

Executive Resume

The London Cartagena Bogotá Process is a democratic dialogue between the Government of Colombia, international and national civil society organizations and international community present in Colombia. The process permanently works on the improvement of relations and acceptance of the other, but in parallel it has produced many concrete results on the thematic level that transcend from the personal level into the socio-political ambit. In this sense the process has on various occasions transcended from being a dialogue¹ in the strict explorative sense to become a space for joint deliberation or even joint decision making.

Topics for dialogue

One overarching goal of the process since its beginnings is to **diminish polarization** between the national parties through dialogue and ultimately to contribute to a climate that could facilitate peace and reconciliation in Colombia and support the construction of social capital. The London Conference and Declaration in 2003 became the excuse to set in motion a long term dialogue around the issues highlighted in the Declaration, in particular as they related to the development of an national strategy for international cooperation. Later, other issues contained in the London and subsequent Cartagena and Bogotá Declarations found their way onto the official agenda of the process, first human rights and later public policy dialogue.

In the area of **cooperation**, work has centred on the development of the national strategy of international cooperation and the organization of international cooperation around jointly defined priority areas. Although the strategy is a Government document it represents an interesting exercise where dialogue transcended into joint deliberation and even decision making and it has allowed the orientation of over 530 million dollar towards the priority areas defined. The Government of Colombia presented this exercise as a good practice at the Third High Level Meeting on Aid Efficiency in Accra 2008.

Another important consequence of the London Declaration was the impact it had on the relationship between the Colombian Government and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for **Human Rights** (HCHR) in Colombia. The office had been present and making annual recommendations to the Colombian Government since 1998, but after the London conference the Colombian Government began paying more attention to the implementation of the recommendations. An internal coordination process was set in motion by the Presidential Program for Human Rights requiring different State and Government institution to coordinate their response aimed at implementing and report on the recommendations. Following two declarations from the Commission for Human Rights in Geneva mandating the G24 to follow-up the implementation of Colombia's human rights commitments, the process formally incorporated the annual follow up on the UNHCHR's recommendations for Colombia in its work agenda. In January 2006 additional issues such as the fight against impunity and the protection of communities at risk were also incorporated in what had become

¹ The definition of Dialogue as used by the UNDP is of a process that is about understanding and learning - achieving a joint outcome while simultaneously building new relationships. This is a different concept as compared to deliberation, negotiation or discussion.

the human rights pillar of the process, and in September that same year began the process to develop jointly a national human rights plan through a newly created institution, the Coordination Instance, where the parties of the process participate together with 16 social sectors. The human rights agenda is generally the more complicated part of the London Cartagena Bogotá process due to the sometimes difficult relations between the government and civil society human rights organizations. However, it is one of the areas where the process has the most impressive results to show and where the international facilitation provided by the process is the most needed.

The area of **public policy dialogue** was added in 2007 in recognition of the need for a space where the parties could analyze jointly and make proposals in relation to public policies of high relevance to the process, in particular those that relate to the three priority areas of the cooperation strategy and the human rights and peace agenda. In 2008 this public policy dialogue took the form of large regional seminars of around 200 participants and with a significant regional emphasis (around 50% of the participants in each seminar, or approximately 100 persons, were from the regions). The topics included Victims, Local peace building, Social recovery of territory and Poverty, local development and millennium development goals. The methodology allowed the process a closer contact with the realities in the regions, and gave the possibility to the regional representatives to have direct access and present their proposals to decision makers.

Mechanisms for dialogue

The **G24** was informally constituted after the London Conference and during the consultation of the first national strategy on international cooperation. It is an informal group of embassies present in Colombia and is unique for its heterogeneous composition, including the European Union and other European countries, the US, Canada, Japan and Latin America. The group has played a key role in the facilitation of relations between the government of Colombia and civil society and is often perceived as the eyes of the international community on Colombia.

The **Consensus of Cartagena** is a coalition of national civil society organizations of a wide spectrum spanning over peace and human rights organizations, the church and private sectors. The group was officially conformed when at the conference in Cartagena 2005 7 civil society platforms signed a minimum consensus declaration. In the process' human rights agenda these 7 platforms are complemented by three additional human rights platforms, and the process is also permanently accompanied by two international NGO platforms, DIAL and PODEC. The diversity of this CSO coalition provides it with significant legitimacy in the representation of civil society.

The **government of Colombia** has also created mechanisms for internal coordination in the area of human rights coordinated by the Presidential Program for Human Rights and in cooperation coordinated by Acción Social.

In 2004, the dialogue between the three parties was institutionalized through the conformation of the **Follow-up Commission**. The three parties participate in this commission at a high level (Vice Minister for Multilateral Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Head of Acción Social, Director of Presidential Program for Human Rights, Ambassadors of the G24, Directors of the Organizations of the Consensus,

Heads of UN agencies). In the open sessions, which since 2006 are the norm, invitations are also extended to all process participants, resulting in fairly large assembly-like meetings of around 60 participants. The Commission has decision making power relating to the process and is responsible for approving the annual work plan.

After some initial problems with the implementation of the joint agenda, in December 2005 the parties decided to create the **Liaison Commission** as a kind of executive committee to the Follow-up Commission. This commission is responsible for defining the agenda for each Follow-up commission meeting as well as the process' annual agenda. The annual agenda outlines the activities to be carried out within the framework of the process in a given year. Each particular dialogue event is then generally prepared by a three-party working group, which jointly agrees in detail on the objectives and reach of each event. The clarity, transparency and ownership derived from the jointly elaborated work agenda provides all parties with the guarantees needed for a fruitful dialogue also on sensitive topics.

The Resident Coordinator exercises since the London meeting the **Technical Secretariat** of the G24. This implies providing technical support to the G24 president and troika, meeting organization, preparation of documentation, taking the meeting minutes and to facilitate the participation of the G24 in the three party process. As of the creation of the Follow-up Commission, the Resident Coordinator also functions as its technical Secretariat. This implied initially moderating the Commission meetings and taking the meeting minutes. When the Liaison Commission was constituted in 2006 the role of the Technical Secretariat expanded to include calling responsibility for the invitations to all process meetings as well as the coordination of the annual work agenda. This implies coordinating the work of the different process working groups such as the ones responsible for preparing the events on human rights, cooperation and the thematic seminars, as well as the Liaison commission and Follow-up Commission. The Technical Secretariat watches over the implementation of the annual work agenda and may call extraordinary meetings of the liaison committee at the request of the process parties for solving problems in the dialogue. Since 2006 The Technical Secretariat is also responsible for the moderation and coordination of the meetings of the Coordination Instance for the National Human Rights Action Plan and participate in its Executive Committee.

The role that was conferred on the Technical Secretariat as the general overseer of the process has been important in guaranteeing the level playing field among the three participating parties. Civil society is no longer an invitee by the governments participating in the process, but a participant in its own right, invited, like the other two parties, by a common Technical Secretariat. This solution has also guaranteed a better rhythm in the implementation of the process agenda as well as better timeliness in compliance with tasks and information circulation.

International facilitation by the G24 and United Nations help bring the parties closer together and to bridge difficulties in the dialogue. The international visibility the process enjoys also greatly enhances its effectiveness.

The process is a complex mixture of smaller, productive decision making spaces and bigger assembly-like fora. The latter type of events, although not always as productive are needed as they allow all process participants to participate and voice their opinion. In a society such as the Colombian it has a value per se to create space where different opinions can be voiced and heard in a frank and respectful manner. The process has, however, long since passed the stage when this type of explorative dialogue is the only expected result. For negotiation and decision making the process participants use smaller working groups such as the Liaison Commission, where important agreements are reached, agendas defined and positions move closer together. Since only a limited number of process participants have access to these smaller spaces, it is a constant challenge to transmit the important advances and the positive and collaborative ambience that is often perceived there to the bigger mass of process participants. Nevertheless this is a challenge that the process has to respond to, in order not to create a sense of dialogue fatigue outside the core group.

Results

The process shows important results at three levels:

- Process related outcomes, relating to the creation of the various institutions, the implementation of the annual work agenda and its various process events as well as the level playing field created between the parties.
- Short term changes relating to capacity development where the process is contributing to an important information exchange between the three parties as well as a development of dialogue capacity both at government institutions and civil society organizations, this in turn advancing thematic agendas.
- Long-term impacts on public policy, including the national cooperation strategy and the mechanism and methodology for the consultation of the national human rights plan as well as indirect influence on the legal framework for the demobilization of paramilitary groups as well as in the sphere of human rights.

To ensure that all process participants know what to expect from the process, it could benefit from articulating more explicitly its overarching objectives. More attention ought also to be put to the recording and divulgation of results as well as monitoring and evaluation in general, tasks that could be delegated to the Technical Secretariat. In the area of international cooperation it will be important for the process to reinvent itself in the light of the global trends and commitments for aid effectiveness. In the area of human rights the process could benefit from a continued close support by the international community, including the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in order to facilitate the often difficult relations between the government and human rights defenders. A focus towards actions and solutions rather than diagnostics of the situation could be helpful.

The London Cartagena Bogotá process has showed remarkable resilience and ability to engage the parties in dialogue even on very sensitive topics. All parties benefit from having access to a mechanism where differences can be voiced in an orderly manner. It would be interesting to explore the possibility to use the process mechanisms for the facilitation in other situations where the problem essentially is the breach of communication and dialogue.