



INTERNATIONAL POLICY REPORT

STABILIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT: LESSONS OF COLOMBIA'S "CONSOLIDATION" MODEL

By Abigail Poe and Adam Isacson

April 2011

INTRODUCTION

Colombia, the world's largest producer of cocaine, has been embroiled in an internal armed conflict and humanitarian emergency since the mid-1960s, and since 2000 has been by far the number-one recipient of U.S. military and police assistance beyond the Middle East. About four years ago, faced with stubborn drug production and the difficulty of governing territory under illegal armed groups' influence, the U.S. and Colombian governments underwent an important shift in strategy.

The model now being pursued in Colombia is called "Integrated Action" or "Consolidation." Several small, historically ungoverned regions of the country have been chosen as targets for a phased, coordinated "hold and build" effort. A new agency in Colombia's central government, the Center for Coordination of Integrated Action (CCAI), coordinates military efforts to establish security conditions in these territories, and then civilian efforts to introduce the rest of the government and the services it provides. The desired end state is that violent, lawless zones become integrated into national civic and economic life, with their inhabitants becoming full citizens, supporting the state and abandoning illegal activity.

In some zones, the Consolidation experience has operated long enough to make evaluation possible. Some aspects of this experience appear to be working well: drug production is reduced, and security, particularly in town centers, has improved. Other aspects, however, pose risks that threaten the success of the entire Consolidation effort. These issues include "militarization," lack of civilian agencies' coordination and participation, local corruption, human rights abuse, and land tenure, among others.

The United States, and other donor states, are facing similar stability, development and peace building challenges elsewhere, particularly Afghanistan. In

our view, Colombia offers not a model to be copied exactly, but a series of lessons for policymakers and practitioners working in other parts of the world.

For this reason, the Center for International Policy and the U.S. Institute of Peace held a conference on December 9, 2010 to discuss the Colombian experience with practitioners whose expertise goes beyond Colombia and Latin America. The goal of the conference, titled "Stabilization and Development: Lessons of Colombia's "Consolidation Model," was to engage people working on and making policy on the same issues, in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Speakers at the conference represented several U.S. and Colombian agencies, as well as non-governmental experts and activists from several disciplines. The agenda and list of speakers is at the end of this report. However, since the discussions took place on a not-for-attribution basis, speakers are not identified in this narrative unless they have given express consent to be quoted.



Panelists Vanda Felbab-Brown, Kevin Healy, moderator Abigail Poe and panelist Katherine Donohue-Papillon discuss the socioeconomic lessons to be learned from Colombia's Consolidation Model.

2 EXPLAINING THE MODEL

The problem

Colombia has been embroiled in a long, complicated internal armed conflict for decades, with varying opinions as to when it actually began. Some argue that Colombia's current violence began in the late 1940s, with the outbreak of a decade of bloodletting between political parties, known as "La Violencia." Others point even further back to minor wars during the 19th century. In the more recent past, the violence has followed a certain trajectory, starting in the 1960s, when the leftist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla groups formed in the Colombian countryside, followed in the 1980s by a series of far-right paramilitary militias. In the past twenty years alone, the fighting has been fueled on all sides by income from the drug trade.

As frequent strife indicates, Colombia is a difficult country to govern. It has one of the world's worst distributions of wealth, land and income, and less than 5 percent of the country lives in about half of the national territory. The nation's secondary and tertiary road network is very poor, rural health and education coverage is sparse, security forces are unable to cover territory, and the judicial system is absent. Almost two-thirds of the rural population lives in poverty. Therefore, these "ungoverned spaces" have served as breeding grounds for warlordism and the existence of an illegal economy, where forced displacement, massacres, human rights violations and illicit crops exist with impunity.

What is Consolidation?

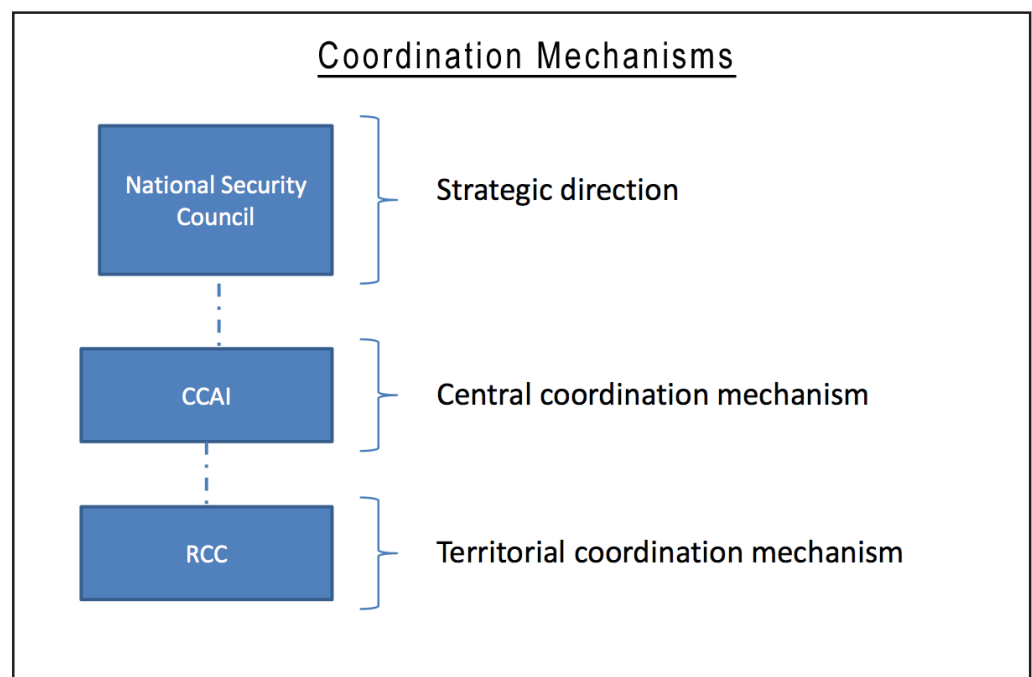
In Colombia, U.S. and Colombian officials began developing a new civil-military strategy through a process that began around 2004 and rose to prominence by 2006. According to official statements about Consolidation, this strategy aims to guarantee citizens' rights throughout the national territory, integrate peripheral regions into the country, and establish effective governance.

The underlying idea is that Colombia's historically neglected rural areas will only be taken back from illegal

armed groups if the entire government is involved in "recovering" or "consolidating" its presence in these territories. On paper, the strategy begins with military operations and illicit crop eradication, moves into quick-impact social and economic assistance projects to create trust or "buy-in," followed by food security, permanent income, local capacity and land reform projects, and ends up with the presence of a functioning civilian government and the removal of most military forces.

The Consolidation effort requires a careful sequencing of all of its components, coordinated by three institutional mechanisms with unique mandates: the Colombian Presidency's National Security Council, the Presidency's Center for Coordination of Integrated Action (CCAI), and Regional Coordination Centers (RCC) in Consolidation zones. The National Security Council serves as the "strategic roof" that gives direction to the whole process. The CCAI is the interagency mechanism centralized in Bogota, which seeks to coordinate the entry of fourteen state institutions, including the military, the judiciary and cabinet departments, into parts of Colombia considered to have been recovered from armed groups' control. Finally, the RCC are the territorial coordination centers that actually implement the policy and the program on the ground.

The key to success, according to Sergio Jaramillo, Colombia's high commissioner for national security, is to make sure residents believe that the government will follow through with its promises, instead of viewing it as just another military occupation; to offer incentives to encourage local residents to comply with and not undermine the efforts of the program; and to



get them to engage in viable economic projects that are sustainable. The challenge lies in the sequence of implementation: the multiple stages of Consolidation must be carried out almost simultaneously in order to keep the local community engaged and to avoid the return of armed actors after the Consolidation effort is deemed complete.

Consolidation and current stabilization, peacebuilding and development thought

By definition, Consolidation is where civil-military models are implemented and where the theory of “whole of government” gets put into practice. As many panelists warned, in theory the application of Consolidation is straightforward, though it is often far more complex and difficult to implement on the ground, and every region/zone/country will experience it in different ways.

Current stabilization, peacebuilding and development thought holds that in zones where internal conflict still exists, such as in Colombia, there is high potential for failure. The Colombian government, then, sees two overriding factors: that nothing works in isolation, and that the effort must be “population-centric.”

The first point, that nothing works in isolation, pertains to the need for the strategy to be truly integrated. The “clear, hold and build” stages cannot be viewed as completely separate stages, and often must take place simultaneously. Populations in conflict zones often have a “learned helplessness,” and are eager for predictability in their lives—even if that predictability means brutality. If provision of anything absolutely essential such as food or security becomes absolutely arbitrary and unpredictable, people will start giving up and will turn to otherwise unsavory groups and individuals.

The second point is that Consolidation efforts must be population-centric. The initiative must adapt to the needs and history of the zone and gain the trust of the local population in order to ensure that the population will participate in the program. Basic security will quickly collapse, and with it will go the population’s trust, if Consolidation fails to leave behind at the minimum a strong police force, civilian justice system and basic food security.

Transitional justice and redress of grievances is crucial to retain the trust of the local population. If perpetrators of violence (be it actors from the government, police, military, illegal armed groups, etc.) function with impunity, the ability to build trust for the credibility of the actual government will become an issue, and the chance for the perpetuation of or return to conflict will increase. The capacity and will

to combat impunity and build trust through a functioning judiciary and police force will serve to prevent a return to conflict or a perpetuation of conflict. 3

Finally, in addition to the above important steps that must be integrated into a Consolidation process, a study on civil wars and rebellions, by David Leighton and James Ferron, concluded that “mountains cause civil war.” Though a very simple hypothesis, the case of Colombia provides it with credibility. When you have an extraordinarily mountainous country, such as Colombia, it provides a geography that fragments the population, prevents the government from providing services, prevents the local population from identifying with the nation as a whole, cuts off access to the national economy, and prevents the government from providing the security they need so that when they engage with government programs, they are not threatened by armed groups. Therefore, when conducting Consolidation programs, difficult terrain is a major obstacle to successfully bringing the state to the people and the people to the state.

PAST SUCCESSES & FUTURE CHALLENGES

As the Consolidation process moves into its fourth year, some successes have been noted. But most importantly, lessons have been learned and the challenges that the government of President Juan Manuel Santos face are more apparent.

La Macarena, in the western extremity of the department of Meta, about 200 miles south of Bogotá, has been a principal focus of Consolidation projects since 2007. Its close proximity to the capital and an already existing network of roads made it an obvious place to start, and the Colombian government views La Macarena as an example of success.

The Colombian government cites several statistics as indicators of success in La Macarena. According to Sergio Jaramillo, between 2007 and 2008, there was a 75 percent reduction in coca crops in the zone, accounting for most of a 23 percent decline nationally. Additionally, 7,000 hectares of national park area have been recovered from FARC control.

Among other accomplishments Jaramillo’s presentation cited in La Macarena are the creation of a Regional Center of High Level Education for the Macarena Region (CERES), in San Juan de Arama, a project to improve the infrastructure and resources of schools, and a project to assign nurses to nine health centers in rural areas.

Yet rather than focusing on past successes, Jaramillo and many of the other panelists focused on future

4 challenges. These include:

- Taking into consideration each zone’s historical nuances.
- Minimizing the role of the military.
- Strengthening justice and the rule of law.
- Improving land policy.
- Developing sustainable projects and livelihoods.
- Working with corrupt local officials.

Taking into consideration each zone’s historical nuances

As referenced above, Consolidation cannot be viewed nor implemented as a linear, cookie-cutter strategy. Instead, the historical nuances and cultural context of each country—and even each zone within one country—will affect the sequencing of strategy and the strategy itself.

In Colombia, each historically neglected community has a unique history of violence around which entire livelihoods have been built. Violence came to different regions at different times, and specific conditions and variations apply to each region: displacement, the cultivation of coca, and the social impact of the conflict. Therefore, understanding local dynamics is key and this cannot be seen as a “flat strategy,” with every zone being attributed the same list of problems and potential solutions.

Not only must Consolidation projects understand the historical nuances of a given locality, but they must also take into consideration the local dynamics of power that have arisen as a result of over 30 years of conflict. Many of the goals of Consolidation—including land reform and sustainable livelihood programs for campesinos—seek to undo decades of inequality and traditional power structures. This is especially important in zones, such as Montes de María in Colombia’s north, where the traditional power structure is linked to paramilitaries and illegal armed groups, a challenge in itself that will be discussed below. The Consolidation project must be ready to push back against protests or efforts to thwart its success by those who have long benefited from the traditional power structure.

Minimizing the role of the military

The role of the military has been one of the most challenging aspects of the Colombian experience. The civilian part of the government has been slow to arrive, and soldiers are being called on not only to keep order in Consolidation zones, but also to provide services and interact constantly with communities.

One of the biggest challenges in the upcoming years is to figure out how to limit the role of the

armed forces in Consolidation zones. Ideally, the military would be deployed only in the first stage of Consolidation, as security is established. However, and as noted above, if development and state institutions are slow to arrive, a hurried departure of the military will only lead to a return to violence and the reemergence of illegal actors.

In Colombia, as in many other countries, the military is the only institution with the equipment and manpower necessary to go into a community and implement quick development and security projects. It can go in to a zone at the beginning, assess the environment, plan accordingly and move forward with the project. However, many fear that human rights violations are inevitable when the military is working alongside a civilian population because soldiers are trained to defeat an enemy through the threat or use of violence.

It is imperative that the military operates in the shortest time frame possible in order to avoid military takeover of civilian roles, such as implementing the rule of law and building sustainable livelihoods. In order to achieve this, both the “clear” and “hold” stages of Consolidation must work quickly and the final stage, “build,” must focus on strengthening the rule of law through an efficient judicial system and capable police force.

In Montes de María, the military has not been able to avoid becoming involved in the build phase, and often enjoys its status as the local engineers and providers of development services. Outside of providing security, the Marines provide social services, something that unfortunately moves closer to the undesired militarization of development. The Marines’ significant role in the Consolidation process has reached the point where they are victims of their own success and the local community does not want them to leave. The experience in Montes de María exemplifies the importance of policies and programs intended to transfer power to the local forces, something that, it turns out, is hard to do.

Strengthening justice and the rule of law

Quick improvements to the rule of law are vital to the Consolidation effort’s success. The local population must see that legal remedies exist, that there is justice to be had, and that impunity no longer reigns. As mentioned above, without an effective justice system and a capable police force, the successes of Consolidation will be replaced by violence the moment the military leaves the zone.

Here lies one of the main shortfalls to date in Colombia’s Consolidation process. Many of the Consolidation zones have experienced important security gains, especially in their small town centers,

but a lack of resources and political will have left the military unable to hand effective control of the project over to civilians. As a result, armed actors reemerge when military personnel are not present.

In many zones, new judges, courts and police officers have been put into place, though the number of functionaries is still insufficient to take the process out of the hands of the military. Crime rates have increased so much that the limits of the newly developed judicial system are breached and the justice that so many people seek cannot be achieved.

Even in areas where a functioning judicial system exists, there are still several challenges that Consolidation efforts face. For instance, physical access to courts is still difficult for those living in rural areas and many zones are still over-reliant on the military and police to perform alternative justice. Many territories, especially those outside of town centers, are not yet secured, and prosecutors must function in precarious conditions. Finally, severe human rights abuses by all parties overload and overwork those courts that are functioning.

Improving land policy

The problem of land distribution in Colombia is not a recent one, nor is it simple. Scholars cite it as one of the major factors underlying the conflict. One of the main stated goals of the Consolidation program is to restore displaced farm families to their original communities—an effort that immediately confronts Colombia's unjust and intricately complicated land tenure system.

The Santos Administration is working on two new laws, currently passing through Colombia's Congress, which attempt to address Colombia's land issue: the Victims' Law and the Land Law. Both include strategies to facilitate the return of land to displaced families, implement transitional justice programs, modify land-use requirements, facilitate titling, and more. However, many obstacles remain in the way, including:

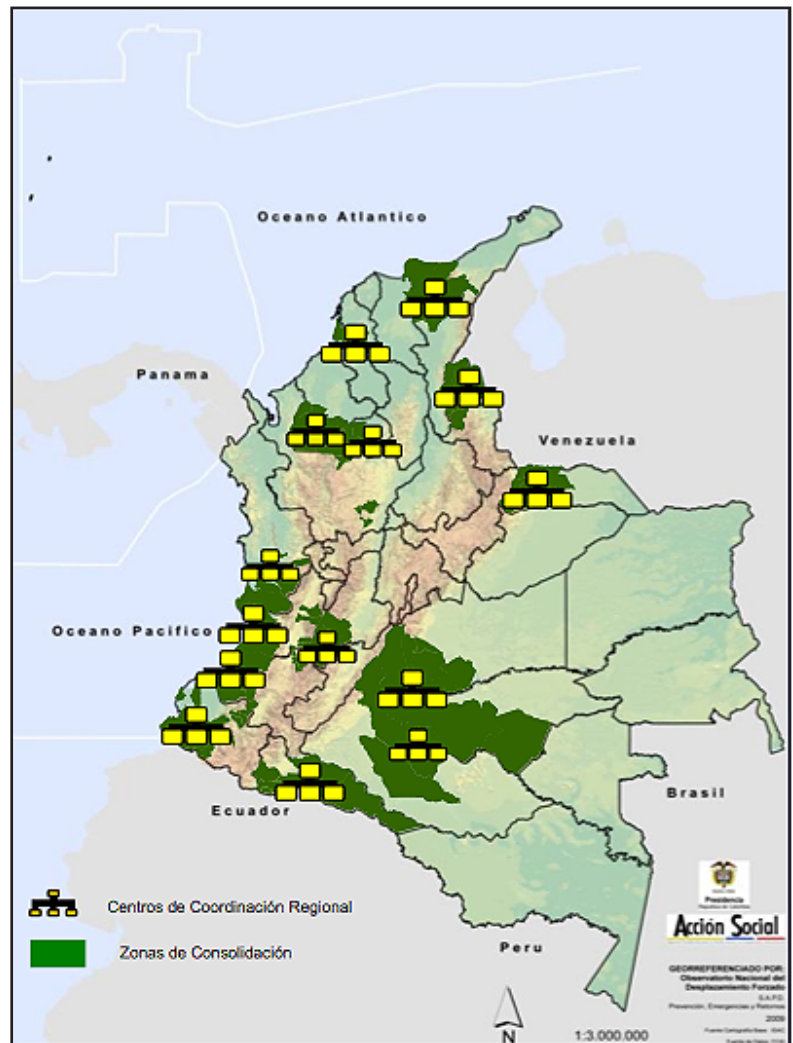
- Insecurity in tenure. Many landowners do not have titles to their land, and cannot prove they own the land without proper documentation.
- Massive land purchases. In areas where security has improved, land values have risen, leading many large landowners and corporations to purchase tracts of land, possibly including land from which families were displaced.
- Victims of displacement often incur large debts that still exist upon return to their

land. Many are coerced or forced into selling their land for an extremely low price in exchange for payoff of their debt.

The two new laws presented by the Santos Administration take into consideration some of these obstacles, though making sure that those who return to their land are not victims of a "land grab" is still a major challenge. The success of Consolidation programs is threatened by the population's fear that the programs themselves are part of a land concentration strategy that will end up displacing them from their newly valuable plots.

Counternarcotics, food security and sustainable livelihoods

In Colombia, a strategy would not be considered complete without a counternarcotics component, and the Consolidation strategy does not stray. Eradication of coca crops in the Consolidation zones usually occurs during the first stage, as it is thought that



Consolidation zones: Nariño (Pacífico), Cauca (Pacífico), Valle (Pacífico), Sur del Chocó (Pacífico), Río Caguán, Macarena, Cordillera Central, Oriente Antioqueño, Bajo Cauca, Sur de Córdoba, Montes de María, Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Putumayo, Arauca and Catatumbo.

6 removing coca from the area will shrink the finances of the illegal armed group operating in the zone, and therefore force it out.

The true challenge, however, is not eradication, but the question of how to move from the first “clear” phase into the “hold” phase in coca-producing zones. Populations in previously ungoverned areas are often very suspicious of the state, and finding a way to change that suspicion into confidence is difficult to achieve. On paper, the sequence is to first eradicate, then establish food security before moving to development and sustainable livelihoods projects, though recent thought suggests these stages must happen simultaneously, and in fact the ideal outcome is an arrangement in which growers voluntarily eradicate and the government provides services.

Food security is critical. For years, even decades, these communities have sustained their families with the relatively modest income offered by coca plots, and without coca, they are immediately deprived of profitable cultivation options in areas with very poor market access. Yet the food security programs that are implemented are often insufficient. For example, when living off coca, a typical family can afford to eat meat once per week. A family with no coca and no food security program may be able to eat meat once every few months, while a family with food security programs, but no coca, can eat meat once per month or month and a half. It is hard to convince someone who used to eat meat once per week that they will be better off on a food program that cannot guarantee something as simple as meat on even a monthly basis.

One strategy that has potential for success is to implement food security programs prior to eradicating coca, making the transition from coca to alternative agriculture gradual. This strategy gives the new crops time to reach full productivity before a family’s income is cut off with eradication. This would violate the letter of the “zero-coca” policy currently in place, which prohibits food security programs from starting prior to the full eradication of coca, even though this policy has proved repeatedly to be a failure. The challenge of Consolidation will be to find a sustainable solution that will encourage coca-growing families to trust the state and will guarantee a basic standard of living, in addition to security, that is not substantially lower than life with coca.

Working with local officials and elites

In many of the Consolidation zones in Colombia, resistance from local political leaders and traditional local elites will be difficult to overcome. As recent scandals have shown, local political leaders are

frequently tied to large landholding sectors—or even organized crime and armed groups—and may be working actively against the interests of populations whose support the Consolidation programs seek to gain. This may be the greatest challenge, as it requires taking on not only the issue of corruption, but the even thornier issue of land tenure.

In Montes de María, for example, governance is not a blank slate—the challenge is not to establish a state in a vacuum where none exists. Instead, the existing power structure is infiltrated by paramilitaries and narco-trafficking organizations. Here and elsewhere, the challenge will be to break links between the local government and these sectors, which destroys the state’s credibility.

One of many steps is to strengthen the politicians that aren’t linked to paramilitaries or other emerging armed groups. It is important to make it easy for these politicians to come forward and gain political strength in order to displace the corrupt officials. Even more important, however, is to devote far more resources to the establishment of a credible, capable justice system—one whose members have the security and capabilities necessary to take on local power structures engaged in criminal activity. The judicial component of Consolidation programs is barely underway, and there is cause for concern that if it lags too badly behind, corrupt local networks who do not share the Consolidation effort’s goals will continue to function unimpeded. The result could imperil the whole strategy.

CONCLUSION

As the December 9 discussion made clear, these challenges are closely linked to one another. If one piece of the puzzle is missing, such as a strong police force or a functioning judiciary, the effort will continue to be militarized, impunity will continue, human rights violations will persist, land tenure will remain unequal and insecure, and criminal groups will reemerge.

The Consolidation program has admirable goals. Bridging the gap between these goals and reality will require a truly integrated, civilian-led strategy executed with impeccable sequencing and timing. Many steps must be taken simultaneously, and if one is delayed, it could set back the entire process. While under the Santos Administration, all ministries are on board in theory, getting them to work together in a timely fashion is going to be a major roadblock to successful consolidation in many of Colombia’s ungoverned territories. Getting past this roadblock will require the Colombian government to exert a good deal of political will—something for which no amount of foreign assistance can ever substitute.

CONFERENCE AGENDA

Stabilization and Development: Lessons of Colombia's "Consolidation" Model

Co-hosted by

the Center for International Policy and the U.S. Institute of Peace

Thursday, December 9, 2010

8:30-8:45 Participants' arrival, sign-in, coffee

8:45-9:00 Welcoming remarks

9:00-10:45 Panel 1: Explaining the Model

Moderator: Adam Isacson, advisor, Center for International Policy

- Adam Isacson, advisor, Center for International Policy, Washington.
- Sergio Jaramillo, high commissioner for national security, Presidency of Colombia.
- Mauricio Romero, Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris, Colombia.
- Jonathan Morgenstein, global strategic engagement fellow, Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, Washington.

11:00-12:45 Panel 2: Lessons for Civil-Military Relations and Human Rights

Moderator: Virginia Bouvier, senior program officer, Center for Mediation and Conflict Resolution, United States Institute of Peace

- Juan Carlos Palou, coordinator, Peacebuilding and Post-Conflict Area, Ideas for Peace Foundation, Colombia.
- Beth Cole, director, Intergovernmental Affairs, U.S. Institute of Peace, Washington.
- Nancy Sánchez Méndez, Corporación MINGA, Colombia.
- Heather Hanson, director of policy and advocacy, MercyCorps, Washington.

12:45-1:30 Break to serve lunch

1:30-3:15 Panel 3: Socioeconomic Lessons

Moderator: Abigail Poe, deputy director, Center for International Policy

- Yamile Salinas Abdalá, Institute of Peace and Development Studies (INDEPAZ), Colombia.
- Kevin Healy, professorial lecturer, Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University, Washington.
- Vanda Felbab-Brown, fellow, Foreign Policy, 21st Century Defense Initiative, the Brookings Institution, Washington.
- Katherine Donohue-Papillon, Latin America and Caribbean team leader, Office of Transition Initiatives, U.S. Agency for International Development, Washington.

3:30-5:15 Panel 4: Institutional Lessons

Moderator: Mary Hope Schwoebel, senior program officer, Academy for International Conflict Management and Peacebuilding, United States Institute of Peace

- Luis Jorge Garay, Grupo Método, Colombia.
- Miguel La Rota, Judicial System Area, Center for Studies in Law, Justice and Society (DeJuSticia), Colombia.
- Johanna Mendelson Forman, senior associate, Americas program, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington.

The Center for International Policy would like to thank the Compton Foundation, Inc., and the United States Institute for Peace. Without their support, neither this conference nor report would have been possible.

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