How International NGOs work with Internally Displaced Persons

- A Minor Field Study of the Colombian Case

Amra Levnjak

Abstract

Ever since its independence from Panamá, Colombia has suffered internal conflicts. This has posed a threat to the country's stability and has produced much internal displacement in the country. After Sudan, Colombia has the largest amount of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the world.

There are many NGOs active in Colombia that work to attend this crisis and in comparison to other countries with severe internal-displacement problems; Colombia has the most advanced system to attend it. In spite of this seemingly beneficial situation, the IDPs belong to the poorest of Colombian society and to this day hundreds of thousands of people get displaced every year.

The aim of this thesis was to investigate the work of International NGOs active in Colombia in this area, through a theoretical perspective that views NGOs as gap-fillers to weak governments, and to look at their relationship to the Colombian government - this in order to explain the contradictions that exist in the Colombian case regarding attention to the IDP.

Given the perspectives brought up in the theoretical approach, this thesis concludes that the two main difficulties of the INGOs are the strained relationship with the Colombian government and the lack of inter-INGO cooperation.

Key words: Internal Displacement, Civil Society, International NGO, Field Study, Colombia

Table of contents

1 Organizations Interviewed

- Solidaridad Internacional
- CRS (Catholic Relief Service)
- Caritas
- Red Cross
- Project Counseling Service
- Two World Foundation
- NRC (Norwegian Refugee Council)
- Doctors without Borders
- Tierra de Hombres, Switzerland
- Diakonie, Germany
- Acción Social (government organization)
- Las UAO (Government Organization)
- Mesa Nacional de Desplazados (Organization of Displaced)
- Coordinación Nacional de Desplazados (Organization of Displaced)
- UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)

2 Introduction

2.1 Colombia and Internal Displacement

More and more armed conflicts now take place within countries´ borders. As a consequence, tens of millions of people have been forced to internal migration worldwide. The increasing number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) points to the individual states´ inability to protect its citizens from this insult.

With 41 years of continuous activity the civil war in Colombia is the oldest of the currently ongoing civil wars that is being fought. It causes the death of thousands of people every year and has claimed 40.000 lives in the past decade alone (www.pcr.uu.se). Besides the insurgency and the casualties, the civil war is one of the main causes of the severe problem with internal displacement that the country suffers. After Sudan, Colombia has the largest quantity of internally displaced persons in the world – over three million in total. And even though violence has decreased in many parts of the country, 200 000 people are still forced to leave their homes annually (www.internal-displacement.org). They're denied some of their basic rights, and put in a vulnerable situation with many of the IDPs living in extreme poverty (Sida, 2007).

The degraded nature of Colombia's armed conflict and the strategies to control territories and their populations on the part of different combatants weaken the Colombian government which is unable to resolve the problem of internal displacement on its own (Escobar, 2000).

2.2 Purpose and Questions

The problem of internal displacement is obviously a humanitarian tragedy for the IDPs but also for Colombian society.

My aim in this thesis is to focus on and analyze the work of international NGOs in this area and their relationship to the government. I want to identify the difficulties that they encounter in their work, with the hope of explaining the contradictions between theory and practice that exist in the Colombian case, and clarify why the IDPs in Colombia aren't receiving adequate attention.

In order to achieve the stated purpose the following four questions will be answered:

1. *Is there consensus between the INGOs and the government on the functions that international NGOs in Colombia should have regarding the work with Internally Displaced Persons?*
2. *In what way do the international NGOs improve the living conditions of the IDPs?*
3. *Who do the international NGOs cooperate with?*
4. *What influence do the international NGOs have on the Colombian government in the area of internal displacement?*

2.3 Definitions

2.3.1 Internally Displaced Person

The definition of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) will in this thesis be the same as the United Nations´, which defines IDPs as "Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border" (Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement).

2.3.2 International Non-Government Organization

In this thesis a simple definition will be used that describes INGOs as "independent voluntary associations of people acting together on a continuous basis and for a common purpose, other than achieving government office, making money or being involved in illegal activities". The international aspect will in this thesis mean that the INGOs not be Colombian and have actions outside Colombia as well (NGO Benchmarking).

2.4 Disposition

This thesis is divided into six parts or chapters including this first introductory one that contains purpose and questions that will be answered. In the second chapter the method chosen is presented and motivated. The third part consists of the theoretical perspective which in this thesis regards Civil Society and NGOs. It is followed by a background chapter on Colombia and Internal Displacement and explains the earlier mentioned layers of contradictions in Colombia. And the sixth and final part contains a summary with short answers to the questions along with final concluding thoughts about the work of INGOs and internal displacement in Colombia.

3   Methodology

The gathering of empirical material for this thesis was done in Bogotá, Colombia as a Minor Field Study.

3.1   Case Study as a Strategy

It has become very common to use case studies in research of society, especially in small scale investigations. What distinguishes case studies from other strategies (such as survey research for instance) is its emphasis on only one research unit as opposed to a wide spectrum. The goal is to shed light on the general by looking at the particular (Denscombe 2000 p. 41).

Strength of the case study is that it not only allows but encourages the researcher to use different sources and methods in the research. Hence, the decision to conduct a case study is a strategic decision and it doesn't decide what methods are to be used (Ibid. p 42-43).

3.2   Field Investigation as a Method

With this thesis interest lies in discovering possible patterns, incidence or no-incidence of certain qualities and problems in the work of the chosen population (international NGOs) and not how common determined qualities are. This makes a qualitative study fruitful to use (Trost 2005 p. 7). The Minor Field Study calls for a field investigation which is an investigation that is carried out through direct observation and interviews of different kinds (Esaiasson *et al*. 2004 p. 333-334). Given the limited timeframe and the need for controllable sources of this field study, interviews were the main method for material collection and direct observations were only used as a complement when possible.

3.3   In-depth Interviews

Having decided that empirical material will consist of interviews the following choice stands between survey investigations and in depth-interviews (*Ibid*. p. 258). In-depth interviewing means that an interactive conversation takes place

between the interviewer and the interviewees. In a survey investigation, however, the answers are standardized and the interviewees choose amongst determined answer alternatives. When conducting in depth interviewing the interviewees are chosen strategically and not by random choice like in survey investigation. Also, in depth interviews allow short, simple questions and qualitative, deep, answers – and were perceived as the most suitable for the purpose of this thesis (*Ibid*. p. 253-257).

A total of 15 in-depth interviews were conducted during this field study, from April 21st to June 20th of 2009. The base is the 10 interviews conducted with international NGOs as defined in part 1.4.2. Also, two interviews were conducted with two government agencies that work with IDPs. This because the government-NGO relationship is important given my theoretical positioning. Also two interviews were conducted with two large organizations of Internally Displaced Persons to see how they perceive this aid aimed at them. An interview with the UNHCR was also conducted. The main reason for why it is given relatively much space in this thesis is because UNHCR is perceived by the other actors as very important and as a channel through which the INGOs can generate influence on the Colombian government.

3.4   Choice of Interviewees

The main method for choosing the interviewees was so called snow ball selection (Dahmström 2005 p. 237). Before heading off to Colombia some INGOs were found and contact was established with NRC, the Red Cross and the UNHCR. After starting the interviews, contacts to other relevant groups were simply asked for. This may not have been the most methodical way since the first organizations more or less chose which other were to be interviewed. However, given the limited timeframe and resources for this thesis it was perceived as the most appropriate one. As for the government-side I wished for interviews with more parties but had to settle with these two. Establishing contact with the government-side was more difficult than I first thought.

The field study was conducted in Bogotá, the capital of Colombia and also the largest recipient of IDPs.

4   Theoretical Approach

4.1   Civil Society

The term civil society has a long history but in spite of that, and in spite of the fact that its present meanings are based on history it is now used in different ways (Kaldor 2003 p. 11). New with the term civil society after 1989 is the global aspect. There is no longer enough room for all of civil society within each states´ borders. Kaldor (2003) claims that this was the case before the cold war due to the then-existing idea of the traditional, centralized war-waging state (*Ibid)*. This idea, she further claims, has however been undermined with increasing global cooperation. Her definition of civil society is that it's a medium through which several social contracts between people are negotiated and reproduced. She also means that this definition is compatible with the one of Ernest Gellner which states that civil society is the collection of various non-government institutions that carry great weight in relation to the state and that prevent it from dominating the rest of the society (*Ibid.* p.67).

   A strong civil society is thought to be a prerequisite for good governance, as well as an indicator for it. It is seen as a provider of a sphere where society interacts constructively with the state, not to subvert and destroy it, but to improve its actions and its efficiency (Muriisa 2003).

4.2   NGOs

Civil society is a multifaceted phenomenon, for it includes activities - and actors - of a highly varied sort. One of which are NGOs (Kaldor 2003 p.117). The concept of NGOs isn't a new one. International NGOs were established in the 19th century already, with the International Red Cross probably being the most well-known example (*Ibid.*).

   NGOs have come to be a force in many societies or are so perceived. They possess some attributes that make them quite important actors within civil society. According to John Clark (1993) this is the case for three main reasons: First because of their scale; they contribute quite a lot of money to development assistance. Second, because of their style of work; many NGOs have demonstrated an ability to reach poor people, work in inaccessible areas, innovate, or in other ways achieve things which are difficult for official agencies. Third; many of them represent poorer people. Many NGOs have close links with poor

communities. Informed by the needs of their target population, they often mobilize, articulate and represent these peoples´ interests at different levels of political governance and have them participate in the decision making that affects them (van Tuijl and Jordan 1999).

Qualities that are generally ascribed to NGOs are that they work as complements to failed and weak governments. NGOs have received much attention and the reason for that is they are perceived to be able to do something that national governments cannot or will not do (Maslyukivska 1999). Clark (1993) claims that donors for instance find NGOs attractive because NGOs act as a complement to the state, they respond to failures in both the public and private sectors.

4.3   Relationship to the Government

From a normative point of view, according to Hadenius and Uggla a role that civil society and NGOs should play is to guarantee pluralism in the society. For them to do so two conditions are essential: the organizations should be autonomous from the state, and they should seek to influence state policy as well (Hadenius and Uggla 1996). A healthy, mutually beneficial relationship between NGOs and the government is desired. This is something that only can take place when both parties share common objectives (Maslyukivska 1999). In the Colombian case, given the governments´ seemingly big efforts to address the internal displacement-problem, this should mean that there is a genuine partnership between the INGOs in Colombia that work with IDPs and the government, to work on the issue.

Since NGOs are to complement the government, and not replace it, they must inform themselves as to the legal and political environment of government actions. Government on its part must be aware of the needs and activities of NGOs as these have significant influence on overall service patterns and often try to influence government policy as well (Coston 1998).

4.4   Cooperation

As far as cooperation among NGOs is concerned I am parting from the principle "the greater the number, the greater the impact". With few exceptions NGOs are small in terms of impact. By themselves, they are not likely to make much of a difference (Moore *et al.* 2003, Holmén 2002). Organizations form small parts of civil society and it is only when joined together that they become a force for political and social development (Hadenius and Uggla 1996). From this point of view, networking and alliance-building amongst NGOs is crucial if organizations wish to enhance their impact and generate influence on decision makers and

development agencies. Coordination of NGOs has been viewed as important to optimize the flow of resources among agencies and increase the accountability, efficiency and impact of aid operations (Moore *et al.* 2003, Holmén 2002).

Scholars, however, claim that cooperation and coordination among NGOs in general is deficient for whatever the reason(s) – be it the large number of NGOs or their fierce competition for funds etc. – and constitutes a systemic problem within this part of the non-government establishment (*Ibid.)*.

5   Background

5.1   Colombian History

Throughout much of its modern history Colombia has suffered from internal conflicts. The historical antagonism has been between the conservatives and the liberals. After WW II this antagonism escalated and what has been known as La Violencia (the Violence), an outright war, broke out in 1948 and ended up causing the death of 300 000 people. This ended with the so called Frente Nacional (National Front) in 1958, which was an agreement meaning that conservatives and liberals took turns in governing (Landguiden, 2009).

This created tranquility on the surface but excluded people from political influence and didn't take care of the escalating social inequity that the country also suffered. The fact that the political left didn't have representation in the political sphere led to the creation of leftist guerrilla groups. Frente Nacional ended in 1986, but by that time paramilitary groups were created as a counterweight to the leftist guerrillas and the foundation was set for a new kind of – and still ongoing – internal conflict (*Ibid.*).

During this epoch drug trade had also seriously taken off in Colombia and the drug cartels gained large political influence by bribing politicians, lawyers and journalists. Today drug trade still is described as a threat to the country's stability to an extent, but it has somewhat different characteristics: from being in the hands of few big cartels it is now spread in many smaller, less visible cartels. In the 1990s drug trade and the guerrilla war grew together with both guerrilla- and paramilitary groups dedicating themselves at cultivating coca (*Ibid.*).

In the late 1980s the government succeeded in making peace with a few guerrilla groups which demobilized and formed political parties. These peace processes opened the way for democratic processes and a new constitution was adopted in 1991. For the first time, Colombia auto defined itself as a state ruled by law. With doing so, the state was to dedicate itself to guaranteeing the rights of the inhabitants (UNHCR).

The Colombian president Alvaro Uribe, when elected, introduced a strategy to resolve the crisis. This so called democratic security policy (DSP) of his was initiated in 2003 as a strategy to combat the insurgents. The idea was to gain territory by increasing the numbers and capacity of troops and police and deploying them across the country to challenge the guerillas. This was accompanied by eradication of illicit crops aimed at reducing coca production. The DSP also introduced an informal security structure involving more than a million civilian collaborators and informants who are to generate information to the government about the insurgents (International Crisis Group).

The INGOs claim that soldiers also are involved in many parts of the governments´ humanitarian work, and that the main government presence in many parts of the country is constituted by militaries (Solidaridad Internacional, UNHCR).

Although security has improved in Colombia since 2003, the INGOs claim that the DSP with the collaborators and informants and only military presence in many parts of the country creates much mistrust in communities and doesn't allow civil spheres. All actors in the conflict have a "either with us or against us"-approach and the civilians are more or less forced to take part in the conflict (Caritas).

Another deficiency of the DSP is the lack of coherent development policy in rural areas of Colombia (International Crisis Group 2003, www.womenscommission.org).

5.2   Internal Displacement

While focusing on the guerrillas and drug trade, a humanitarian disaster was being created in Colombian society. Due to the different clashes in the rural areas, hundreds of thousands of people had to flee their homes every year. These so called Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) usually ended up in the slums of larger cities with no one attending to their needs. By the mid 1990s the problem was too big to ignore and in 1997 the so called law 387 was passed. With it the responsibilities of the Colombian government regarding internal displacement were defined. Measures were according to this law to be taken in order to first of all prevent displacement and if, despite these measures, displacement still was to occur the state had to attend, protect and finally socioeconomically stabilize the IDP (Red de Solidaridad Social 1999). This effort has gained international attention, however, the institution appointed as responsible for the coordination of the attention to the displaced, Acción Social, has as its primary function the humanitarian aid, not other durable solutions. Hence the whole policy towards the IDPs is described as primarily assistance oriented. A very small part of the national budget goes to the prevention of displacement, and the country lacks adequate policy regarding land distribution (Acción Social, UNHCR).

In 1997 was also when UNHCR started accessorizing the government institutions, such as the ombudsman office and something called the produraduría[1] (UNHCR).

The way in which the system of attention to the internally displaced operated wasn't consistent with the principle of guaranteeing of rights, and the Colombian constitutional court systematically received legal remedies from IDPs claiming they weren't receiving what they had legal right to. In 2004 the constitutional

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[1] The producaduria is nearest equivalent to some type of organ dedicated at making sure that government officials do their job in a satisfying way.

court, in the t-025 sentence, declared the phenomenon displacement unconstitutional. In 2005 Colombia was condemned as responsible for the internal displacement that was taking place in the country by the Inter-American court, and the Colombian congress has also recognized internal displacement as a crime against humanity (Dalto, 2009). But in spite of the increasing budget aimed at attending internal displacement, the orders of the law 387 aren't being fulfilled and the status of the attention remains unconstitutional (Acción Social).

5.3   UNHCR Involvement

In comparison to other countries with severe internal displacement problems (Sudan, Congo, Sri Lanka etc.), Colombia has the most complete system to attend this population (UNHCR).

UNHCR came with a mission to accessorize the government in order to develop response mechanisms such as improvement of the law 387 and the national registry for the displaced. Before this there wasn't any statistics on the magnitude of the problem – something that made it difficult to design appropriate policy (*Ibid.*).

When the policy regarding the internal displacement was declared unconstitutional, things changed. The largest intervention of the international community took place within the framework of this national activity. From 2003 The UNHCR started strengthening its role as the aide of the constitutional court. In practice this means to finance and accessorize functionaries that generate information to the court. And in the parts of the country where the ombudsman office isn't present the UNHCR and international cooperation finance communitarian ombudsmen who monitor the legal situation in these places (*Ibid*).

The UNHCR is trying to improve state presence and works at taking the civil institutions of the government – as opposed to military – to places at risk. This is seen as vital because according to the UNHCR

> *"even if assuming that there was no corruption within the military force and that it [the force] wasn't collaborating with any illegal military groups – securing military presence doesn't necessarily avoid people getting threatened [and displaced], because the function of the soldiers isn't to control law and order but to secure a perimeter, a territory. This is an explanation as to why displacement occurs even in areas with large military presence [...] the military isn't protecting the civilians (Ibid.)."*

The idea is to bring national institutions closer to the people, to improve the response to this crisis. Various programs and projects are being implemented to achieve this. However in sum, the response is according to the UNHCR not functioning well. "If it were, we wouldn't be having a yearly displacement rate of 250 000 people, with 97 percent of them living in poverty conditions – when poverty rate for the same population before displacement occurs is 50 percent, the national rate" (UNHCR).

6 How the INGOs Work

6.1 INGOs as Gap-fillers

Different INGOs active in Bogotá normally specialize in providing different necessities. Their resources often come from international cooperation and their projects have to look after many interests (NRC). The primary task of Doctors without Borders, for instance, is to provide medical attention to the Colombian population, while the Red Cross offers three, as they call them, *helps* which are vouchers that the receivers can buy groceries for (Red Cross, Doctors without Borders). As indicated earlier, however, the aim in this thesis is to identify patterns and similarities and not differences in the work of the NGOs, with hopes of being able to draw general conclusions.

The dynamics of the Colombian conflict along with the government's military strategy are described as the causes for which the government lacks presence in many parts of the country. On a normative level, with the advanced legislation, Colombia fulfils every need of the IDP. However, given the lack of state presence in many rural parts of the country the implementation of this modern legislation is deficient (Solidaridad Internacional). It is in this area where the International NGOs interviewed enter. They are unified by international humanitarian law and the t-025 sentence of 2004. From the interviews conducted two major lines of actions have been identified: the first, *humanitarian aid,* satisfies the short-run needs of the IDPs and the second, *access to rights*, is a long-run strategy that the INGOs have (Caritas).

6.1.1 Humanitarian Aid

This area is directed towards short term assistance such as the handing over of different types of kits (containing hygiene or cooking articles, blankets etc.) to the people right after a displacement takes place; or provision of healthcare, shelter and psychological aid. This area isn't generally a priority of the International NGOs interviewed, with the exception of Doctors without Borders and the Red Cross (Consejería en Proyectos, Red Cross, NRC, Doctors without Borders). Caritas state that they believe in the role of assistance only in the sense that "an immediate response has to be given. There are children that are dying of hunger" and this has to be taken care of. When humanitarian-aid projects are executed, the INGOs make sure to never take over the government's actions. They always ensure themselves that everything they do hasn't been done by the government organizations (Solidaridad Internacional, Diakonie).

Due to the explicit un-prioritized nature of humanitarian aid in the work of INGOs further attention will not be given to this line of action.

6.1.2   Access to Rights

The distinctiveness of Colombia, with the existence of very advanced legislation and yet poor response on behalf of the authorities, allow for the INGOs to work with similar issues. As has been described Colombia has everything needed to attend the displaced population in a more adequate way (Consejería en Proyectos, Solidaridad Internacional, NRC, Doctors without Borders). The laws are designed, the economic means exist and the institutions are there. The INGOs however describe the government approach as very, if not only, oriented towards assistance. The government provides economic subsidies that are worth a lot of money and in a way create dependence. People receiving these don't get incitement to improve their living conditions because that means an end to the subsidies (Diakonie). Although acknowledged as necessary, the UNHCR states that "this policy doesn't create employment or possibilities for the IDPs to return to their place of origin" or even prevent displacement, which are the durable solutions (Diakonie, NRC). There has not been one single case so far where a successful return has taken place – that is where the IDP has wanted to return and where security and dignity conditions have been met (CRS, NRC).

The United Nations have allegedly released documents that show strong correlation between wealth (oil, water, minerals) of a certain area, the presence of paramilitary groups and displacement in the same (Caritas, Consejería en Proyectos). Many NGOs call the Colombian conflict a conflict of interests and claim that "displacement will stop when the interests stop existing" (Diakonie). A frequently expressed viewpoint is that "displacement doesn't occur because there's a war, but there's a war so that displacement will occur" (Caritas) – meaning that it is much easier to displace families and rob territory for megaprojects than to incorporate them in the development- or other plans.

Displacement can thus take place because of international investment, multinational companies, sometimes even as a direct consequence of national actions (the implementation of the democratic security strategy and taking over of territory) and also because of powerful drug traffickers that have interests in Colombian land (Caritas, UNHCR). Some scholars think of forced displacement as war strategy aimed at strengthening territorial strongholds (Dalto, 2009).

The INGOs interviewed work to enable the populations at risk the access of the right not to be displaced. That is prevention of displacement. And, if prevention isn't possible, they try to mitigate its consequences by having the IDP enrolled in the national programs. In the Colombian context from the INGOs point of view in practice this means accessorizing these populations at risk, and later IDPs, and Colombian civil society and making government institutions accessible to people (Solidaridad Internacional, Consejería en Proyectos).

The main idea isn't that the international NGOs do the work, but provide with adequate tools so that the locals themselves can act (NRC). This is described as

beneficial given the fact that many IDPs in today's Colombia get displaced more than once (Mesa Nacional). What the international NGOs want is to generate processes of change and prevent displacement altogether as opposed to getting stuck in a dependence-creating assistance policy. This is thought to be done by organizing people and strengthening communities. In Córdoba for instance a strong community managed to over throw an international hydroelectric project that would have required a lot of land, and the community managed to prevent possible displacement in this specific area (Diakonie). Indigenous populations are also mentioned by the NRC as positive examples: they are generally better organized than other populations in rural areas and have better knowledge of their territories – an advantage when trying to resist displacement. It's not easy resisting, selective murders take place on their leaders in order to end movements, but their displacement isn't as notorious as the afrocolombians´ or the peasantries´ (NRC).

Once people do get displaced, a very big issue in Colombia is that they aren't aware of what has happened to them, or why. These people don't usually know that they have exceptional rights or that they are subject to special protection (Caritas). Occasionally an IDP can come to an INGO without any personal belongings, without knowing where else to go - but have all the laws concerning him/her as an IDP printed (*Ibid.*). Many INGOs thereby finance information- and education projects in conflict areas so that, if displacement occurs, people will know where to turn institution-wise to enter the registry and receive the attention they are entitled to by law (NRC).

Besides the Red Cross and Doctors without Borders every other INGO interviewed works through local counterparts, NGOs, or partners to implement projects. They don't execute projects themselves but finance local partners in order to organize IDPs and present means – financial and security means – with the help of which the IDPs can claim responsibility from the government institutions (Solidaridad Internacional, NRC).

Also working from the other end, some INGOs have projects with the UNHCR as described above with the aim to strengthen local institutions so these in turn can be more efficient and accessible to the people (NRC).

6.2   Cooperation

The INGOs interviewed mainly cooperate with the local counterparts that execute their projects. These could be civil government institutions, such as the case of Doctors without Borders and their project to affiliate people in the subsidized healthcare system (see part 5.3); or in the case of the Red Cross, that cooperates with the government in order to reach areas that the government doesn't have access to (Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders). INGOs working with organizational reinforcement work with different parts of Colombian civil society (Diakonie, Tierra de Hombres).

As far as inter-INGO cooperation goes, they participate in a number of forums aimed at coordinating these INGOs. One of these, mentioned by all interviewees, is the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC). The IASC is a forum that used to have as its primary task the coordination of different UN bodies active in Colombia. Now various, but not all, international NGOs participate in this committee in order to share information about the situation in Colombia. Even the Red Cross participates, however just as an observer (Red Cross). Judging by the interviews conducted IASC only seems to work as a forum for information sharing between the INGOs that participate and the different bodies of the UN. When it comes to coordination of actions this occurs more when on field and is described as problematic (NRC). A weakness of the IASC is according to the NRC is that "a clear mechanism for talks with the government hasn't been established yet".

There are various other bodies that are dedicated to coordinating INGOs. Only faith based organizations have a few networks such as ACT (Action of Churches Cogether) and Diosesis, but these, and other coordinating bodies mentioned in the interviews, seem to also primarily function as information-sharing spaces (Diakonie, CRS). Not all INGOs participate in such coordination attempts (CRS).

6.3   Government-INGO Interaction

The political debate regarding the humanitarian situation in Colombia is according to several international NGOs very polarized. According to interviewees on both government- and non-government side the government hasn't wanted to admit that there is an internal conflict taking place in the country (Las UAO, Doctors without Borders, Caritas). What officially motivates the governments' democratic security strategy is a struggle against drug-terrorists. And if the conflict isn't recognized, then the attending to its´ victims, IDPs for instance, becomes a non-prioritized question (Doctors without Borders).

The government is keen on spreading a positive image of the country, so criticism from civil society isn't met with an open attitude (NRC, Caritas, Diakonie). Many times the efforts of NGOs active in Colombia are in fact depreciated and the government accordingly has a condescending approach in the dialogue with civil society: "it's like when your father tells you that something is bad and you're not allowed to talk back because he's your father. He's right. This happens on many occasions" (Diakonie). Organizations also state that attacks on civil society take place in Colombia (Mesa Nacional, Coordinacion Nacional, NRC, Caritas, CRS). Civil society organizations (including international and national NGOs) are catalogued as direct opponents to the government and some are even accused of collaborating with the FARC (Mesa Nacional, Coordinacion Nacional, Solidaridad Internacional). When it comes to grass root movements in the rural areas they're sometimes ended by paramilitary groups, which are highly suspected of having close links with the government (www.migrationsverket.se).

Consensus amongst international NGOs and the UNHCR is that the Colombian central government doesn't allow much influence from actors unless they're very powerful, "besides United States, Colombia hardly lets anyone else influence it" (UNHCR).

There are however some more or less indirect ways in which international NGOs can affect parts of the government. First and foremost through the UNHCR and IASC. The UN – being an interstate organization receiving donations from several countries and having close relations with ambassadors in Colombia – its´ words/recommendations carry more weight than the average INGO's. In the IASC the international NGO has a space where it can contribute with its preoccupations and recommendations and elaborate documents so that the UNHCR, the president of IASC, shares this with the national government (Solidaridad Internacional).

Some international NGOs work together with the UNHCR in the process of strengthening of the local ombudsman office. By giving them more resources, financial and technical, they can in turn do their jobs of control of the functionaries and the implementation of the laws more efficiently – and hence generate influence on the national government (UNHCR, NRC). The same method is used when influencing the government through the constitutional court; resources are provided to the courts´ efforts in the following-up of the t-025 sentence and the law 387. The idea is that the more information the court can gather, the better recommendations can be elaborated and presented as guidelines to the government (Caritas, CRS).

As mentioned earlier international NGOs work with national and local organizations with the aim of strengthening Colombian civil society. Further they accompany IDPs and IDP leaders in their reclamation of rights (UNHCR, CRS). In this way, making it possible for people to reclaim their rights, influence on the government is created.

International NGOs have an advantage over other NGOs due to the fact that they are international. One way that they try to generate influence on the Colombian government is by advocating abroad (Diakonie). An example is CRS, whose funds mainly come from the United States: it participates in a committee in Washington D.C. where they advocate for a change of American policy towards Colombia (CRS).

The Norwegian Refugee Council also tries to affect the legislation by supporting so called emblematic cases. This means financing lawyers and organizations that take these important cases to court. Today, June of 2009, they are supporting an action to get sexual violence recognized as war strategy (NRC).

What several INGOs aim at is that their projects have permanence even when the organization itself has to end the projects. Doctors without Borders had a project in Soacha, Cundinamarca, where they made sure that all of the displaced they attended later got integrated in the subsided national healthcare system – and hence were getting attended even after the organization's project ended (Doctors without Borders).

In spite of these attempts, the organizations interviewed say that it is very difficult to generate influence on the national government: "every thing that has been accomplished has meant much, much work" (Caritas). The church

organizations have been relatively strong and claim that they were the first ones to put the problem on the political agenda (Caritas, CRS).

Given the fact that international NGOs act in accordance with international law and the principles of the UN, which assign responsibility to the government, they all have their aim set on complementing the actions of the Colombian state (Fundación Dos Mundos, Consejería en Proyectos *et al.)*. The government agencies/organizations interviewed strongly agree on the international principles that declare every state responsible for its´ IDPs, so even the Colombian (Acción Social, Las Uao). However, due to the fact that "the state has to do it all", Acción Social claims not having deeper knowledge about what should be, and is being done by the international NGOs active in Colombia: "it is very difficult for the government, with everything we have to do ourselves, to also look at what they [the INGOs] are doing" (Acción Social). Nevertheless, elements of the government, such as the UAO, have a picture of the function of the NGOs, which according to them is "being complementary to what the state does" (Las UAO).

In reality however, many INGOs state that they have a preponderant role in many parts of the country and overtake the role of the state due to its lack of presence in these areas (Solidaridad Internacional, Tierra de Hombres).

Some INGOs, such as the Red Cross and the UNHCR, have agreements with the government regarding the attention to the IDPs. In the case of the Red Cross this mainly means entering and providing aid in parts of the country where the government cannot enter (Red Cross, Acción Social).

6.4 Reflections from the IDP-organizations

The IDP organizations´ comments regarding the humanitarian situation in Colombia are in many aspects similar to the ones given by the INGOs. The lack of durable solutions for the IDPs is emphasized (Mesa Nacional). As is the extreme stigmatization that the IDPs are subject to. According to the IDP organizations interviewed they and NGOs tend to have the same view on the government – its responsibility and flaws when implementing policy – something perceived as positive by the IDP organizations. NGOs become allies in the critique against government policy. As for international NGOs, their voice abroad is also seen as positive.

The IDP organizations claim that internal displacement is a political problem for it is a product and effect of the internal conflict and the huge inequality that the country suffers. If the country's resources weren't distributed in a very unequal way, and if foreign investors weren't given such advantages, the guerrillas wouldn't have a reason to exist – and without the guerrillas there wouldn't be an internal conflict and hence no internal displacement (Mesa Nacional, Coordinación Nacional).

They further claim that internal displacement is the government's problem because it allows it. "Colombia isn't a poor country; it has wealth, so the situation shouldn't have to be as it is" (Mesa Nacional).

As for the work of the national and local NGOs aimed at the IDPs it is also criticized by the IDP organizations. The most serious accusation is that the NGOs sometimes take advantage of the suffering if the IDP in order to have an office in for instance Bogotá. Their budgets are described as very large, "while the IDP doesn't have anything to eat" (Coordinación Nacional). There are many NGOs active in Colombia and the IDP organizations say that "if they are this many, one should be protected" (Mesa Nacional).

The IDP organizations are to an extent unsatisfied with international cooperation as well for its resources go to national and local NGOs and not directly to the IDP-organizations: "I would say that 90 % of the IDPs are negative to the NGOs because the people that benefit from them are very few" (*Ibid.*). "One NGO does something and another one something else. But what happens is that many times the same thing is repeated" (Coordinación Nacional). The international organs work well in Bogotá, "but the problem isn't in the capital or other large cities but in the rural regions" (*Ibid.*).

7   Results

7.1   Summary

7.1.1 Is there consensus between the parties on the functions the international NGOs in Colombia should have regarding the work with Internally Displaced Persons?

The short answer to this question is pretty much yes. There is unambiguous consensus among the interviewees regarding the responsibility and preponderant role that the Colombian government should play. Also the INGOs interviewed have their complementary function clear and they are not trying, nor should they given the theoretical point of view try, in any way to take over the function of the Colombian government.

7.1.2   In what way do the international NGOs improve the living conditions of the Internally Displaced Persons?

The INGOs operating in Colombia don't dedicate themselves to changing already existing policy, formulate laws, and build new institutions or equivalent. They improve the living conditions of the people that receive their help by seeing to so that there is correspondence between what the government says it is doing or going to do and what is actually being done. They enable the Colombian IDPs to access the rights that they, even from the Colombian official point of view, are entitled to.

7.1.3   Who do the international NGOs cooperate with?

The INGOs mainly cooperate with civil bodies of the Colombian society. The projects they finance (INGOs mainly finance projects) are executed through local counterparts which usually are local NGOs. However, some INGOs cooperate with government institutions, such as the case of Doctors without Borders and the healthcare system, and the Red Cross who has understanding agreements with the government to access areas difficult to reach. Anything that they see provides

durable solutions: prevention of displacement or reclamations of rights officially provided by the government.

7.1.4   What influence do the international NGOs have on the Colombian government?

The INGOs interviewed have many, direct and indirect, channels through which they *try* to generate influence on the national government, all in accordance with the theoretical approach of this thesis. What influence they actually *do* have is however very difficult to answer. The fact that the church organizations lifted this issue a long time ago, and that now a whole legal apparatus exists to attend it, implies that they actually do have an impact. The same goes for the fact that the constitutional court still labels the attention as unconstitutional. However, the fact that the government goes on with its military strategy, and that hundreds of thousands of Colombians still are getting displaced every year and belong to the poorest in Colombian society even years after a displacement occurs, implies the contrary.

It's clear that the INGOs are trying to influence the government but without knowing how the situation would have been without INGO-involvement it is difficult to answer what influence they actually have.

7.2   Conclusions

The situation in Colombia is very complicated. This is one of the main conclusions of this minor field study. The context within which the interviewed organizations operate is very difficult, and it is not easy to examine one problem, in this case internal displacement, without entering other problems; the internal conflict, drug trade, socioeconomic inequality, the mistrust in Colombian society etc. as they all interact closely and depend on one another.

If simplifying and only looking at the aspects brought up in the theoretical approach of this thesis, the main issues INGOs seem to encounter are first the unwillingness to cooperate on behalf of the Colombian government. It seems to deny the problems the country suffers as opposed to facing reality and presenting durable solutions to this horrible situation. Social investment such as roads, schools, hospitals and the creation of employment opportunities for the people is needed – in contrast to, or at least accompanied by, the military strategy being implemented today. Alternatives to whatever it is the guerrillas and drug traffickers are offering are crucial if the conflicts and displacement are to end. The government shouldn't on one hand act in a way that creates displacement and on the other provide subsidies that cost a lot of money. More resources are needed for prevention and socioeconomic stabilization. A big problem that needs attention is the huge stigmatization of IDPs that exists in Colombia.

The second main problem that the INGOs have, besides the counteraction from the government, is the lack of coordination among INGOs active in Bogotá. No matter what the INGOs claim they do, it apparently isn't perceived as very efficient by the IDPs interviewed. More effort should be done to evaluate projects and coordinate actions (and maybe resources?) with other INGOs, and crucial, with the so called local counterparts that execute the projects. What mechanisms do the INGOs have to evaluate what is being done by the local organizations they give their funds to? And are these mechanisms the optimal ones? In a country where problems of noncooperation and suspicion – lack of social capital – are widespread it is important that at least the INGOs are responsible. Judging by the comments given by the IDPs, important resources are being wasted due to the fact that actions are being repeated. If a project has to come all the way to the field before being coordinated with other relevant actors/projects, it may be too late. I realize this is a very difficult task as the organizations are many and not all participate in the forums aimed at this particular subject, not to mention the fact that donors probably have a say in what ends up being done with the resources they provide with, but coordination of actions is important if the effects of the same are to maximize. Also, there must exist an arena where civil society interacts with the government.

What needs to be emphasized yet again is the enormous amount of IDPs in Colombia, somewhere between three and four million people. These can not be properly attended if the yearly displacement rate still continues to lie around 200 000 people. These are enormous numbers. Therefore I believe that the right way to go about things is the way the INGOs try to do it; prevention of displacement with the creation of a vibrant civil society and strong communities able to resist displacement.

To reconnect to the original aim of this thesis, and clarify why the IDPs aren't receiving the attention they are entitled to, my conclusion is that it mainly depends on the lack of durable solutions from the Colombian government – its unwillingness to really end this crisis. The gap the INGOs are trying to fill is preventing displacement and building bridges between the government and its institutions, and the IDPs in Colombia. Another conclusion drawn is that they would be able to do this much more efficient if they were to cooperate more and to a larger extent than today communicate with the government.

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