

Addressing Marginality: Towards Enhanced Participation and People-Centred Security

Initial Inputs

The forum began with an introduction by the host organisations, University of Oxford's CONPEACE and Universidad del Rosario, before taking inputs from each of the stakeholder groups involved: the Colombian government, the international community, civil society, and academia. These provided empirical observations and conceptual frameworks to guide subsequent plenary discussion and working groups.

The forum examined the changing landscape of security, opportunities for development, and possibilities for popular participation among marginalised groups after the Havana Peace Accords. Marginality was conceptualised in two distinct manners: as referring to 'marginalised areas' at the physical geographical borders of Colombia; and as 'marginalised groups' that face exclusion due to their gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, or socioeconomic status as well as the intersections among these.

These factors help explain why scholars and analysts often consider processes of

marginalisation to affect a substantial part of Colombian society rather than merely a minority.

The country's border regions, meanwhile, are characterised by the double crisis of post-peace accord insecurity and mass arrival of people from Venezuela that combines with longstanding irregular cross-border flows of goods and people.

People-centred security requires participation

Traditional – national or military – security was contrasted with people-centred security, empirical evidence suggests that both are considered important. Forum participants highlighted the difference between providing bodyguards and armoured vehicles to at-risk individuals, and overcoming the need for such provision by decreasing social and political violence. Participants argued that urgent attention was needed to facilitate the

institutional and societal context required to ensure more holistic people-centred security – with citizen participation considered a vital component in improving security and overcoming marginality.

Enhancing participation is an essential element of improving state-society relations, which ultimately is the basis for people-centred security. This however requires a relatively high citizen level of trust in state institutions – something which is not always evident. As one of the participants explained, recent empirical evidence from Cesar Department indicated low levels of trust in most state entities, with the *Defensoría del Pueblo* (Ombudsman’s Office) being the major exception. Regarding the security sector, people reported more confidence in the armed forces than the police, who were seen as incompetent and corrupt – although neither regularly patrol, nor prevent or investigate crimes outside urban centres.

The peace deal did not end marginalisation

Another theme of discussion was the relationship between the Havana Peace Accords and presence of an effective state in marginalised territories. Forum participants discussed how the implementation of the peace deal can conceivably improve effective state presence. The Havana Peace Accords is an opportunity to confront historic problems, with points 1, 3, and 4 in particular generating high societal expectations. The hopes were that, with the social environment supposedly calmer and FARC supposedly demobilised, local communities would be less prone to coercion or

being caught in the midst of armed confrontations. Indeed, the Tripartite Mechanism created to verify disarmament and demobilisation at the ETCRs (*Espacios Territoriales de Capacitación y Reincorporación*) has come to be considered an example of international good practice, while the engagement with communities in marginalised regions through the initial stages of PDET (*Programas de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial*) was welcomed internationally as serious, institutional work by state planning entities.

Implementation however fell short of initial promises. Persistent delays and under-resourced plans raise doubts about the seriousness of the government’s commitment to showing effective presence and engagement across Colombia’s territory. Social conflicts continue to be high; communities continue to be at risk. Accordingly, the overriding perception was that the opportunity created by the Havana Peace Accords to (re-)construct an effective state in the margins was being squandered, with insufficient pedagogy included, and the current political situation polarised.

PDET

15-year roadmaps setting investment priorities in under-resourced areas: 5 factors in each municipality; 8 pillars of discussion; 1800 initiatives selected

Discussion

1. Community Best Practices

The initial discussion considered existing community governance practices, such as *Terminales de Justicia* in Arauca that bring together faith communities, JAC (*Juntas de Acción Comunal*), educational institutions, and state entities to focus on the issues of power vacuum and impunity. State entities show a willingness to have a stronger territorial presence, but face security barriers. Saving lives is the most important aim; so one cannot merely consider ‘hammer justice’ (retributive justice), while recognising that it is important. One issue raised was the problem of institutions utilising ex-combatants as informers; this places them at risk, as demonstrated by the murder of an ex-combatant in Arauca on 20th June.

Communities in the Department of Norte de Santander explained that they tried to resolve their problems by themselves. They therefore created Coexistence Committees to develop their own Development Plans, Security Plans, and Coexistence Manuals. These manuals prohibit the entrance of armed actors, similarly to so-called “peace communities” in other parts of the country (e.g. Samaniego in Nariño). They have mainly been successful, with the persons in question apparently handing in the arms. However, communities continue to periodically suffer invasions – and have had to retire for their own safety.

Communities in La Guajira have struggled to create similar mechanisms, relying instead on civic actions/protests/strikes to request adequate infrastructure and action against corruption. The *Fiscalía* (Prosecutors Office) is absent despite high crime rates, with the *Defensoría del Pueblo* the only state entity considered effective in the department, (similarly to the findings in Cesar). Even then, there was implicit criticism of the *Defensoría* scaling up its presence mainly in response to the situation in Venezuela rather than to address serious long-term problems in the region.

There were complaints about corruption at the highest levels in the department, and there was a perception that state entities appear concerned mainly with protecting their own institutional interests. An example was given of people complaining about the police, only to be subsequently visited and threatened. Similar sentiments were echoed by participants from other regions.

The discussions revolved strongly around how the lessons of these communities can be shared and used to replicate best practices (see [CONPEACE Best Practice](#) brief for some of those discussed at previous fora and workshops). Short-circuits exist at all levels, sometimes even at the local community level – and there is a need to consider how to repair these to spread learnings horizontally and vertically.

2. The Role of the State and Armed Forces

Representatives of the armed forces emphasised the importance of their participation in dialogue spaces like the CONPEACE cross-stakeholder forum, befitting their role as guarantors of the constitutional order and the need to enhance their understanding of themes like marginality. Members of the armed forces shared the concerns of other participants regarding the increase in violence and combats and the links between armed organisations – ELN and others – and drug trafficking.

There was a shared understanding by both military and civilian participants that members of the armed forces understand very well that more state presence does not just mean soldiers – and security is not just the presence of soldiers. All agreed that it is incumbent upon them to ensure that actions to combat criminality respect human rights, including obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and to build robust processes to work more closely with institutions like *Procuraduría* and *Defensoría* and with the SAT (Early Warning System) to carry out their duties. Working together more coherently in this manner provides an opportunity to combine public policies on development and security, allowing the armed forces to be more useful to the country (for example, in environmental protection) despite the challenges and risks (of extortion, criminal gangs etc.) that continue to exist.

Generating confidence in state institutions is a key objective of the HPA and wider state policies, including PNIS and PDET, with the latter considered an important participatory process resulting from the work of the Colombians in regions highly affected by armed conflict and marginality.

Representatives of marginalised communities throughout Colombia explained that building confidence is a lengthy and complicated process that can be easily eroded by lack of implementation of the peace deal, or failure to continue consider local specificities. The conflation of coca substitution and eradication programmes in Tumaco, for example, has damaged trust where individuals or communities agree to substitution and instead suffer from forced eradication, especially as the government continues to consider reintroducing aerial fumigation. Testimony from Tumaco, Norte de Santander, and Cesar expressed doubt regarding the willingness and/or capacity to implement PDET recommendations; and these recommendations are virtually negligible in the National Development Plan.

In any case, the PDET is a one-off participatory exercise, so other spaces for democratic participation must be created or strengthened. 17 Productive Projects have been introduced in the ETCRs: this is fewer than required, but they have help generate new dynamics. According to important relevant stakeholders such as the UN, this is the route to take, and it must be speeded up.

The timely and effective provision of justice is a key transversal issue that impacts upon the legitimacy which communities grant to the state and its various agencies and institutions. This was clearly evident in debates around Justice in the Territory; the Restorative-Ordinary Justice tension; and the creation of an Integral Justice System. Canada is supporting the Colombian National Police, especially to enhance rural and community policing capabilities; and the *Terminales de Justicia* in Arauca showed how state and civil society could work together under rubrics of people-centred justice to reconstruct the often problematic relationships between citizens and the state security sector.

3. The Double Crisis of Insecurity and Migration

The current reconfiguration of armed actors threatens to mirror the post-Justice and Peace period when a partial demobilisation and reintegration programme led to a mutation of armed conflict and violence. Alliances between ex-FARC and ELN/EPL have increased threats to marginalised communities, while organised criminal groups (including non-Colombian ones, such as Mexican cartels) have expanded. Internal displacement continues, and so does the strategy of armed actors of confining communities in their territory and limiting access to medicine, education etc. – detailed analysis is needed regarding the impact on people-centred security of these different modalities of armed actor behaviour.

The sensationalisation of the Venezuelan political situation by the media, and the conflation of migration with crime, has created a distorted perception of Venezuelans that fuels xenophobia. While some Venezuelans have been recruited by armed groups or engaged in common criminality, the vast majority have not – and are more often victim than perpetrator of crime. The provision of social assistance is weakened by fiscal problems and a tendency to place migrants and victims of the armed conflict in competition for scarce state spending.

Such competition among marginalised groups is a strong indication that inequality remains the central problem in Colombia. Some concern was expressed that the peace process has eroded the national political consensus in Colombia while while – perhaps paradoxically – the international consensus over the need for the implementation of the peace deal in Colombia seems to have strengthened. The perception of erosion is likely due more to the reality that current governmental forms are exhausted and new challenges have emerged that require more inclusive representative and decision-making processes, a view strongly held by participants from Tumaco and La Guajira.

Conclusions and Implications

Encourage a shift away from the centralist idea of 'bringing the state to isolated regions'. These regions have their own attributes and structures that should be strengthened. This would empower agency, devolve responsibility to more local levels, and lessen the dynamic of constantly demanding of the central state.

Create and empower community-led spaces of dialogue with state entities, especially the armed forces. Civil society representatives considered this the best way to overcome mutually-held negative perceptions of state and its citizens: sometimes seen as 'oppressor' and 'guerrilla' respectively.

Strengthen and extend the commitment of the armed forces to defending, respecting, and protecting human rights through the provision of better knowledge of obligations, and mainstreaming this knowledge into strategic, tactical, and operational decisions.

Construct justice from the local level, with community-based conflict resolution measures based on restorative justice principles. The *Terminales de Justicia* in Arauca could be a model that is replicable in other regions – again it is vital to study the characteristics and dynamics that make them successful before widespread replication is attempted.

Enhance community involvement throughout development processes, including planning, implementation, and monitoring. This could be done by building on the expertise engendered by PDET planning processes that increased the confidence and capacity of marginalised communities to participate in decision-making. These acquired skills should be used to make more decisions at the local level where lived experiences are most felt.

Recognise and strengthen the role of the armed forces to judiciously use their technical skills and capacity, for example in infrastructure construction and maintenance. This would ensure more constructive integration of security and development policies (a major caveat is to scrupulously avoid 'securitisation' of development) and enable projects to be executed more economically by reducing private sector contracting.

Reduce transaction costs associated with development programmes and projects. Cut out intermediaries via direct contracting with JAC or other community organisations. Tibú in Norte de Santander is an example of this working, with 30% more of budgeted spending actually reaching the communities. Analysis is needed of these mechanisms, how much extra spending they enable, and the conditions necessary for their success.