC-EP in a demilitarised zone known as El Caguán. These talks failed spectacularly, ending after the FARC-EP hijacked a plane to abduct a Senator and the government, with US support, bombed guerrilla enclaves in response. The collapse of the process – which was mainly due to a lack of sufficient political will on either side to reach a compromise agreement - provoked rising public support for a hardline military approach, which was at the centre of right-wing Alvaro Uribe’s presidential campaign. Uribe, who was elected President in 2002, launched an aggressive counter-insurgency campaign against the FARC-EP, leveraging a Colombian military significantly strengthened by Plan Colombia. Meanwhile, he pursued negotiations with paramilitary groups, leading to the demobilisation of members of the umbrella United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC). However, from 2003-12, an estimated 20% of AUC members remade themselves into smaller criminal outfits.

The legacy of uneven state presence across Colombia’s territory, as well as the confluence of politics and criminality has persisted, with many rural areas still marked by absent, low or corrupted state capacity. In these parts of the country, the state lacks a monopoly on the use of force, service delivery and tax collection. Small criminal groups have collaborated with larger criminal organisations and armed groups such as the FARC-EP and ELN, further blurring the lines between criminal and political violence in Colombia. In some areas, paramilitary successor groups continue to commit violence against land restitution activists. As UNU-CPR has written, “most aspects of daily life in these areas have been governed by armed and criminal groups that have either filled the vacuum left by the absence of the state or replaced or supplanted the state.”

The 2012-16 peace talks

After a half-century of conflict and several unsuccessful negotiation attempts, in 2012 the government and the FARC-EP embarked on a formal peace process with relatively promising conditions. Colombia’s new president, Juan Manuel Santos, was more supportive of peace talks than his predecessor, Uribe. The FARC-EP, militarily weakened and pushed largely back to the peripheries by counterinsurgency operations during the Uribe years, appeared to recognise that continued conflict would “permi[tt] survival but little else.” Direct talks between the government and FARC-EP began in Havana, with Cuba and Norway serving as guarantor countries and Venezuela and Chile as accompanying states, on an agenda to address: integrated agricultural development; political participation; end of the conflict; solution to the problem of illicit drugs; victims; and implementation, verification and ratification. Early progress was made on integrated agrarian development, illicit drugs, and political participation, and the parties agreed in 2014 on principles for the discussion of the agenda item on victims. After two years of steady progress, the FARC-EP declared a unilateral ceasefire in December 2014.

However, challenges remained. The talks took place in the absence of a bilateral ceasefire, a decision that was made to allow the government to continue putting military pressure on the FARC-EP, preventing it from using peace negotiations to win time or strengthen its military capacity (as had happened in El Caguán). Widespread public scepticism that the FARC-EP would actually disarm, and forceful political opposition to the talks meant that the parties were under pressure to avoid breakdowns that would embolden political detractors. Yet, questions of transitional justice and the need to provide the FARC-EP with robust security guarantees to disarm proved particularly difficult sticking points. Lack of clarity around whether the ELN would enter formal peace talks threatened to complicate the implementation of a possible peace accord with the FARC-EP in regions facing ongoing ELN-related violence.

In 2015, the FARC-EP’s unilateral ceasefire broke down following an airstrike by the Armed Forces, provoking an escalation in violence that threatened the process and strengthened its detractors. This crisis, however, “injected new urgency to do whatever it took to protect a project neither side could afford to let fail.” The parties returned to the negotiation table within days, and soon thereafter reached an agreement on the establishment of a truth commission, helping put the process back on track. Shaken but standing, the process went on to resolve the most contentious issues on the agenda, including transitional justice, the terms of a ceasefire, and security guarantees for disarmament, reaching a final accord in Summer 2016. The two sides also agreed that a civilian-led UN mission would, as part of a tripartite mechanism involving the government and the FARC-EP, monitor and verify the FARC-EP’s disarmament, the ceasefire and cessation of hostilities. Though the peace deal was defeated in a 2016 referendum, Congress ratified a revised accord soon thereafter and the parties proceeded to the implementation phase.

2. Historical role and perception of the UN in Colombia

Colombia’s relationship with the UN has at times been ambivalent. On the positive side, due to the humanitarian, peacebuilding and development needs generated by decades of conflict, the UN Country Team (UNCT) there has grown into the largest UN development presence in Latin America. As of 2015, 24 agencies, funds and programs operated in the
country, relying on over 2,200 people in 46 cities and 138 field offices in 102 municipalities. The bulk of the UNCT’s funding comes from the Colombian government, and about 95% of UNCT staff in the country are Colombian nationals. Some Country Team members, namely UNDP, OHCHR, and humanitarian agencies have long worked on conflict-related issues in historically-neglected areas most affected by the conflict. This work has generated strong relationships in those areas between the UNCT and civil society, including victims’ groups.

The UNCT’s presence in these territories has enabled it to develop a deep understanding of the causes of the conflict. Two landmark Human Development Reports (HDR) reflect this understanding: one in 2003 that identified inequality and exclusion as root causes of conflict, and another in 2011 that analysed rural-urban disparities. Both of these texts shaped the national debate about peace and continue to be basic reference texts for peacemakers in Colombia, including UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAF), Common Country Assessments (CCA), and UNCT programming.

Most notably, UNDP undertook significant local-level peacebuilding work through its Programme on Reconciliation and Development (REDES) program, which built off the 2003 HDR’s recommendations. The program, which started in 2004, focused on historically marginalised communities, including women, youth, Afro-Colombians, campesinos, and indigenous people in territories most affected by the conflict. REDES and other UN programmes in these zones were based on the premise that peace can be built locally even amidst ongoing conflict if efforts are made to address multifaceted root causes of the conflict. This approach had some shortcomings, namely with respect to the challenge of linking up disparate local-level efforts to have a cumulative effect on peacebuilding at the national level. However, it helped the UN establish key relationships with civil society, mayors and governors, and develop expertise on prevention-related issues at the regional and local levels. This constituted crucial groundwork for future prevention efforts.

Another key UN-supported forum during the Uribe years (2002-10) was the so-called “London-Cartagena Process,” a framework for dialogue and cooperation among the Colombian government, civil society and the international community. Coordinated by the UN Resident Coordinator (RC), at the time Bruno Moro, this framework offered the UN a role in facilitating interactions between the government, civil society, and the international community around humanitarian and human rights issues. This was a valuable platform during a period the Uribe administration when, as discussed below, there was very little political space in Colombia to discuss the conflict.

On the negative side, the UN has at times been perceived warily as an international actor with an outsized role in a relatively strong and democratic state such as Colombia. Sensitivities about a UN role in peacebuilding in particular date back to the failed peace talks with the FARC-EP in El Caguán in the early 2000s. A UN envoy (James LeMoyne) was sent to provide good offices to the process; by the time he arrived, however, the process was already collapsing. Through his sometimes-flashy efforts to revive an already “moribund process,” he came to be seen by many Colombians as having overstepped his role, inserting himself centre-stage as the process was entering the brink of collapse. Although, as described above, the Caguán process collapsed mainly due to insufficient political will on the part of the negotiating parties (rather than the UN’s intervention), the legacy of El Caguán “set a negative precedent regarding the role of international actors in peace processes in Colombia.” After this episode, an unwritten rule prohibiting the UN from engaging non-state armed groups emerged, preventing the UN from facilitating dialogue or even interacting with the FARC-EP. (This “rule” was loosened during the 2012-16 peace talks, when, as discussed below, the RC and others began traveling to Havana, and was made moot by the arrival of the Security Council-mandated UN Verification Mission in 2016.)

After El Caguán, the hardline security policies of President Uribe, elected in 2002, narrowed the space for UN engagement in peacebuilding even further. The Uribe administration did not acknowledge the existence of an armed conflict, addressing the violence instead in terms of “narcoterrorism.” During these years, the RC and UNCT often had to dance around the vocabulary of “conflict,” and design politically-oriented programming aimed at creating the conditions for a peace process, “disguised through the flexibility of [their] mandates.” Indeed, UNDP’s focus on local-level peacebuilding emerged in part by default, given that the UN had little space to work on conflict-related issues at the national level.

Since the Uribe years, lingering perceptions that the UN lacks neutrality and/or infringes on sovereignty have reinforced hesitation or outright opposition among some national actors regarding a UN role in peacebuilding. The government, and in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has conveyed discomfort at times with the pronounced UN peacebuilding, human rights and humanitarian presence in the country. As the government considered inviting the Security Council to deploy a cease-fire monitoring mission, it weighed concerns about Colombia being compared with “failed states” prominent on the Council’s agenda. Further, the UN has been perceived by many in Colombia as a left-leaning organisation, and some sectors in the armed forces have considered it as being close to the positions of the FARC-EP. OHCHR’s criticism of Colombia’s human rights record, especially regarding army and paramilitary abuses such as “false positives,” has long been a thorn in the relationship. At the start of the peace process, the FARC-EP was also deeply sceptical of the UN, seeing it as partial to the government and the US. Its view had been coloured by UNODC’s significant role in illicit crop substitution, which had threatened an important part of the FARC-EP’s support base, the coca growers.
3. RC-led Strategy for a UNCT Role in Support of the Peace Process

At the start of the peace process in 2012, partly in an effort to avoid controversy similar to that caused by UN involvement in the Cagüán process, President Santos minimised the role of international actors in the Havana talks, shunning the possibility of an external mediator and emphasising instead a “Colombian process for Colombians”66 (though, as noted above, four states played accompanying and guarantor roles). Further, in order to ensure the confidentiality of the talks, the government restricted public participation, leaving little room for civil society - the UNCT’s main national partners besides the government.

Without a seat in the room, it was not apparent at the outset what role, if any, the RC and UNCT would play in the process.67 The first opportunity for a role emerged from a discreet conversation between the Head of UNDP’s Peace Area (Alessandro Preti), the PDA embedded in the RC’s office (then Denise Cook) and a member of Colombia’s Congressional Peace Commission (Congressman Ivan Cepeda). The latter conveyed a proposal for the UN to help Congress channel public participation in the peace process.68 The UN staff considered this a positive role for the UN to play, and it was later green-lighted by RC Moro.69 These early conversations led to UNDP-organised regional tables on peace process agenda items, which in turn prompted the first formal request from the negotiating parties for UN support to the peace process by facilitating public participation (see Public Forums section below).

Fabrizio Hochschild, who has a strong background in peacebuilding and humanitarian affairs in diverse conflict-affected countries, took up the post of RC in Colombia in 2013. He arrived with an “almost peacekeeping mentality,”70 expecting the UNCT to kick into high gear to support and prioritise the peace process and a possible post-accord scenario. His strategy for UNCT engagement was premised on the idea that the peace process presented a unique window of opportunity to address historical inequalities and structural factors that give rise to conflict recurrence at the national and local levels.71 As one UN official put it, “the peace process became the [UNCT’s] strategy.”72 To achieve his vision, RC Hochschild sought, inter alia, to build relationships that would create new entry points for a more substantial UN role in support of the process; to orient the UNCT toward prioritising the peace process; to prompt early planning both within the state and the UNCT for a post-conflict scenario; and to raise new resources and build new analytical capacities for the Office of the RC (RCO) and the UNCT more broadly.

Relationship building and entry points

When RC Hochschild arrived in Colombia in 2013, his predecessor (Moro), the PDA and UNDP had already carved out the first entry point for the UNCT with the regional tables and public forums on peace process agenda items. Yet, many within the Colombian state still preferred to keep the UN at bay. RC Hochschild tried to overcome such resistance by demonstrating that the UN could support government priorities around the peace process in a low-key manner, “without seeking protagonismo for protagonismo’s sake.”73 RC Hochschild leveraged his pre-existing relationships in Colombia, most importantly with the High Commissioner for Peace Sergio Jaramillo, who he had known for years and who was seen as representing a part of the government that harboured a “secret sympathy for the UN.”74 Often with the support of Jaramillo, RC Hochschild quickly set about establishing new relationships at the highest levels of government, including with President Santos, who is said to have valued his judgment.75 The RC’s background in peace operations proved useful in cultivating these high-level relationships, as it enabled him to advise the government on the UN’s potential role in supporting the implementation of a peace agreement and to facilitate its dialogue about a verification mission with relevant UN headquarters departments.76 Further, the RC and his Office built close relationships in the diplomatic community, especially with Norway, which sat inside the Havana process; and with other national and international actors operating in the territories most affected by the conflict, including the Church, civil society and the ICRC.

However, the RC’s relationship with national actors who were more mistrusting of the UN remained difficult. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in particular continued to resist a pronounced UN role and was wary of the RC’s high profile in the country. Further, significant efforts by the RC and others in the UNCT to engage sceptics of the peace process – such as supporters of Uribe and some within the armed forces – fell short of shifting their positions (though to be fair, as one observer put it, “note even the Pope could move them”). However, many UN staff believe these efforts, which are ongoing by senior UN officials in the country, could prove useful in the long-run, especially given that presidential elections will take place in 2018.78

Orienting the UNCT

RC Hochschild, recognising the UNCT’s expertise on the conflict, saw a need to shift the Team’s stance from one of dealing with the consequences of war to one of contributing to the peace process. In his view, the UNCT could leverage three main comparative advantages to reorient its work around the peace process: first, its resources, networks and logistical capacities across the country, combined with its reputation (at least in some segments of society) as a more or less neutral actor, which enabled the UNCT to convene, particularly in regions most affected by the conflict, diverse groups of people in a deeply polarised society; second, the UNCT’s reach into rural Colombia and access to government elites, which positioned it to facilitate dialogue between the peripheries and the capital; and third, its ability to tap into the UN’s global expertise on prevention, combined with its
understanding of on-the-ground realities in rural Colombia, which afforded it unique informational credibility and a strong basis on which to advocate for peace. The RC aimed to strengthen these comparative advantages further. For instance, he encouraged UNCT members, some of which already had a presence in the territories affected by the conflict, to shift an even greater share of their presence from departmental capitals into more rural and neglected parts of the country. He also pushed for more holistic and granular UNCT analysis at the local level (see Analytical capacities below). These and other efforts were in line with a “territorial” approach, a guiding principle in the UNDAF and CCA, as well as in the Colombian High Commissioner for Peace’s own vision for post-conflict peacebuilding. A “territorial approach,” thus, became a unifying theme between the government and the UN.

While parts of the UNCT were receptive to the RC’s push to prioritise the peace process, other parts that had been hesitant since the start to rally explicitly around the talks remained lukewarm. First, some humanitarian actors were concerned that an emphasis on reaching a “post-conflict” situation would risk underplaying persistent humanitarian needs arising from ongoing armed conflicts, such as with the ELN. Humanitarian actors were also concerned that the end of the FARC-EP conflict could generate new protection risks, as other armed groups could move in to fill the vacuum left by the FARC-EP. Thus, there was a tension between the RC’s two hats, as Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator: he needed to balance his efforts to focus the Team’s posture on the peace process with signals that he was mindful of ongoing humanitarian concerns related to and beyond the conflict with the FARC-EP. Second, there was some concern within the UNCT that explicitly supporting the Havana process would mean entering the political fray, given that the peace process had come to be seen as a political project of the Santos administration. Third, some within the UNCT who had been living and working amidst conflict conditions most of their lives felt the peace process was unlikely to succeed, and that by aligning itself too closely with it the UN could get burned.

RC Hochschild deployed a range of tools and incentives to bring the UNCT as a whole on board with a more robust interagency approach to supporting the peace process. Most importantly, he helped gather the UNCT around concrete joint initiatives – and new funding for those initiatives - in support of the peace process (see Resources below). Further, the RCO organised UNCT retreats in which agencies were asked how they were planning to reorient their programming to the peace process. It also organised a peacebuilding training session, facilitated by a Swiss research institute, for the UNCT. The PDA (at this point Jared Kotler) frequently convened meetings of the UNCT Peace Group, comprising key agencies working on conflict-related issues, in order to ensure regular exchange of information and analysis around the peace process. In a further effort to foster joint prevention programming on the ground, the RC supported the creation of inter-agency Local Coordination Teams (see below), and the establishment of “UN Houses” that co-located UNCT members in certain localities. The RC also drew on his strong relationships in UN Headquarters (UNHQ), delivering messages from the Secretary-General and other key figures in New York to reiterate that the peace process was considered the chief priority in Colombia for the UN. It is important to note, however, that the RC’s relationships with parts of UNHQ were difficult, as some in New York saw him as being too forward-leaning (not waiting to coordinate with UNHQ) and/or playing too political a role for an RC in the public sphere.

Planning for the post-conflict

Drawing from his experience in other conflict situations, and the UN’s experience globally, Hochschild frequently stressed the importance of early planning for a possible post-accord scenario. Partly due to the parties’ decision to negotiate under the principle that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, the government had done little early planning for implementation while the talks were still underway. In 2014, the RCO, with input from the UNCT Peace Group, drafted a strategic framework for the UN’s and international community’s contributions to the early implementation of the peace accord. The draft strategy emphasised the need for quick-impact projects in priority regions that would demonstrate early peace dividends in the first year after the accord. The RCO had two audiences in mind for the draft strategy: first, the government, to prompt early planning for post-accord stabilisation; and second, the UNCT, to foster collective thinking regarding how it could contribute to the post-conflict phase.

The RC presented the UN draft to the government, which cautioned that the UN should not get ahead of the government’s own articulation of a post-conflict aid framework, and then immediately began working on its own post-conflict strategy. The RC, rather than insisting on the UN draft, welcomed this decision and dropped the UN draft, and then began supporting the new and understaffed Ministry for Post Conflict, which took the lead on developing the government’s Rapid Response strategy. For instance, the RCO seconded a consultant who had worked on the UN draft to the Ministry.

Further, the RC, drawing on his background in peace operations, helped pave the way for the UN Political Mission that the parties eventually agreed to in 2016. Between 2013-15, the RC and PDA helped facilitate discussions between the Colombian government and UN Secretariat regarding possible modalities of such a mission. The RC and PDA also supported the work of Jean Arnault, who in 2015 was appointed, at the request of the negotiating parties, as the Secretary-General’s delegate to the sub-commission on disarmament.
4. RC Resources and Analytical Capacities

Resources

Hochschild helped raise new resources to enable a larger UNCT role in supporting the peace talks and early planning for the post-conflict. One of the first things he did in Colombia was to expand his office from three to eight staff, recruiting individuals with international experience in peacebuilding and post-conflict transitions. He did this by combining funding from several sources, including UNHQ (through a DOCO crisis country package, which raised the RCO’s core support),

UN Agency co-funding, locally-raised contributions from Sweden, and secondments from Switzerland and Norway.

Hochschild also led fundraising efforts for new inter-agency initiatives in support of the peace process. For instance, the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) provided USD2 million in funds to an interagency communications campaign aimed at contributing to a culture of peace (see Respira Paz below).

The most significant contribution the RC made to resource mobilisation was the establishment of a UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) for Post-Conflict in 2016, which has since raised over USD83 million in support of stabilisation and peacebuilding in the post-accord phase.

The Steering Committee of the multi-window Fund is co-chaired by the RC (now Martin Santiago Herrero) and the Colombian government’s High Commissioner for Post-Conflict, with significant donor participation. This arrangement has allowed for a strong degree of national ownership and alignment with national priorities, but has also caused some questions regarding the identification of projects. During its first two years, the MPTF invested 65% of its resources in stabilisation and early peace dividends in the territories most affected by the conflict,

with the remaining 35% in support of establishing new institutions created by the peace agreement. These include the Agency for Territorial Renovation, the Post-Conflict Office, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, the Truth Commission and the Unit for Disappeared Persons. However, during the initial phase, partners in the MPTF, including the UN, wanted to see further support to initiatives identified and implemented by local partners, in particular civil society organisations in conflict-affected territories – an objective that has been only partially achieved.

Analytical capacities

The UNCT’s large presence in the territories affected by the conflict provided the UN with a deep understanding of the causes and consequences of the conflict. Over time, OCHA built a strong information management system that drew on data collected by local humanitarian teams, which comprised both UN entities and international humanitarian NGOs across the country. The RCO frequently drew on OCHA’s information capacities, but lacked a system of its own that could incorporate data on peacebuilding and development, in addition to humanitarian trends. Starting in late 2014, with OCHA facing funding cuts and a phased draw-down of its operations, the RCO, OCHA and UNDP began developing plans to adapt OCHA’s information management system to serve the entire UNCT, covering humanitarian, development and peacebuilding trends analysis. Local humanitarian teams were later refashioned into inter-agency Local Coordination Teams co-led by a humanitarian and development agency, thus generating interagency units at the local level capable of feeding information into the new system. The new information management unit, established in 2015 and called UMAIC, draws on information gathered by these Local Coordination Teams to respond to key UNCT needs.

The RC strategically used data from UMAIC, as well as other sources of analysis, to advocate for the peace process. For instance, after the FARC-EP lifted its unilateral ceasefire in 2015, the RC used humanitarian trends data showing that the original ceasefire had resulted in lower rates of attacks on civilians and internal displacement to advocate for a bilateral ceasefire and other confidence building measures. This was done through public advocacy, including press conferences and Op-eds, as well as closed-door diplomacy with key government counterparts, including the government’s negotiating team. Further, the RC promoted a 2014 joint study by UNDP and the Colombian research centre, CERAC, about the economic benefits of peace. The study demonstrated that conflict has cost Colombia an average of 4 percentage points per year in terms of gross domestic product. It is difficult to assess how much impact these efforts had on the national conversation, but it appears to have helped reinforce arguments made by national actors in favour of peace.

5. RC-led interventions and initiatives

During the case study period, UNCT members undertook a wide range of peacebuilding activities, from OHCHR’s work on human rights monitoring and helping state institutions, the private sector, and indigenous authorities to incorporate human rights standards, to UNDP’s support for urban-rural youth exchanges, management of hydrocarbon-related social conflicts, and transitional justice; to UNHCR’s work on internal displacement; to FAO’s support for land restitution processes, which sought to address a key root cause of the conflict. While many of these are important and worth studying, this section will focus on a select number of RC-led, inter-agency initiatives in support of nationally-led prevention efforts.

Public Forums

From 2012-13, and at the request of the Congressional Peace Commissions (House and Senate), the UN, led by UNDP, organised 18 regional tables (Mesas Regionales) in nine different regions of Colombia to discuss, gather and systematise proposals on peace process agenda items. In late 2012, following the conclusion of the regional tables on the first agenda item, the government and the FARC-EP, in joint communiqués, formally requested the UN and the
National University (NU) to co-organise major public forums (Foros) on peace process agenda items. The NU was seen as ideologically closer to the FARC-EP, and thus helped compensate for perceptions on the part of the FARC-EP of the UN as being closer to the government. The forums were largely funded by the government. Over 12,000 people took part in these platforms for citizen participation, which resulted in the co-organisers conveying around 3,000 citizen proposals to the negotiating parties in Havana.

The most important and high-profile of the forums requested by the negotiating parties were those on Victims in 2014. These forums gathered victims of various actors in the armed conflict (e.g., FARC-EP, national security forces, paramilitaries, ELN) in Colombia and of various types of human rights violations (e.g., sexual violence, people whose relatives had been assassinated, kidnapping victims, forced displacement). Multiple UNCT members participated in the organisation of the forums, ensuring the participation of marginalised groups and women. Despite the organisers’ efforts to be inclusive, the victims’ forums did give rise to tensions among some who felt excluded, requiring RC Hochschild to personally intervene at times to defuse tensions.

It is difficult to measure the impact of the forums on the substance of the peace talks. According to experts Segura and Mechoulan, some government functionaries said the drafting commission would frequently review the proposals conveyed to the parties, while “others admitted to having mostly ignored these documents as time went by and the rhythm of the negotiations became more demanding.” Further, despite efforts on the part of the UN and NU to persuade those opposed to or sceptical of the peace process to attend, the Forums mainly mobilised sectors of society that already backed the peace process. What is more clear is that the regional tables and forums marked the first entry point for the UN to support the peace process. Through these early activities, the UN demonstrated to the negotiating parties its ability to quickly and effectively respond to requests and be trusted to support the process without overplaying its hand.

The Forums also allowed the UNCT to come together and support concrete initiatives through a “whole-of-UNCT” approach, as most UNCT members supported the forums by providing staff and other resources. Thus, while there is insufficient evidence to conclude that the Public Forums influenced the substance of the peace talks, they do appear to have positioned the UN as a credible actor that, at least from the side-lines, provide effective support for the peace process.

**Victim’s delegations**

The Public Forums, which represented the first time that victims participated, albeit indirectly, publicly and collectively in the peace process, warmed the negotiating parties up to the idea of direct participation of victims at the talks. Given the UN’s and NU’s roles in organising the Forums, the parties once again looked to them, along with the Episcopal Conference of the Catholic Church, which added moral legitimacy to the triumvirate, to organise five 12-person victims’ delegations to travel to the talks. These “Victims’ Delegations” proved to be a key innovation of the Colombian peace process, and arguably the most important – and complex - contribution of the RC and UNCT.

Selecting 60 delegates from a diverse universe of 7 million victims was bound to be a contentious process. The UN, as “a neutral broker that could take a lot of political fire” and an organisation with strong links to victims’ communities, was uniquely well-positioned to take on the challenging task. The negotiating parties set forth broad, and rather vague, selection criteria, which the RC and various UNCT members, along with the other two co-organisers, worked to interpret and apply. The final list included victims from various regional, socio-economic, and personal backgrounds; victims of assorted actors in the armed conflict, including paramilitaries, the state, the FARC-EP, the ELN and in many cases of multiple parties to the conflict; and victims of diverse types of violations. Despite painstaking efforts on the part of the organisers to explain the selection process and criteria, and to be as inclusive as possible, the exercise proved controversial, generating a great deal of scrutiny over how many victims from each “side” were chosen.

Despite the perhaps inevitable politicisation of the selection process, there is widespread agreement that the Victims’ Delegations were a crucial contribution to the peace process. According to Sergio Jaramillo, the Victims’ Delegations were “without question the most emotional moment of the whole peace process. They gave their views and testimony in what one might imagine a truth commission to look like, except they were talking to the two sides that were trying to end the conflict and that, in some cases, had serious responsibility for some of the things the victims were talking about.”

RC Hochschild, for his part, explained that the Victim’s Delegations gave substance to the frequent refrain by the negotiating parties that victims were “at the centre of the peace process.” Roddy Brett, a Colombia expert, argues that the proposals that the Delegations conveyed to the negotiating parties “directly shaped the Victims’/Transitional Justice Agreement, eventually signed in December 2015.” Further, Segura and Mechoulan have written that the Delegations generated a “radical change” on the part of the FARC-EP, whose leaders had previously shown little concern for apologising to victims (or were even mocking of the idea). Indeed, during the Victims’ Delegations’ trips to Havana, there were many instances of FARC-EP and government representatives offering apologies to the victims – often in informal spaces, such as during lunches or on breaks. The FARC-EP’s first formal act of apology took place in Bojayá, the site of one of the worst civilian massacres by the group, and it was the “direct result of engagement with one of the participants of the Victims’ Delegations – Leyner Palacios – a community leader from Bojayá.”

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*Colombia*
While the Victims’ Delegations were widely considered a vital part of the process, it is important to note that a high percentage of the victims who participated were re-victimised, with many receiving threats and harassment, upon their return from Havana to Colombia. A UNDP study on lessons learned from the experience concludes that if the idea of the delegations were to be replicated in another context, more should be done to anticipate the risks to participants as early as possible, and to ensure that relevant state authorities have put in place sufficient protection measures.

Direct input into the talks

In addition to facilitating the participation of others (civil society and victims) in the peace process, the RC and UNCT also at times participated directly in the talks. In close coordination with government counterparts, they provided technical support and thematic advice to the negotiating parties. With varying degrees of RCO coordination, the following UN agencies provided direct support to the parties in Havana at various points during the talks: UN Women (on gender); UNICEF and IOM (on the separation of minors from the ranks of the FARC-EP); UNODC, FAO and IOM (on substituting illicit crops); OHCHR (on transitional justice); and UNHCR (on humanitarian aspects); among others. The RC and relevant agencies also helped coordinate support from UN headquarters in NY, including visits by the SRSG for Children and Armed Conflict Leila Zerrougui (whose input was highlighted by Sergio Jaramillo being particularly important) and the SRSG on Sexual Violence in Conflict (Zainab Hawa Bangura). This direct participation helped create a role for the UNCT in the post-accord phase, as the negotiating parties named in the final peace accord many of the entities that visited Havana as actors upon which they had agreed to request implementation support.

Respira Paz

The 2012 talks began amidst an atmosphere of widespread public scepticism that the FARC-EP was genuinely willing to disarm, and that negotiations could end Colombia’s decades-long conflict. Especially among urban populations that no longer tangibly experienced the conflict in their daily lives, the absence of peace ranked low on many Colombians’ list of concerns, after unemployment, insecurity and the high cost of living. Against this backdrop, and at the request of the Colombian government, several UNCT members worked under the leadership of the RCO, UNIC, UNICEF and UNDP to develop a major communications campaign to mobilise public opinion in support of peace. The first phase of the campaign (2013-14) was titled La Paz es Mia (Peace is Mine) and funded by the Norwegian Embassy in Bogota. In July 2014, with 2 million USD in PBF support and additional funds from Norway and UNDP, the UNCT launched a second, much larger phase, titled Respira Paz (Breathe Peace).

Respira Paz aimed in particular to influence Colombians who were either indifferent to or sceptical of the feasibility of peace, as well as youth and women. However, due to the intense polarisation around the peace process, the UNCT opted not to explicitly campaign for the agreements being negotiated in Havana. Instead, Respira Paz adopted a lighter and more indirect message about peace: that by taking a deep breath, Colombians can reduce tensions and find peace in their daily interactions with others. The campaign, which was developed in collaboration with a Colombian ad agency, was delivered through various media, including: a mobile cinema; music; TV and radio commercials; radio serial dramas (radionovelas); social media campaigns; and peace-related events in conflict-affected areas.

Despite these innovative approaches, Respira Paz had mixed results when measured against initial expectations. A PBF evaluation found that the campaign was most effective in conflict-affected rural areas where the UN already had a strong presence and consolidated relationships with civil society. Respira Paz resonated less in urban areas, where it had to compete with a saturation of political messaging and campaigns. Moreover, there is little evidence to suggest that Respira Paz managed to shift the positions of those indifferent to or sceptical of the possibility of peace, as had been initially hoped. In hindsight, however, it appears that it was unrealistic to expect that a UN campaign – with less than USD 3 million in a middle-income country of 48 million people – could shift public opinion on an issue as polarising as the peace process with the FARC-EP at the time in Colombia. As those involved in the campaign began to realise these limitations, they adapted their approach, deciding to focus their remaining resources in the conflict-affected peripheries where the campaign had more bang for buck, rather than on national advertising. Finally, an unexpected positive outcome of the campaign was that Respira Paz contributed to enhancing the UN’s image as an unified actor committed to peace in Colombia.

Social dialogues

During the case study period, the RCO, UNDP and OHCHR played the UN’s most direct peacemaking role on a track technically separate from, but related in substance to, the peace process with the FARC-EP: facilitating dialogue between the government and Cumbre Agraria, a coalition of campesino, Afro-Colombian and indigenous organisations. The dialogue emerged after agrarian strikes escalated in 2013, culminating in hundreds of thousands of farmers blocking roads to demand a range of concessions from the government, ranging from subsidies for local producers and restrictions on imports, to access to credit and debt management. The strikes threatened to paralyze the country and cause shortages of basic goods even in Bogotá. Given the UNCT’s longstanding involvement in facilitating dialogue between the government and civil society, the government looked to the UN to help resolve the situation. Between 2014-16, the RC and OHCHR served as guarantors to the Mesa Única, a negotiation platform involving the government and Cumbre Agraria. The RC was often represented at the
dialogue by the PDA or the Head of UNDP’s Peace Area, but Hochschild attended himself when a high-level presence was needed to add extra energy to the process. The Mediation Support Unit also dispatched an expert from the Standby Team (Graciela Tapia) to advise on process design.

The implementation record of the agreements reached through the Mesa Única was very mixed, often leading to renewed protests. Although the UN stepped in to try and restart negotiations whenever this happened, there was a sense, even within the UN, that political will was lacking from the outset on the part of the government to follow through on certain financial commitments. This created a tricky situation for UNDP, which was asked by the government to support the implementation of some agreed projects, before it was clear that the money was on the table to finance these works. UNDP thus had to carefully navigate this position in order to avoid being scapegoated for non-implementation of any agreements if the funds did not materialise.

Despite these challenges, Cumbre Agraria proved an important prevention experience on several counts. First, despite the apparent lack of political will to follow through on commitments, “dialogue for dialogue’s sake” proved to be an important “pressure valve” that could help ease strikes and protests at critical moments. Second, although it was technologically separate from the Havana process, the Mesa Única offered a space in which the social dimensions of the conflict – which the more restricted Havana agenda could not comprehensively address – could be discussed. In this way, Mesa Única was “a mirror of what was happening in Havana.”

Third, the government viewed the UN’s role in the Mesa Única as useful, helping to placate, even if not ultimately resolve, a difficult situation. This was particularly important for OHCHR, which was able to demonstrate that it could leverage its strong relationships with campesino and other social groups using its rights-based approach to help the government, rather than only to criticise the state. In sum, despite a widespread sense that the Mesa Única fell short of resolving Colombia’s myriad social conflicts, it helped prevent tensions from escalating into large-scale violence at a particularly delicate time.

**Overall contribution of RC and UNCT activities to prevention**

The government and the FARC-EP reached a final peace accord in 2016 thanks to the efforts and commitment of national actors, not as a result of the contributions of the UN or other internationals. However, there is evidence that the RC and UNCT contributed to filling discrete but important gaps during the peace process.

Where the RCs and UNCT’s efforts bore the most fruit, they played to their comparative strengths, namely their longstanding relationships with civil society in territories affected by the conflict and their global expertise on prevention. The Victims’ Delegations stand out as the RCs and UNCT’s most important contribution to the peace process, as they were widely considered a watershed in the talks that left strong impressions on the negotiating parties. Although there is little evidence that the Public Forums influenced the substance of the talks, they constituted a platform for public participation in an otherwise largely closed-off process and positioned the UN to support the peace process more substantively. Direct UNCT inputs into the Havana process appear to have been useful, especially with respect to the release of children from the ranks of the FARC-EP, gender mainstreaming, demining, coca crops substations, and victims’ rights. The RCO provided significant support to the government in undertaking early planning for the implementation of a potential peace accord, including with respect to paving the way for a UN mission. And the Mesa Única, though technically separate from the Havana process, offered an important space for dialogue on broader social issues related to the conflict.

Where the UN’s efforts bore fewer fruits, it reached beyond its comparative strengths, aiming, for instance, to engage or influence those sceptical of the peace process (as in the case of the Respira Paz campaign).

In 2016, the UN Security Council unanimously approved a UN Mission in Colombia with a limited mandate, focused on verifying the laying down of arms of the FARC-EP, and monitoring and settling disputes related to the ceasefire and cessation of hostilities. In 2017, a second mission, the UN Verification Mission in Colombia, was established; its mandate was recently expanded to, on a temporary basis, verify a temporary truce between the government and the ELN.

The new RC (Herrero) must grapple with UNCT-UN Mission relations – a sometimes difficult dynamic, given that the Mission is not an integrated one – and ongoing challenges related to the implementation of the accord. However, due to the efforts of his predecessors and the UNCT, the current RC can benefit from a number of conditions that were not in place in 2012, including: a more unified UNCT stance and voice with respect to supporting the peace process; recognition of the relevance of the UN among key stakeholders, including the government, and the public with respect to peace implementation; an agreement among the UNCT that has an explicit role in the implementation of the peace accord, enshrined in the agreement itself; a strong interagency analysis unit through UMAIC; and significant funding available through the MPTF.

**6. Lessons for RCs and UNCTs**

Even when political space is limited, opportunities for preventive action exist: In some contexts, the RC’s and UNCT’s room for manoeuvre with respect to prevention efforts is extremely limited. Still, RCs, PDAs and UNCTs can lay important groundwork for future preventive action if and when political space broadens. During the Uribe presidency in Colombia, the UN could not do high-profile work on the
strengthen the ability of RCs and UNCTs are likely to enhance its situational awareness and inform prevention programming and advocacy. In the case of Colombia, the RCO and OCHA built on pre-existing humanitarian information capacities to create a more holistic information management unit linked to interagency coordination teams at the local level. The RC strategically used data on the benefits of a ceasefire, as well as other analysis on the economic benefits of ending the conflict, to advocate for a bilateral ceasefire and confidence-building measures.

Be a good guest - but be willing to take calculated risks: Especially in middle-income countries with relatively strong institutions, RCs need to be particularly sensitive to the parameters of nationally-led processes, looking to empower national actors rather than replace them. This may result in a smaller role for the UN. However, RCs also need to understand when to take calculated risks in pushing national actors, proactively communicating in media, and taking initiative on key issues without necessarily waiting to be asked (as in the case of the RCO’s initiative on developing a post-conflict strategy in Colombia). In such situations, it is important for RCs to know that UNHQ has their back.

Build a common vision for the UNCT: In transitional contexts, RCs need to build a common vision for the UNCT from the outset. In the case of Colombia this was achieved through a series of UNCT activities—retreats, common trainings, joint initiatives—as well as processes—such as the development of a post-conflict strategy geared at aligning the UNCT behind peacebuilding objectives.

Pooled funding can help foster results-based investments and “one-UN approaches” to prevention: Aligning funds to stabilisation and prevention outcomes instead of individual UN mandates can be an especially effective tool to rally the UNCT around joint programmes, as agencies will naturally go where the money is. Moreover, in the case of Colombia, the RC looked early to bilateral donors and global funds, in particular the PBF, to ensure availability of early and flexible funding for the initial phase of stabilisation and peace implementation. The establishment of a Multi-Partner Trust Fund can also help foster interagency programming in the implementation phase of a peace agreement. (In Colombia, during the MPTF’s second year of operation, 12 out of 13 UN projects supported involved two or more agencies.) Such Funds should focus limited resources on the most urgent priorities in the aftermath of an accord, such as demonstrating early peace dividends in areas hardest hit by the conflict or providing start-up funding to critical institutions or new programmes for peace. The Funds require strong technical secretariats to ensure they remain focused on those priorities.

Play to the UNCT’s strengths: RCs and UNCTs are likely to be most successful if their interventions build on their comparative advantages. In the case of Colombia, a key UNCT strength lay in its strong presence and relationships in territories most affected by conflict. The RC understood these comparative advantages, seeking to strengthen them further and leverage them to create entry points for the UNCT where it had value-added to nationally-led prevention efforts. For instance, the Public Forums and Victims’ Delegations positioned the UN as a platform for public participation in the Havana process. (By contrast, efforts to change the minds of
sceptics is rarely a game the UN plays well, and in Colombia proved less productive. While it is necessary for the UN to engage with diverse groups along the political spectrum, including political opposition, this engagement might be more productively oriented toward relationship-building rather than attempting to shift opinion(s).

UNCT members can provide multi-dimensional technical advice to negotiating parties in peace processes: Especially where UNCTs have a strong understanding of the causes and consequences of conflict in a national setting, country offices can be well-placed to provide expert advice to negotiating parties in a peace process, independently or in collaboration with the UN’s global thematic experts (such as SRSGs on Children and Armed Conflict or on Sexual Violence in Conflict).

Where necessary, couch the UN’s role: The UN’s strength in highly politicised talks comes through its impartiality, which needs to be actively sought and preserved. Where the UN is perceived from the outset as partial (or, as in the case of Colombia, perceived to lean different ways by different actors), looking for partnerships with national actors (such as, in the case of Colombia, a left-leaning University and the Church in the organisation of the Victims’ Delegations) can help provide balance and greater legitimacy to specific interventions.

RCs and UNCTs may be particularly well-placed to facilitate dialogue over slow-burn social conflicts: RCs and UNCTs can play important roles in facilitating dialogue between governments and diverse social groups aimed at preventing or easing slow-burn social conflicts driven by highly local dynamics. Staff working at the local level in relevant regions should be equipped with facilitation and other prevention-related skills, as they are likely to be called upon to do much of the legwork. In the case of Colombia, the Mesa Única dialogue demonstrates that RCs and UNCTs, given their country expertise and continuous presence in a country, can be well-placed to facilitate such dialogues, which require sustained accompaniment over potentially long periods of time. Indeed, it would appear they are far better placed for such dialogues than would be high-level envoys flown in to mediate for short periods. Though RCs and UNCTs cannot create political will and should thus be careful not to be scapegoated if negotiated commitments are not upheld, “dialogue for dialogue’s sake” can contribute to easing tensions.
Endnotes


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1 Note on approach and scope of the case study: For this case study, and all other cases in this project, UNU is taking a magnifying glass to the role of the UN. This is because the aim of the project is to provide the UN with a sense of ‘what works’ in UN prevention. By definition, this magnifying glass makes the UN’s role central to this paper; it is important to remember, however, that the UN played a secondary role in Colombia’s peace process. For a broader overview of the central roles played by national actors, and the secondary roles played by various international actors including and beyond the UN, in the Colombian peace process, see the following list of references: International Crisis Group reports on Colombia from 2012-16. To access see “Colombia.” International Crisis Group, www.crisisgroup.org拉丁美洲-加勒比/安第斯-哥伦比亚/; Segura, Renata and Delphine Mechoulan. “Made in Havana: How Colombia and the FARC Decided to End the War.” International Peace Institute, February 2017, www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/IPI-Rpt-Made-in-Havana.pdf.; Brett, Roddy. “Stabilisation and Political Settlements: Colombia Case Study.” UKHMG Stabilisation Unit, June 2016. Bouvier, Virginia M. Colombia: Building Peace in a Time of War. United States Institute of Peace Press, 2009.

3 Ibid p.12.
5 Ibid p.12.
6 Ibid p.12.
11 De Boer et al. 2017, pp.7.
18 Brett, R. 2016, p.28.
19 For more details, see Brett, R. 2016, p.28.


“Colombia: Peace at Last?” 2012, ii.


“Colombia: Peace at Last?” 2012, ii.


“Colombia: Bringing the link between peace and development into focus.” DPA Politically Speaking, 2015.dpa-ps.atavist.com/pdaamericas.


Brett, R. 2014, p.25.


Personal interview with Bruno Moro. 2017. Further, the UNCT played a key role in facilitating dialogue between high-level state functionaries and human rights groups through the Mesa Nacional de Garantías, a framework that was revived in recent years and continues to this day. “Gobierno reactiva Mesa Nacional de Garantías por salida de paramilitares.” El Heraldo, 21 October 2014. www.elheraldo.co/nacional/gobierno-reactiva-mesa-nacional-de-garantias-por-salida-de-paramilitares-170821.


Segura, R and Mechoulan, D. 2017. In early 2002 LeMoyne convinced Pastrana to allow him to try to restart talks, meeting with the FARC-EP and apparently persuading them to agree to a ceasefire, briefly raising hopes for the process (Fawcett, Louise. “Participación internacional en conflictos armados: los esfuerzos de las Naciones Unidas por lograr la paz en Colombia.” Proceso de paz en Colombia: Participación de actors internacionales, edited by Sandra Borda Guzmán and Fernando Cepeda Ulloa, ECIE Ediciones, 2012, pp.125.). However, the FARC-EP just weeks later hijacked a domestic flight to abduct a senator, in what was “the last straw after three years of frustrations during which the FARC-EP took advantage of the demilitarized zone to reorganize and strengthen its forces” (Segura, R and Mechoulan, D. 2017, pp.7.).

Then-President Pastrana accused LeMoyne of having “behaved as more of a negotiator than a facilitator,” which created “more problems than solutions.” Fawcett, L. 2012, p.125.
59 Interview with UN official, October 2017.
60 Moro, B. November 2017.
61 Interviews, UN officials.
63 False positive is “the euphemism used… to describe army killings of young civilians passed off as guerrilla casualties.” See: Vieira, Constanza. “Santos Says Colombia Doesn’t Need U.N. Human Rights Office.” Inter Press Service, 18 July 2013. reliefweb.int/report/colombia/santos-says-colombia-doesn%E2%80%99t-need-un-human-rights-office. Further, former OHCHR-Colombia head Michael Fruhling sharply criticized Colombia’s Justice and Peace Law which was a controversial but central tool for the demobilization of the AUC; this was seen as a misplaced and intrusive rebuke of the government’s peacebuilding strategy. Fawcett, L. 2012, p.91.
67 However, the High Commissioner for Peace apparently did envision a role for a UN Mission for the post-conflict from the outset. Segura, R and Mechoulan, D. 2017.
68 The General Accord that marked the start of the talks in 2012 noted the possibility of the parties to the talks agreeing to “delegate to a third party the organization of spaces for participation.” See: “Appendix B: General Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace.” International Crisis Group, “Colombia: Peace at Last?” Latin America Report No.45, 25 September 2012, peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/CO_120826_General%20Agreement%20for%20the%20Termination%20of%20the%20Conflict.pdf.; However, there was no indication at that point that this would be the UN. Interview with Denise Cook, former Peace and Development Adviser, 2017.
69 Interview with Denise Cook, 2017.
70 Interview with UN official. 2017.
72 Interview with UN official, October 2017. The UNDAF 2015-19 also reflects this, being based on the premise that Colombia has an exceptional opportunity to close historical gaps and address structural factors that give rise to conflict recurrence at the national and local levels.
73 Interview with Pontus Ohrstedt, Head of RC Office. October 2017.
76 Email exchange with UN official, 2018.
78 Interviews with UN officials. October 2017.
79 Interview with Fabrizio Hochschild. October 2017.
80 For instance, UNDP opened an office in Quibdó, Chocó during this time. Email exchange with Sabina Stein, formerly Political Affairs Officer seconded by Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs to the Office of the RC. February 2018.
81 For the RC, enfoque territorial (territorial focus), meant two things: first, that the UNCT work should target territories most affected by the conflict and the inequalities that lie at the root of the conflict; and second, that it should adopt a differentiated approach depending on the needs of different regions. Enfoque territorial also aligned with the Colombian High Commissioner for Peace’s concept of paz territorial, (see Jaramillo, Sergio. “La Paz Territorial.” Oficina Del Alto Comisionado Para La Paz, 13 March 2013. www.interaktive-demokratie.org/files/downloads/La-Paz-Territorial.pdf.) and was enshrined in the 2014 CCA and the 2015-19 UNDAF. For the CCA see: “Colombia: Situacion de la Paz, la Equidad y el Desarrollo Territorial.” El Sistema de las Naciones Unidas (SNU), 2014. ims.undg.org/downloadFile/753c2b2eaf730f44b56b6d88d1d1625fbc8c3806d1054bd6d7c5689fdeda517a7.
82 Email exchange with Sabina Stein. February 2018.
83 For more on the humanitarian dimension after the peace accords, see Marcos, Francisco Rey and Sophie Duval. “La dimensión humanitaria tras los acuerdos de paz: propuestas para la comunidad internacional en Colombia” Informe, January 2015. http://iecah.org/images/stories/publicaciones/informes/Informe_Final_IECAH.pdf. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA’s) funding in Colombia has been slashed and the Office will be forced to close in 2018 despite ongoing violence against land claimants, human rights defenders and community leaders.
in areas previously held by the FARC-EP. Further, clashes between other armed groups attempting to control strategic areas previously held by the FARC-EP have provoked forced displacement. Nevertheless, Colombia’s humanitarian situation overall has improved significantly due to the peace process and the bilateral ceasefire. As a UN official explained: “What we have now is more a protection and human rights crisis than a humanitarian crisis. The reduction in humanitarian funding should not be an issue as long as it is paralleled by efforts to strengthen state institutions and promote the entrance of development and peacebuilding actors in regions where only humanitarians used to work.”


85 For instance, a UN House was established in Cucuta. Email exchange with Sabina Stein. February 2018. See also: “Nueva Casa de las Naciones Unidas en Cucuta.” Naciones Unidas en Colombia, 27 October 2014. http://nacionesunidas.org.co/blog/2014/10/27/%E2%80%8B%E2%80%8Bnueva-casa-de-las-naciones-unidas-en-cucuta/.


87 At first, parts of the UNCT initially resisted what was perceived as a top-down imposition of a strategy from the RC’s Office that emphasized the role of some agencies more than others. In response, the RCO backtracked to incorporate more inter-agency input into the draft, creating a more inclusive process and thereby helping alleviate concerns. Stein, S. October 2017.

88 Internal UN document, October 2014.

89 The consultant seconded by the UN had also worked on the UN’s draft strategy. Stein, S. October 2017.

90 For instance, in 2015, the RC and PDA supported a visit by the head of DPA (Jeffrey Feltman) to Colombia to meet with President Santos to discuss modalities of a political mission. As a prelude to Feltman’s visit, DPA and the RC Office, in consultation with a number of agencies based in Colombia produced a paper for the government presenting options on roles the UN could play in the implementation of a possible peace agreement. “PDA report April-May 2015.” United Nations, Internal document, 2015.


92 DOCO soon thereafter “downgraded” Colombia, which meant the Office could not benefit from raised core funds, but continued to raise additional support from Sweden and Norway.

93 Ohrstedt, P. October 2017.

94 “UN Post-Conflict MPTF for Colombia.” UN, 27 June 2017. www.un.org/webcast/pdfs/170627pm-colombia.pdf. PBF was one of the first donors to the MPTF, providing 3 million USD for joint work on reparations to victims in areas close to FARC cantonment sites. http://www.co.undp.org/content/dam/colombia/docs/MPTF/undp_co_Hoja1MPTF.pdf Further, the MPTF has partnered with other international funds, including those of the World Bank, the EU and IADB, to prevent duplication. “UNDG Report September 2017.” UNDG, Internal document, 2017.

95 This priority is at the heart of the government’s own post-conflict strategy, see Gualberto Girvin, Alexandra and Nataly Sarmiento Eljadue. “Respuesta Rápida: Una estrategia de estabilización y generación de confianza en la paz.” Presidencia de la Republica, viva.org.co/PDT_para_la Construccion_de_Paz/Estrategia_de_Respuesta_Rapida/1.%20Estrategia%20de%20Respuesta%20RC%3A1.pdf.

96 Relevant international NGOs, such as ICRC, also participate. Interview with Gerard Gomez. November 2017.

97 “Respuesta Rápida: Una estrategia de estabilización y generación de confianza en la paz.” Presidencia de la Republica, viva.org.co/PDT_para_la Construccion_de_Paz/Estrategia_de_Respuesta_Rapida/1.%20Estrategia%20de%20Respuesta%20RC%3A1.pdf.

98 Relevant international NGOs, such as ICRC, also participate. Interview with Gerard Gomez. November 2017.

99 UNCT initially resisted what was perceived as a top-down imposition of a strategy from the RC’s Office that emphasized the role of some agencies more than others. In response, the RCO backtracked to incorporate more inter-agency input into the draft, creating a more inclusive process and thereby helping alleviate concerns. Stein, S. October 2017.

100 Internal UN document, October 2014.

101 Interview with UN official, October 2017.


108 Most UNCT members participated in the Mesas, although UNDP initially bore the brunt of the work and the financing. Interview with Denise Cook, 2017.
113 Those in attendance included representatives of campesinos, indigenous groups, Afro-descendants, trade unions, LGBTI, and others. “Participación masiva en foro final del proceso de paz.” Universidad Nacional de Colombia. 3 February 2016, agenciadenoticias.unal.edu.co/detalle/article/participacion-masiva-en-foro-final-del-proceso-de-paz.html
114 “Participación masiva en foro final del proceso de paz.” 2016.
115 For instance, a group of victims of paramilitaries and the state protested against the Barrancabermeja Forum, claiming the organizers had excluded them; RC Hochschild met with the protestors personally. See: “Víctimas colombianas denuncian exclusión del foro de ONU sobre proceso de paz.” La Vanguardia. 11 July 2014, www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20140711/54411828201/victimas-colombianas-denuncian-exclusion-del-foro-de-ONU-sobre-proceso-de-paz.html. In another vivid example, during the Cali Forum, RC Hochschild had to physically intervene to defuse a clash that started when a group of participants accused a man in attendance of being a neo-Nazi infiltrating the Forum by posing as a victim. “Inconformismo en Primera sesión de foro de Víctimas en Cali.” El Espectador. 3 August 2014, www.elespectador.com/noticias/nacional/inconformismo-primera-sesion-de-foro-de-victimas-cali-articulo-508385. Video of the incident, including Hochschild’s intervention, here: “Eduardo Romano, exlíder neonazi agrede periodistas en encuentro de víctimas – Cali.” YouTube, uploaded by Las2orillas, 6 August 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpPhxxNylZs.
117 Ibid p.29.
118 According to Sergio Jaramillo, through the forums, the UN and in particular the RC, demonstrated how they could support the peace process. Jaramillo, S. 2017.
119 Interview with UN official. October 2017.
120 Brett, R. 2016.
122 Ohrstedt, P. October 2017.
123 Sergio Jaramillo acknowledged that choosing the victims was an extremely difficult task that required impartiality, logistical capacity and “serious leadership,” which the UN, and in particular Hochschild, was able to bring. Jaramillo, S. 2017.
124 These included: principles such as balance, plurality and fairness (sindéresis); that delegates needed to be direct victims (as opposed to participating in representation of others); and that the composition of the delegations must reflect the total universe of human rights and IHL violations that took place in the armed conflict. See “Joint Communiqué.” The delegations of the National Government and the FARC-EP. Havana, 17 July 2014, www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/mesadeconversaciones/PDF/Comunicado%20Conjunto,%20La%20Habana,%2017%20Julio%202014-Versi_n%20Ingl_s%20_0.pdf. According to UNDP, the organizers interpreted sinderesis as the capacity of the victims to speak with rectitude and honesty, and to express the pain of their specific case while also having the capacity to transcend that in order to demonstrate how their personal experience could be emblematic and representative of other similar cases. Brett, Roddy. “La Voz de las Victorias en la Negociacion: Sistematizacion de una Experiencia.” PNUD. March 2017, www.co.undp.org/content/dam/colombia/docs/Paz/undp-co-victimas2016ajustado-2017.pdf.
125 Ibid. Involved UNCT members included UNHCR, OHCHR, UNDP, UN Women, and UNICEF.
127 These included violations of the right to life, extrajudicial executions (including “false positives”), abduction, sexual
128 “Primera delegación de víctimas viaja a La Habana a encuentro con la Mesa de Conversaciones.” 2014.
129 Brett, R. 2017, pp.25. In particular, the choice of Piedad Cordoba, a former Senator who was kidnapped by paramilitaries in 1999 and was considered by some, especially on the right, to be a FARC-EP sympathizer, added to the politicization of the process. “Piedad Córdoba viaja a La Habana en condición de víctima.” Semana, 15 December 2014, www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/piedad-cordoba-en-el-grupo-de-victimas-que-van-la-habana/412314-3.
RC Hochschild addressed some of this public controversy, contending: “the truth is more complex and more variated; many of the victims are victims of various perpetrators. Some don’t know who was the perpetrator. And there are perpetrators who are or were victims.”
130 Jaramillo, S. 2017.
132 Brett, R. 2016.
135 Email exchange with Sabina Stein. February 2018.
136 UNDSS received formal complaints from 14 of victims, while another 10 said they were victims of harassment and threats upon their return home; thus, around 40% of the victims were re-victimized, largely, according UNDSS, by a right-wing group with paramilitary roots called Las Aguilas Negras. Harassment of victims on social media networks was also a key problem. Brett, R. 2017, p.7.
137 Brett, R. 2017, p.73 and p.93.
138 UN Women accompanied multiple delegations of women and LGBT organizations, as well as one delegation of experts on sexual violence, to Havana to provide expert input to the sub-commission on gender. According to IPI, “the continuous presence of women and LGBT experts and advocacy groups in Havana during the process had a significant impact on the members of both delegations. It opened their eyes to the importance of both having women present at the table and of taking gender issues seriously – particularly for the FARC-EP, which had been accused of violating women’s rights both within and beyond its ranks.” Segura, R and Mechoulan, D. 2017, p. 16.
139 Jaramillo, S. 2017.
140 MSU further supported the RCO, as well as the Norwegian delegation to the peace process, with wide-ranging technical support, including on “early implementation of the peace agreement, UN engagement with non-state armed groups, women’s participation in the peace process, and mechanisms to ratify an eventual agreement, among others. Numerous confidential technical papers were prepared at the request of the RC. MSU also provided technical feedback on strategic documents produced by the RCO.” Email exchange with Sabina Stein, 2017.
141 These include: UNDP and FAO for agricultural reform; UNESCO and UNDP for reintegration of former combatants; OHCHR on the situation of persons detained for belonging to or collaborating with the FARC-EP; security guarantees and human rights of victims; UNODC on the dismantling of criminal organizations and the solution to the problem of illicit drugs; and UN Women, along with the Representative of the SG on Sexual Violence in Conflict, on gender. See Final Peace Accord, pages 215-16.
142 PBF independent evaluation of Respira Paz campaign, p. 5.
143 PBF evaluation, p.5 and p.48
144 PBF evaluation.
145 When the PBF-funded portion of the campaign concluded, the RC coordinated a six-month extension, funded by an additional 150,000 USD from the Norwegian Embassy, to spread the campaign's message to more regions affected by the conflict than had been originally envisioned. UNDP also put skin in the game, contributing 100,000 USD through its Territorial Alliances for Peace and Development project, as did the Colombian government through in-kind contributions worth 300,000 USD. PBF evaluation.
146 PBF evaluation.
147 “UNDP Innovative Practice Note April 2016." UNDP, Internal document, 2016. In terms of specific objectives, Respira Paz sought to: 1) contribute to the creation of a culture of peace and reconciliation; 2) highlight the benefits of peace, in terms of security, economic growth, development; and other aspects; 3) generate a positive attitude toward peacemaking; and 4) create a sense of shared responsibility for the promotion of peace and reconciliation. PBF evaluation.
149 One particularly powerful component of the campaign was the critically acclaimed film Mateo, which is based on the story of a young boy in Barrancabermeja. Mateo, which Respira Paz brought through mobile cinema to about 50 of Colombia’s municipalities, was praised for showing the realities of what people live through in the areas most affected by the conflict. PBF evaluation.
150 See for instance “Bomba Estéreo RESPIRA PAZ - ONU Colombia.” Youtube, uploaded by ONU Colombia, 18 July 2014,
In these areas, the message of the campaign interacted with existing UNCT initiatives, such as UNDP supported youth programs in Meta and Nariño. PBF evaluation.

See for instance, the London-Cartagena and the Mesa Nacional de Garantías.

In 2014, the government and Cumbre Agraria agreed to create the Mesa Única. They further agreed that the government would commit financial resources to development initiatives the two sides jointly determined to be priorities. The agreements were co-signed by RC Hochschild and OHCHR representative Todd Howland. “Acta de acuerdos firmados entre la Cumbre agraria y el Gobierno nacional.” Colectivo de Abogados Jose Alvear Restrepo. 14 May 2014, www.colectivodeabogados.org/?Acta-de-acuerdos-firmados-entre-la.

As a UN official explained, “when Cumbre Agraria would get frustrated over a lack of follow through and threaten to raise temperature again, the UN would come in to try to get the parties to sit down together and keep cooler heads prevailing so there would not be bloodshed.” Interview with UN official. October 2017.

Interviews with UN officials. October 2017.


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