

Maria Duran  
Cypress Bay High School  
Weston, FL  
Colombia, Armed Conflict

### **Colombia: The Aftermath of the Armed Conflict**

The Colombian armed conflict between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC as they are commonly referred to and the Colombian government spanned for more than 50 years with violent deaths numerous disappearances in the rural and urban landscape of Colombia. Despite all Colombia suffering in the armed conflict, FARC has occupied vast jungle and dense for over half a decade because of their control in the illegal Coca production. To maintain the land production of the FARC, they took over the rural terrain, they displaced millions of farmers and their families. The civil conflict reached a deal under President Juan Manuel Santos in 2016, vowing for peace among the government and the guerilla forces. In her analysis, June S. Beittel revealed the five principles that drove negotiations between both groups revolving around disarmament and political and economic integration of FARC members back into urban society. Under the peace deal, those who remained marginalized by the same rebels for half a century would get government aid to build up land and economy (Beittel, 2015). However, after 3 years after the conclusion of the accords, the rural population of Colombia remains unstable and in ruins due to government's inability to deliver their promises, These families face the difficult aftermath of despair and poverty, while former guerilla members enjoy a life in government. This paper will examine the effects of the aftermath of the armed conflict on family life and food security of the rural population of Colombia. Before finally, proposing possible recommendations to solve the challenges faced as a result of the end of the armed conflict.

Colombia is the only South American country bordering the Caribbean and Pacific Oceans. Spanning 1,138,910 square kilometers (Nations Encyclopedia), Colombia is the fourth largest country in South America. Their population tells a similar story, with about 49,760,00 people. A larger percentage of the population lives in urban cities such as Bogota, Cali, and Medellin. Meanwhile, only 23.29% of the population live in rural areas (World Bank, 2016). Since most of the population is centered in cities, all transportation, government, and medical resources are centered in the cities. Those that reside in the rural landscape depend on the urban cities for adequate resources (hospitals, law offices, and supermarkets). The average family in the rural population has been cut off from the urban landscape because of the armed conflict; those that live in rural areas are not able to access food or health resources as the divide between the urban and rural landscapes makes life in Colombia significantly difficult.

Despite Colombia being majority urban, the country uses 40.26% of the total land area, cultivating a series of vegetables and fruits in the nutrient-rich land (World Bank, 2015). In fact, The Convention on Biological Diversity explains that Colombia is home to the richest land holding over 10% of the Earth's biodiversity. The uniqueness of biodiversity allows a wide range of crops to be planted. there are, however, large discrepancies in rural life. Only 57% of local farmers hold 2% of the land; meanwhile, the rest of the rich land is used for commercial exports and illegal crop cultivation. As a result, the average family is a rural farmer who only owns small parcels of land not enough to sustain themselves, or form

part of the three million displaced rural workers affected by the illicit Coca Trade (New Agriculturalist, 2010).

The aftermath of the armed conflict in Colombia has immensely impacted the lives of the rural population, the ones who were put at the most risk. Out of the 32 departments, the FARC occupied an estimated 15, mainly in the departments of Putumayo, Huila, Cauca, Choco, and Nariño (McDermont, 2018). In these departments, the average rural family is cut off from food supplies, from average healthcare, and often face tough food insecurity as a result. For example, as a part of the war, the FARC left landmines, claiming more than 11,000 injuries in the past decade (Beaubien, 2017). The landmines act as a major barrier that typical rural families face to access nutritious food, having to risk their lives to seek out food. The 2016 agreement did vow to seek remaining landmines, however, still fails to acknowledge that remnants continue to impact rural communities.

Although the conflict has been resolved, promises of the 2016 Peace Accords of rural development have yet to reach the rural population (Moloney, 2019). The agreement reached was to grant land titles to the farmers that have been displaced, and promote road construction to allow people living in rural landscapes to have access to roads in order to retrieve nutritious food. However, trends are worsening as the government lack coordinated ways to provide government services to the remote rural areas that were affected by the armed conflict.

With the 2016 Peace Agreement, the FARC promised to turn over their weapons and end fighting; however, what the accords failed to consider were the revolutionary guerilla members that remained in the jungle. Ironically, the end of the FARC created more instability with the emergence of more rebel guerilla groups (Moloney, 2019). The agreement lacked in protecting the rural population of a looming threat of those guerilla members that refused to end fighting. Those rebels continue to create violence in the rural regions, inhibiting the promised rural regions to have access to nutritious opportunities.

The first steps to aid the areas that have been long neglected are to hold the Colombian government responsible for their plan to rebuild the rural landscape. In order to shift what The Guardian calls “pretty promises” made by the Colombian government to attainable reform in the rural departments, the international community must be involved and extend the aid promises (Brodzinsky, 2016). Here, the United Nations can urge various countries to participate in helping those Colombians affected by the aftermath. First, to guarantee that everyone has access to food, the international community must invest in the World Food Programme Country Strategy focusing on five strategic results which will ensure the accessibility to food, no one suffers from malnutrition, supporting local farmers, providing sustainable food sources, and strengthening local governments to ensure the implementation of initiatives and plans (WFP, 2019). The impact of this aid would be the growth of local economies and increased opportunities to obtain reliable healthy foods. Although the plan has been effective as it outlines that \$161.24 million (in USD) would be invested over the course of 5 years, the challenges that arise with the plan is the possibility of corruption, and the escalation an armed conflict with the remaining rebels in the rural terrain. Corruption has been embedded in Colombia’s history; therefore, the common pattern can find itself in the aftermath process then hurting the investments into the rural areas that have been affected. However, to combat this barrier there must be a international oversight committee in the UN to ensure all the funds are being used to support local home-grown feeding.

Aside from the international community, non-profit organizations or NGOs must be involved to support local farmers with initiatives and projects to stimulate local production of food, ensuring safer and healthier alternatives for the Colombia rural population. A similar plan has been implemented in the Democratic Republic of Congo, with the non-profit of PEREZ-CV, referring to the English acronym of the Training and Socio-Economic Reinsertion programme for Ex-Combatants and Other Vulnerable Sectors, the group operates in North Kivu, an area affected by the armed conflict in DRC, where they sponsor an initiative to sustainably train ex-combatants and other groups who have been left displaced by the conflict. The most notable achievement of PEREZ-CV is the training of a collective group of individuals affected by the civil war to produce locally grown garden products ensuring that the new farmers will create reliable sources for nutrition, improving food security in their local community (Peace Insight, 2017). Just like in Congo, aid by NGOs in Colombia will contribute to the development of vulnerable areas by providing training for the displaced to develop plans to implement innovative food and nutrition models. The challenge the NGOs face in Colombia (similar to the problem that arose in Congo) is the culture of violence in the rural areas that have been created as a result of the decades of fighting. Since the conflict spanned for more than 50 years, the rural landscape finds it difficult to recover from the brutalities that occurred. The challenge to recover is stemmed from the fact that violence continues to run rampant with gangs who are trying to obtain control of the illicit coca production (Dickinson, 2018). This, in turn, inhibits the aid efforts to have success in the vulnerable landscape, making it difficult for the efforts to reach the greater population that has been affected. To combat the challenges, NGOs must work with the local government to continue the aerial spraying on crops used to produce cocaine that was halted in 2015, which will decrease the violence to get all hands on the coca crop (Neuman, 2015). As a result, the spraying will decrease coca production which will encourage grassroots organizations to support local farmers to cultivate nutritional crops.

The agreements of the 2016 Peace Accords ended the conflict in Colombia, yet the fight for justice is far from over. Still, the marginalized face displacement and food insecurity in more than 15 departments; as a result, the aftermath of the armed conflict is a difficult reality which the government must work to improve. First, by taking account of their inability to deliver the promises they agreed on 3 years ago and then, working with the international community to support the growth of the local areas. After examining the effects of the aftermath of the armed conflict on family life and food security of the rural population of Colombia, and proposing possible recommendations to solve the challenges faced as a result of the end of the armed conflict, it is imperative to realize that the armed conflict will not reach an end unless the vulnerable have dependable access to stable food sources.

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