

Territorial peacebuilding in Colombia: the opportunity to do what has not been achieved before?

By Silke Pfeiffer

■ Executive summary

In the context of the current negotiations to end the armed conflict between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, territorial peacebuilding has become the catchword for doing what has not been achieved in decades: developing Colombia's marginalised regions as a basis for building lasting peace. The national government is preparing for its rollout, albeit timidly. Throughout the country, and particularly in conflict-affected regions, the territorial peacebuilding discourse has inspired local agenda-building exercises, often driven by civil society. Compared to past attempts, territorial peacebuilding will likely thrive on important opportunities, most notably the contents of a possible peace agreement, the momentum that will probably accompany its implementation and the competencies acquired during decades of civil-society-driven peacebuilding in the country's regions. The fate of territorial peacebuilding will depend on the capacity to contain violent spoilers, increase protection and open up entrenched local power relations. Some of these actions may have to wait until a deal is signed in Havana. Building up broad-based coalitions at the national and regional levels in support of the necessary transformations, however, must not be postponed – particularly in light of the upcoming subnational elections in October 2015.

Introduction: Colombia and post-conflict reconstruction

While a number of countries affected by violent conflict have managed to end the fighting by way of negotiations, few have been able to create the conditions for lasting peace. This is not surprising, because the latter involves a series of transformations to uproot the conditions that fuelled the conflict.

Often the end of armed conflict offers unique opportunities to embark on transformations of this kind – a peace agreement usually generates a momentum that opens windows for reform. Security resources can be reallocated, and in the medium term the end of a conflict can allow resources to be moved from emergency responses to more structural interventions. The international community often stands ready to lend moral, technical and financial support to help the country in question succeed in a critical transition.

At the same time, the situation involves inherent risks. Sectors interested in maintaining the status quo will feel

threatened by a possible reconfiguration of power. Reforms will most likely be fiercely contested. Incoming resources will attract all kinds of interests, while enormous tasks such as the (re-)building of local economies, governance and justice systems will rest on a weak institutional basis, increasing the risks of corruption and a return to violence.

In this sense Colombia has critical times ahead, should the current peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) succeed in reaching an agreement. After more than two and a half years of negotiations and provisional agreements in the areas of rural development, political participation, solution of the drug problem and truth, the process has reached a difficult stretch. While negotiators in Havana struggle to come to terms with contentious agenda items, notably judicial accountability for serious crimes, spiraling violence following the suspension of a unilateral FARC ceasefire is straining support at home. Still, the chances that parties will reach an agreement are better than at any time in the history of half a century of armed conflict in Colombia. Clinching a deal

on the six-point agenda would therefore in itself be a historic achievement. The true challenge would, however, only then begin: building lasting peace in a country plagued by social and political exclusion, violence and mistrust.

To a large number of Colombians, however, the term “post-conflict reconstruction” will sound rather strange. People living in central cities like Bogotá or Medellín have reasons not to expect great changes to result from a peace agreement. The internal armed conflict in Colombia is waged in the country’s periphery. According to official figures, 60% of conflict-related armed actions are concentrated in Norte de Santander, Cauca, Antioquia, Nariño and Putumayo, Colombia’s border departments (DNP, 2014: 4). In these areas there is a correlation between armed action and low institutional performance, most notably reflected in high impunity levels. Therefore, in Colombia post-conflict reconstruction effectively means the reconstruction of the country’s rural periphery.

In this context the term “territorial peacebuilding” has emerged as a new mantra for what is to follow a possible peace agreement with the FARC. Branded as such by Colombia’s high commissioner for peace, Sergio Jaramillo, the concept is concurrent with some long-standing claims of communities in conflict-affected regions. It stands for (1) a focus on Colombia’s regions, understanding them as diverse spaces, not only in terms of geography, but also with regard to how they have evolved socially, economically and politically; (2) the desire to close the gaps between rural and urban Colombia, between integrated and marginalised parts of the country, and between centre and periphery; and (3) a participatory effort involving bottom-up development planning. The focus on Colombia’s rural periphery is no coincidence if one considers the agenda of the Havana negotiations. The implementation of a possible peace agreement in areas such as rural development or illicit crop substitution will directly affect Colombia’s countryside.

In principle, territorial peacebuilding is not a new agenda. Closing the gap between the rural and urban parts of the country has been a long-standing proposition in national politics, at least at the rhetorical level. According to the government the war has been one of the principal obstacles preventing the success of this endeavour. High Commissioner Jaramillo has stated that “the end of the conflict should provide the leverage to do what we have not been able to do in 50 years of war”.

This report is an initial attempt to analyse the chances of territorial peacebuilding succeeding in the context of the peace process with the FARC and the conditions needed for such success. After a brief discussion of past approaches, it focuses on how the various constituencies view territorial peacebuilding and are preparing for its implementation. It subsequently examines current opportunities presented

by and challenges facing the process, and then analyses prospects and makes recommendations.

Territorial peacebuilding and local politics in the past

In Colombia, structural change on the ground as an approach to conflict resolution has been a proclaimed government policy for decades. To mention just one example, the National Rehabilitation Plan, which was conceived under President Belisario Betancur (1986-90) and survived under three administrations, explicitly aimed to remedy the weak state presence in rural areas, which was recognised as one of the structural causes of the violence afflicting the country (López, 2013: 28; Pfeiffer, 2014: 14). However, most central government programmes suffered from the very governance problems they were trying to cure. Many of these problems were reinforced as unintended consequences of the decentralisation process (ICG, 2011: 2). Starting in the later 1980s, decentralisation had opened up local politics to wider competition and transferred significant fiscal and administrative competencies to the departmental and municipal levels. The increase of resources, however, did not only turn local governments into an attractive target for illegal armed groups, but the political opening also threatened traditional power holders. Low institutional capacities could not prevent the corruption and political violence resulting from this process.

So-called “parapolitics” (*parapolítica*), i.e. far-reaching coalitions between politicians and paramilitaries, is just one expression of local power structures that state-building programmes, however well intended, have not been able to alter over the last few decades. According to research by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in terms of the level of rotation or change of local elites in power, 92% of Colombian municipalities are categorised as “politically persistent”¹, i.e. the status quo has been largely maintained (UNDP, 2011: p.60). In over 20% there is no change at all. According to the UNDP findings, such political persistence correlates negatively with citizens’ well-being.

While central government programmes have generally only been marginally successful, the country draws on a wealth of peacebuilding experiences driven by civil society. Whether led by local social movements or women’s, peasants’, Afro-Colombian or indigenous organisations, many initiatives have set examples in pioneering alternative approaches to development and coexistence in areas affected by the armed conflict. Perhaps the most prominent reference for civil-society- and community-driven peacebuilding activities are the Development and Peace Programmes (PDPs). Led by grass-roots organisations and the church, they bring together various actors to develop regional agendas dealing with humanitarian protection,

¹ Political persistence is defined here as the degree of control that the elites exercise over the elections.

economic development and the strengthening of democratic governance. The first PDP started in 1995 in the Magdalena Medio region. Currently 23 PDPs cover close to 50% of Colombia's municipalities. Since 2002 programmes have been connected in the Development and Peace Programmes Network (Redprodepaz). Some PDPs have managed to integrate a significant number of institutions, including private and public entities, at the local, national and international levels.

However, with notable exceptions, civil society initiatives have also found it difficult to effectively access and influence local politics – despite the fact that Colombian law makes provision for participatory mechanisms at the local level. In practice, however, many of these mechanisms have operated separately from more or less closed political systems, and have lacked the necessary power, authority, and legitimacy to alter local political cultures and policy-making. Dialogue and crisis management discussions between activists and local authorities have tended to be ad hoc and improvised, often requiring national government to intervene, as the examples of local conflicts in the Catatumbo and Cauca regions have shown. In cases where agendas were developed collectively or conflicts resolved through dialogue, lack of implementation has been a frequent pattern complained of by communities.

Today the government sees civil society's experiences as a foundation for starting "something new" (Jaramillo, 2014: 5), while also recognising the weaknesses of past governmental approaches. Having himself led the implementation of the Democratic Security Consolidation Programme² for years, High Commissioner Jaramillo today blames the lack of systematic involvement and strengthening of local actors: "the centralist model according to which public officials land like Martians among the communities to 'bring the state' has failed" (Jaramillo, 2014: 5). In contrast, he calls for a "new alliance" among central government, subnational authorities and communities (Jaramillo, 2014: 5). For this purpose new institutions, notably "new spaces for participation, debate and peaceful democratic deliberations" (Jaramillo, 2013: 5), needed to be built, because reversing the effects of half a century of conflict could not be achieved "in the normal course of things" (Jaramillo, 2013: 4).

Progress in territorial peacebuilding

The government's ambitions related to territorial peacebuilding are high – at least at the rhetorical level. While the new mantra has set in motion preparatory work, notably an outreach campaign, prospects have also been constrained by limited political leeway (whether real or perceived). With notable exceptions, subnational authorities have shown little proactivity so far. As for local civil society and social movements, the proposal has generally lent new force to

the long-standing demand to be heard when it comes to shaping transformations on the ground.

National government

In preparing for territorial peacebuilding, the government has displayed a somewhat ambivalent approach. Progress has been made on several levels. Firstly, its actions have reflected an understanding that the task of mobilising a broad mass in support of reforms could not be postponed any longer. Community participation during the first phase of negotiations had been mainly organised through regional forums (*mesas*) that gathered proposals from organisations and social movements on the various agenda points. The narrow victory of President Santos in the 2014 presidential polls had then rung alarm bells. In the cities many people are wary of the price that will have to be paid to end a conflict that hardly affects their lives. In conflict-affected areas the peace process has suffered from legitimacy problems due to the ongoing warfare and the lack of voice many communities feel they have had so far in the negotiations.

Against this background the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace has embarked on an outreach campaign. Travelling across the country, Jaramillo and his team have been drumming up support for the peace process and communicating the provisional framework agreements between the government and the FARC to communities, business leaders, social leaders, governors and mayors. Workshops with local stakeholders are being used to learn about their grievances and take stock of local realities, priorities and agendas.

Secondly, the government has taken the first steps to establish the legal and institutional architecture for territorial peacebuilding in the context of the implementation of a possible peace agreement. In February 2014 it created the Office of the Minister-Counsellor on Post-conflict, Human Rights and Security (Post-conflict Ministry), located in the presidency. Retired National Police director Oscar Naranjo, also a member of the government delegation in Havana, was initially appointed to lead the agency. Together with the high commissioner for peace, the Post-conflict Ministry is to develop and oversee post-conflict-related policies and programmes (Presidente de la República, 2015).

Coordination between central government agencies and the national and territorial levels is to be provided by the newly established Inter-institutional Post-conflict Council. Chaired by the president through the post-conflict minister, the council is staffed by representatives of the Ministry of the Interior, the Finance Ministry, the Defence Ministry, the National Planning Department, the Department for Social Prosperity and other relevant offices within the presidency (Congreso de Colombia, 2014, art. 123).

² Launched by President Álvaro Uribe in 2007, the Democratic Security Consolidation Policy involves winning military control over territories, installing civilian governance and delivering public services.

Previously, and following the request of several civil society organisations, President Santos had convened the National Peace Council. Formally established under President Ernesto Samper in 1998 (Law 434), this institution comprises representatives from the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government; state oversight institutions; and civil society groups representing a broad range of sectors. It advises the government on its peace policy. Related councils at the departmental and municipal levels are to be convened by the respective local authorities. On paper, the councils seem to be ideally designed and situated to become the kind of spaces for dialogue, agenda building and conflict management necessary to accompany territorial peacebuilding at the various administrative levels. In the past, however, they have either been not convened or under-utilised by the various presidential administrations. Whether the National Peace Council will play a central role in a new peace infrastructure is uncertain. The proposed new National Development Plan (2014-2018) calls for the strengthening of departmental and municipal councils. Sergio Jaramillo's Office says it is currently looking at ways to redesign the model to make it more effective.

Thirdly, staff at the Post-conflict Ministry and the High Commissioner for Peace's Office are busy with diagnostics, research and initial planning for territorial peacebuilding. International experiences of participatory planning and decision-making processes such those of Brazil and India are being studied; "rapid-response plans" are in the making; and, supported by international organisations such as the UN and national think tanks, data are collected facilitate prioritization of municipalities once implementation kicks off. According to a UN-produced "Territorial Peacebuilding Index", 125 (out of 1,123) municipalities fall into the category of high and medium-to-high priority (Oficina del Coordinador Residente, 2014). A study produced by the Peace and Reconciliation Foundation singles out 281 municipalities for priority post-conflict action. Of them, 87 are rated as extremely vulnerable to relapse into violence (Fundación Paz y Reconciliación, 2015: 61).

While making progress on these levels, the government has seemingly felt constrained by several factors. The fact that there is political opposition to the peace talks has prevented it from moving forward too quickly and boldly, thereby entering troubled waters without counting on the legitimacy of a broadly ratified agreement. In addition, the rules created for the negotiations with the FARC state that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed (Colombia & FARC-EP, 2012: VI.10). The government would therefore not only run into problems with the FARC if it created too many facts on the ground in terms of implementation, but might also lose leverage vis-à-vis the guerrilla movement. Finally, the FARC will insist on some degree of shared responsibility in overseeing the implementation of a peace agreement. Any institutional post-conflict infrastructure that is created before a deal is reached can therefore only be of a provisional nature.

While these circumstances surely require cautious navigation, the government's approach to preparing for territorial peacebuilding has also been interpreted as lacking in political courage as well as in cohesion behind the proposition. Clearly, a number of vital questions regarding responsibilities, implementation structures and processes, and the contents of the proposed reforms have remained open and unanswered. Beyond the high commissioner for peace, high-level government officials are hardly seen marketing the territorial peace-building concept. And, the resignation of post-conflict minister Naranjo only four months after taking office is attributed to the fact that beyond auguring a big and important mission his agency did not become operational for lack of budget and staff.

The National Development Plan 2014-2018 that the government submitted to Congress for discussion and ratification has also been a reflection of this ambivalence (DNP, 2014). Ambitious in terms of its goals as laid out in a framework document, it hardly provides for the kind of transformation that the government has called for in terms of investment decisions. Notably, the plan was drafted based on consultations carried out at the departmental level, a process that contrasts with previous exercises.

Regional agendas

On the ground – and particularly in conflict-affected zones – the territorial peacebuilding discourse echoes a long-standing call for inclusion and has unleashed local agenda-building exercises in a number of regions. In a context of little guidance from national government, the territorial peace concept has lent itself to becoming a projection surface for local actors and rather unconnected efforts. As for the authorities, their level of proactivity tends to be influenced by their ambitions to shape developments beyond the upcoming subnational elections in October 2015, which prevent sitting office holders from standing for re-election. In general, rather than collective action, the territorial peacebuilding agenda seems to have triggered an impulse to position the respective departments for post-conflict resource allocation.

Under the slogan "Let's Prepare for Peace" ("*preparémosnos para la paz*"), the Antioquia governor's office has been putting together a development plan with a peacebuilding focus. Ranging from reintegration and reconciliation activities to economic development, the plan establishes investment parameters for the post-conflict period. This agenda-building exercise is currently being replicated in some pilot municipalities. While efforts in Antioquia have been led by the governor's office, the "Regional Agenda for Peace" in Nariño ("*agenda regional de paz*") has emerged from an alliance among the departmental government, UNDP, the church and the departmental development agency ADEL, which is itself a collective body. The draft agenda is now going through a formal consultation process. In Cauca, several initiatives have reportedly emerged at the municipal level, supported by the departmental government. Cauca is the only department that has formally constituted

a Departmental Peace Council beyond several Municipal Peace Councils.

After many activists in the regions had resented the idea of the FARC and the government negotiating on the fate of these regions behind closed doors, the territorial peace discourse has been a breath of fresh air for existing peace initiatives and has mobilised new efforts and expectations. Across the country, civil society organisations and networks, social movements, and grass-roots organisations have initiated awareness-raising and agenda-building exercises. As one example, Redprodepaz and three partners organised a total of 12 regional gatherings, most of them in remote conflict-affected areas, designed to familiarise people with the peace process and identify local grievances and peace agendas (“*agendas territoriales de paz*”). All these gatherings were attended by either High Commissioner Jaramillo himself or one of his advisers.

Opportunities

In the wider context, at least six factors could help territorial peacebuilding to thrive after a peace deal with the FARC is reached:

1. *Momentum.* The prospect of ending five decades of bloodshed through a political settlement not only attracts almost unanimous international support, but should generate an internal momentum to sustain territorial peace reform efforts. Despite the risks related to popular ratification of the accords, the fact that both conflict parties have committed to letting the Colombian people decide on a final deal should bolster the authority and legitimacy of resulting reforms. In this sense, the upcoming October elections constitute an important opportunity to broaden the constituency for territorial peacebuilding and align future subnational authorities.
2. *Leveraging experience.* As mentioned above, local and regional peacebuilding work does not start from scratch. Whether they are termed development and peace programmes, peace communities, humanitarian zones or territories of non-violence, the experiences of hundreds of diverse initiatives can be leveraged for the various post-conflict processes. They have empowered groups to know and defend their rights and articulate themselves vis-à-vis policymakers. Locals have learnt to negotiate with armed actors to defend their neutral ground and demand humanitarian relief. Some have managed to open up political systems by claiming and exercising participation, while others have pursued and created new development opportunities for their territories. The social leadership that has emerged from these experiences, together with the methods and tools that have been developed, all constitute assets for territorial peacebuilding.
3. *Reducing conflict related violence.* A potential bilateral ceasefire, the laying down of weapons and the gradual demobilisation of the guerrillas should reduce one source of violence in regions where the FARC is present. This should bring humanitarian relief on the ground by reducing civilian casualties, forced recruitment, confinement and displacement. A peace agreement would in principle also eliminate – at least nominally – violence as a primary way of enforcing political or economic interests. This could empower democratic political spaces as arenas for contesting reforms. Finally, ending the armed conflict with FARC should also help to disentangle the mix of military – in the sense of counter-insurgency – and civilian agendas that has undermined the success of previous state efforts such as the Consolidation Programme in areas under guerrilla influence.
4. *The peace agenda as catalyser.* Another opportunity lies in the contents of a potential deal between the government and the FARC. The provisional framework agreements in the areas of rural development, political participation and a solution to the drug problem should, if implemented, help to address the structural problems that have marginalised Colombia’s periphery. Endowed with the authority of a national peace agreement, the deal could become a catalyst for additional, locally driven transformative processes. If complemented by a comprehensive, coherent, and implementable transitional justice and reintegration package, the peace agreement could indeed become the foundation for peacebuilding and reconciliation in the regions.
6. *The FARC’s interests.* One of the actors with a powerful interest in ensuring that the peace agreement does not just remain on paper will be the FARC. The guerrilla movement’s legacy will depend on whether the armed struggle has effectively brought about the transformations that the organisation has claimed it is fighting for. To achieve this the guerrillas will insist on some sort of shared control over the implementation of the agreement. The FARC’s prospects for political power are limited, given its likely marginal electoral success post-demobilisation, while the October polls are too close for the guerrillas to compete in them. The FARC will therefore likely demand implementation guarantees at the Havana table. Such guarantees, whether they consist of a solid monitoring formula with international participation or other mechanisms, should help to escort local changes.
7. *Destigmatisation.* The FARC’s possible transition into a civilian actor could also have a positive impact on the political landscape. Having been an easy prey for stigmatisation for a presumed closeness to the guerrilla movement, left-leaning social movements should find themselves with more political space to act. In areas where the other major guerrilla movement, the National Liberation Army (ELN), is present, this would depend on whether it follows the FARC’s path into

civilian life. The provisions in the agreement on political participation should also ease the movements' entrance into politics. A possible redistribution of political power at the local level could then help to remove some of the stumbling blocks that have impeded transformation in the past.

Challenges and recommendations

Will these factors suffice to achieve what could not be done thus far? A number of hurdles need to be overcome.

1. Territorial peacebuilding will need to occur in areas where mistrust between communities and state authorities is deep-seated. Particularly in the country's abandoned periphery, communities have suffered the consequences of a state presence that has been at best intermittent, at worst an accomplice of illegal armed groups. In many areas state presence has been primarily embodied by the security forces. The fact that these forces have often undertaken civilian tasks beyond the fighting has placed communities in the cross-fire. Lack of trust between local populations and the military has also been compounded by human rights violations.

In many regions communities have grown accustomed to attending workshops and gatherings constituted by national or subnational government representatives only to see the implementation of their input frustrated by inaction, corruption or lack of political will. Beyond that, mistrust has been nurtured by national economic policies – e.g. in the areas of the extractive industries or agro-industrial development – that communities denounce as having been pursued without proper consultation or against their will, resulting in conflicts over land use and environmental damage. As a consequence, the governmental discourse on territorial peacebuilding has not only raised expectations, but has also been met by a great deal of skepticism and cynicism on the ground.

Recommendations

- In this context, territorial peacebuilding will need to become a confidence-building exercise. On the one hand, this will require the government to carefully manage expectations. On the other, the government will need to sequence and prioritise the implementation of the potential peace accord so that it produces tangible results for the populations in conflict-affected areas. The announcement by the government and the FARC to embark on a joint demining effort is an important step because it demonstrates both parties' interest in improving communities' conditions.
- Local ownership will further depend on whether communities feel they have a say in shaping the development of their regions and whether they perceive coherence and transparency in government discourse and policies. In this context, the government's decision

to put effective participation mechanisms in place that reflect and respond to the diversity of local conditions is appropriate. In fact, the provisional framework agreements between the government and the FARC provide for a number of new participatory bodies. The focus will, however, also need to be placed on understanding why previous institutional arrangements have not worked, how to build capacities and establish effective incentive structures to overcome past shortcomings and how to leverage existing institutional capital. Beyond being driven by committed political and social leaders, territorial peacebuilding will only succeed over time if it is sustained by an institutional architecture that matches existing capacities, effectively connects efforts on different levels and is based on the necessary mandate and authority to operate.

2. While the FARC is an important source of violence in the country, it is by far not the only one. Other illegal armed groups abound, partly related to the imperfect demobilisation of the right-wing paramilitaries. Particularly in regions with flourishing illicit economies, the presence of these groups could undermine the implementation of reforms and threaten the consolidation of a peaceful order. If attempts to open negotiations with the ELN continue to fail and there is no ceasefire, the ELN could join other groups in filling the space left by an eventual FARC demobilisation, together with FARC groups who do not obey an order to demobilise.

Some illegal armed groups will likely enforce other, broader interests that will find themselves threatened by a possible peace accord. The rising numbers of murders of and threats against human rights and land restitution activists since the start of the negotiations with the FARC are tragic proof of the continuing political violence and the lack of state capacity to provide effective protection. The open or tacit opposition to the peace talks of some powerful economic and/or political regional actors casts a long shadow over the prospects for territorial peacebuilding.

Recommendation

- In this context it is vital to increase efforts to prevent and categorically sanction political violence. Providing for effective security will require adjustments to the nature and functions of the security forces and the strengthening of governance, notably judicial institutions. None of this is likely to be achieved in the short term. While working towards these goals and in order not to further undermine confidence, government and international action will be needed to immediately increase protection efforts and guarantee effective humanitarian assistance, focusing particularly on the most vulnerable regions and groups.
3. The opposition to the talks and to a reform agenda that is likely to emanate from them is also a reminder of the fact that contrary to what the official discourse some-

times suggests, territorial peacebuilding is bound to be conflictive. To be successful it will need to entail a redistribution of resources and power. In this sense the upcoming elections represent both an opportunity and a major risk as future local authorities will play a vital role in making or breaking the post-conflict. News of party headquarters in Bogotá ready to endorse local candidates linked to politicians with suspected or proven ties to armed actors do not bode well for the prospect of change on the ground. Breaking up the “political persistence” at the local level that has impeded transformation in the past is, however, not going to be easy – if possible at all – given what is at stake. President Santos is not exempt from accusations of having built his political power on clientelistic relations with local politicians. Whether he will give priority to clean records rather than loyalty in the context of the upcoming election campaign is at least questionable in light of his need to contain the influence that his main opponent, Álvaro Uribe, still enjoys in many regions.

Recommendations

- Preparing the ground for territorial peacebuilding therefore implies building up the broadest possible constituency for reform, a task that cannot be left exclusively to the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace or civil society networks. Local authorities need to be aligned, private sector representatives be convinced and opposition politicians come on board. In this context the creation of a National Peace Advisory Commission in March 2015 consisting of influential individuals of different political colours, some of whom are outspoken critics of the peace process, is a positive step. But also on the ground regional agendas will only be able to survive the renewal of subnational authorities if they are based on the support of a broad range of sectors. Territorial peacebuilding will require strong social and political leadership in the regions to lobby for reform, facilitate dialogue and mediate conflicts.
 - Given the pressure of the upcoming October elections, working towards a pact for a fair and clean competition, on the one hand, and an informed and free vote, on the other, constitutes a higher priority than ever. Efforts will need to range from voter education to strictly enforcing campaign finance rules and acting against electoral crimes. Comprehensive monitoring will be key.
 - In the long run the success of territorial peacebuilding will depend on the determination and capacity of key actors to proceed against inefficiencies, corruption, clientelism and impunity in local politics.
4. Finally, the government seems to be carefully avoiding one key topic: how to finance territorial peacebuilding. While different entities, among them the Congressional Peace Commission and the economic think tank Fedesarrollo, have been generating estimates of possible costs, the government has been largely silent

as to where the money will come from. There are good reasons for not putting an exact figure on the potential costs of the post-conflict period as long as the peace accord is still in the making. Yet the government seems to be avoiding the discussion for fear of scaring off a sector whose purse it will likely need to dip into.

Recommendation

- Because it is among the fastest growing countries in Latin America, Colombia cannot expect the international community to pour financial resources into post-conflict arrangements. In light of this the government will need to open a discussion on tax reforms, suggest ways to stop tax evasion, question its exemption policy, etc. – all delicate topics when dealing with a constituency that is largely unenthusiastic about the peace process.

Conclusion

As the government and the FARC move closer to a political settlement, they not only have the historic opportunity to end half a century of armed conflict and bloodshed. A peace deal could also open the way to attending to a long-standing demand of communities in conflict-affected regions that is also an imperative for building lasting peace: investment in Colombia’s abandoned periphery based on each region’s needs and in cooperation with local actors. Compared to past approaches, this time territorial peacebuilding could benefit from a number of favourable conditions. A peace deal will likely unleash a momentum for reform; its contents have the potential to leverage transformations in Colombia’s countryside; and its signatories, notably the FARC, will have a strong interest in establishing the necessary mechanisms to guarantee enforcement. New political space for social movements could alter entrenched local power relations and bring to bear the competencies acquired during decades of civil-society-driven peacebuilding in conflict-affected regions. Simultaneously, however, the widespread skepticism vis-à-vis the official territorial peacebuilding mantra is not unfounded. Communities have reason to believe that a peace agreement will not stop the violence, because other illegal armed groups will fill the space left by the FARC’s demobilisation, while regional power groups will fiercely contest reforms. If the government wants to see its ambitions become reality, territorial peacebuilding efforts will in the short run need to produce tangible results for communities in conflict-affected regions both in terms of security and development opportunities. Success in the long run is linked to the possibility of altering local power structures. Intelligent institutional arrangements that open up political decision-making and effectively connect local and national processes are as instrumental in this context as the systematic sanctioning of corrupt behaviour. The October regional elections will do nothing less than lay some important foundations for territorial peacebuilding. Only a few months remain to build up the broadest possible constituency for peace and reform in Colombia.

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