Youth, Peace and Security Program

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Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security: Medellín Case Study
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Introduction

This is a case study that sheds light on some of the unique and effective peacebuilding initiatives by and for youth in the city of Medellín, Colombia. We have been fortunate to know and work with these youth leaders for more than three years. Their projects have a much longer history with deeper roots from way before we met them. Their work was born out of necessity and their continued efforts come out of grit, determination and belief that they have the ability to make a better world for youth, their communities and future generations.

We will first set the context by highlighting some specific characteristics of Medellín and how it came to be a place known for its beauty, but also its narco trafficking and violence. We will then talk about the methodology we used in gathering this data and other aspects of our research, such as audience selection, data collection and analysis, and findings in response to the questions posed in this progress study. We will close by connecting our findings to the five pillars of the Security Council Resolution 2250 and recommendations for future initiatives.

Part of our purpose and joy in creating this report is to showcase some of the wonderful and energy giving peacebuilding projects the youth we have encountered in Medellín have been doing. Their creativity, ability to work together in collaboration and hope in the future is something to be shared globally as a step toward mutual growth and learning.

City of Medellín

Medellín is a city of magnificent contrasts and peculiarities. In the 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium, following the "Washington Consensus," when most countries along the Andean corridor were undergoing the revival of an emerging political left, Colombia, and particularly Medellín, was advancing a distinct path of state formation. At the same time that many radical populists from the left were being elected along the Andes and redirecting the economies of their countries, Medellín was undergoing a dramatic economic boom. Before the crash of the housing market in the United States, "levels of high-rise construction in Medellín surpassed those of Los Angeles and New York combined [...] the country's largest conglomerates and over seventy foreign enterprises have their Colombian headquarters in Medellín," and since 2005, "over a dozen international business conferences have been held there annually, generating more than $100 million in investment and business deals annually" (Hylton, 2010. pg, 338).

This same prosperous and thriving location, years earlier, was a very different place. It was characterized in the setting of the book by Alonzo Salazar (1990), a journalist who

was also a mayor of Medellín, titled "No Nacimos Pa' Semilla" (Born to Die in Medellín). During the late 1970s and 1980s the city was recognized for being the home of the Medellín Cartel and its infamous capo, Pablo Escobar. The city also became the homicide capital of the world, reporting 55,000 people murdered between 1990 and 2002. The objects of murder were mainly young men (Cardona, et al, 2005). This same city also saw the birth of Fernando Botero—whose depictions of torture of Abu Ghraib gained recognition around the world, and whose voluptuous sculptures of fruits, animals and people reside in the city center, suggesting perhaps, in a piercing metaphor, the voluptuous complexity that embraces Medellin.

Elevated on the Andes, in the Aburra Valley, lays Medellín, the capital of the department of Antioquia. It is the second largest city in Colombia, and since its foundation in 1675, has been recognized for its elevated spirit of entrepreneurship among its people and for vast commercial activity. The city was founded by aristocratic families who were fed up with paying tribute to maintain the bureaucracy in Santa Fe (now Bogota), and decided to take political and economical distance. Because Medellín was to a large extent isolated from the perils of La Violencia during the 50s, and due to the growth of the textile industry in the city, many people from every corner of Colombia, fleeing the civil war or looking for economical betterment, started populating the city. As time passed and the city prospered economically, the elite in Medellín pushed the working class people out of town towards the suburbs growing in the northeastern and northwestern slopes of the city and to this day most people of the lower socioeconomic classes and internally displaced persons live in these areas (Fisher-Yoshida, et al., 2017).

In the beginning of the 1970s the textile manufacturing industry experienced a major decline due in part to the rise of the textile industry in Asia and Indo-China. First marijuana, and then cocaine trafficking became the basis of the economical distribution of capital and culture in the city for years to come. In fact, "the trading of these commodities gave the criminals from the lower and middle classes chances to mimic the life of the privileged class [...] drug trafficking allowed the unleashing of a deep desire for material wellbeing and the access to power, which historically had been denied to everyone but the aristocratic families" (Fisher-Yoshida, et al, 2017, p. 7). As a result of a new economically emergent class and the establishment of powerful drug cartels, violence erupted. In fact, as Salazar (1990) depicts in his book, marginal barrios became settings for gang formation and in consecutives waves of conflict and violence the peripheral neighborhoods of Medellín were governed first by urban guerrilla militias and then by right wing paramilitary groups.

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Also see annual homicide figures for 1981-96 Jaramillo, Ana, et al., "En la encrusijada: conflict y cultura politica en los noventa (Medellín, Corporacion Region, 1998), 110-11

Important actors in this historical drama are the youth. Not so much as proactive actors of violence as much as they are targets of violence. The conflict that produces violence in Medellín is intractable, and in spite of several attempts to reduce violence through urban peace talks with militias and armed groups, violence always finds a way to recycle itself. These conflicts are intractable because they are protracted over a period of time, cannot be resolved through traditional means of conflict resolution interventions and they have taken on a self-perpetuating life of their own beyond the initial causes that may not even be easily identified any more (Coleman, 2011). Furthermore, today illegal armed groups that have ties with powerful networks of drug trafficking, show their presence and dictate the social lives of people in the peripheral neighborhoods of the city, especially the most isolated ones up in the hills, that are gateways to the drug routes that lead to the northern coast of Colombia (Fisher-Yoshida, et al., 2017).

However, as much as youth have taken part in the production - more as victims than not - of an intractable urban conflict, they have been actors of resistance to such conflict. Since the 1980s there have been collective responses by youth in different locations around the city to the violent urban conflict. Many of these social mobilization processes, some artistic in nature, are intended to create conditions of possibility and hope in contrast to the harsh conditions caused by the conflict, so that those historically vulnerable to class and racial discrimination, will have access to more peaceful and dignified lives. Many youth community leaders, social organizers and artists in Medellín, have dedicated their lives to finding the means to contain, transform, and subvert the problems associated with protracted violence that have been with them since the 1980s and which at times seems unending. To these responses to violence and conflict we want to dedicate the following pages.

Research Initiative

We have been working with youth leaders in Medellín for more than three years. In that time we have met many youth leaders who have deep passion and determination to make their lives and the lives of those around them better. In the process of trying to make better worlds without violence and deterring other youth from engaging and perpetuating violence in their communities, some have had truly remarkable progress in their initiatives. The majority of the youth initiatives we have encountered are based in the arts. What these efforts have proven over and over again is that art and culture can bring people together. It provides a platform for youth to express themselves, build meaningful relationships with others, and engage in wholesome activities that distract them from being idle or attracted to gang activity.

Audience and Methodology

Our approach in working with these youth leaders is always participatory. We want to

learn about their methodology and the rationale behind why they do what they do. In return, we share our knowledge and skills to enhance what they are doing for greater effect. In this way we co-create knowledge through participatory action research (Park, 2001). It is as John Paul Lederach (1995) advances in his work, a prescriptive and elicitive approach. An elicitive approach is when we elicit from the local players the approaches they are using and have been using to learn more about what has been working. These are more often than not organic approaches that emerged over the years. Some may have been adapted from previous learning, and the main point is that they are local and culturally sensitive.

A prescriptive approach, on the other hand, includes ways of addressing conflict transformation that have been developed from outside the local context. They are approaches that have been proven effective in other environments or through research validation. They are not naturally adapted to the local context without an intention to do so.

In our efforts to build partnerships with local youth leaders and to impart knowledge that is relevant, we believe in taking a combination of elicitive and prescriptive approaches. This is the basis of our relationships and it has worked to develop trust and openness. We believe this way in which we have been working has served this study well because when we convened several focus groups to ask the framing questions that guided this study, there was an overwhelmingly positive response to want to participate. Our initial meetings over the years with youth leaders and their initiatives followed a snowball effect (Creswell, 2012). We had some initial contacts and through them we began to meet other youth leaders. Our knowledge of these youth leaders and their work provided us with a mapping of some of the more effective and sustainable initiatives taking place in Medellin. It is based on this familiarity that we began selecting specific focus groups of youth leaders.

We organized three focus groups. Our original intent was to have five focus groups and we reached out to all five, but two of them could not be organized within the timeframe we had established. Each focus group was from a different area of the city known as comunas. These areas have all been known for their violence, both historically and less so in the present, depending on which gangs are in conflict with one another. Focus group one had two young women ages 25 and 29 and they were from comuna 8; focus group two had two men ages 25 and about 40, and one woman about 35 from comuna 5; focus group three had four men ages 19-30 from comuna 13. The four questions we used to guide us in the focus groups are the questions posed for all of the case studies in the Progress Study:

- What are the main peace and security challenges that young women and men face, and how do these impact their lives (locally, nationally, regionally or globally)?

- What factors prevent or inhibit the involvement of young women and men in building peace and contributing to security? And what factors could promote and support young people's active involvement in building peace, preventing violence and contribution to

positive social cohesion in their communities, societies and institutions?

- What are the peacebuilding and violence prevention activities, initiatives and projects being undertaken by young people, and what is their impact?

- What do young people recommend to enhance the contribution and leadership of young men and women to building sustainable peace and preventing violence? Do they have particular views on how their governments, State institutions, civil society organizations, media, or the international community, could help to support these contributions?

We know that the age range for some of the focus group participants is beyond the 29 years old limit suggested by the study. However, we felt that the people above 30 who we included have been working in the field for more than 15 years, with youth, and have a vast amount of knowledge from which we can all learn. Their contributions were significant.

Process

For focus groups one and two, we started our sessions posing the first two questions. We gave them time to first think through what we asked them and then we used a model in which they were already familiar due to our previous work with them. There is a practical theory known as Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM), that takes a communication perspective about how we make the social worlds within which we live, through our communication (Pearce, 2007). CMM is also used in research in a variety of ways, one being participatory, and we had them using one of the heuristics, the Daisy Model. In the center of the daisy we asked them to write their names and on all of the petals surrounding the center (any number they chose based on how many responses they had) they wrote the different peace and security challenges they had as young men and women.

They shared their petals in a rotating sequence so we heard from all the participants as we went around the group. The sessions took about three hours each and because they were very tiring toward the end, we did not ask questions three and four at that time. We went back to them on a separate occasion to find out about their peacebuilding and violence prevention activities and what they recommend for sustainability.

When it came time for focus group three, we decided to skip over questions one and two. We made this decision because: there was richness in the data collected from the first two groups in response to identifying the peace and security issues and challenges they faced in peacebuilding; there was much overlap in content so we felt as though we reached a saturation point and that we would not gain significant new information from the third focus group in response to these questions; and we noticed a difference in energy levels when we asked the third and fourth questions about their initiatives rather than a description of the violence and security issues they faced on a regular basis. Our lives shape the narratives we

tell and our narratives shape how we live our lives (Fisher-Yoshida, et al., 2017). When we tell stories of positive and constructive growth it gives energy and elevates us, rather than rehashing stories of violence that drain us and prevent us from advancing. We also focused on the positive efforts being done as is in alignment with the focus of this study and not to continuously belabor all the violence and challenges, which are already known and well documented. We wanted to glean lessons learned from the initiatives and results being accomplished.

This group was also asked to use the CMM Daisy Model, to place themselves in the center and then on the surrounding petals to write in the different elements of what makes their peacebuilding efforts effective and how these can be sustainable. They drew a daisy, but then took turns adding words to a list they created of 13 elements, describing each one as they went along. One of the men was a rapper and after they collectively came up with this list of qualities he put them together into a rhyme using freestyle. We included it below both in the original Spanish and then with the English translation. It was an inspiring process to watch them organically taking turns and creating in the moment.

Data Collection and Analysis

The majority of our data was collected through the use of the Daisy Model as an initial prompt and then a combination of free flowing and guided conversation. There did not seem to be any hesitation on the part of the participants to contribute as we already had previously established relationships, there was trust amongst us and they were eager to tell their stories. We will share the findings in three groupings. Part I will be the findings in response to the first two questions, which outlines the violence and security issues youth face and the obstacles for youth to be involved in peacebuilding and violence prevention activities. Part II will be focused on the second two questions about peacebuilding initiatives the youth leaders have been involved in with specific illustrations from all three comunas (5, 8, 13) that the youth in the focus groups represented. In Part III we will then interpret these findings through the lenses of the five pillars of Security Council Resolution 2250: Participation, Protection, Prevention, Partnership, and Disengagement and Reintegration. We will conclude with recommendation.

Findings
Part I: Violence and Security Challenges Youth Face

These are the main themes captured from focus groups one and two. We grouped them into the categories of Armed Actors, Economic Disadvantage, and Other Influences.

Armed Actors
Presence of gangs, armed actors, absence of State. Many youth feel that the police are corrupt and they do not feel safe with their presence. The gangs and other armed actors delegitimize

the State as they fulfill some of the State functions, such as patrolling the streets in the neighborhoods. They are present, while the State is felt to be absent.

Community has naturalized violence. The level of expected and tolerated violence in these communities is high due to the frequency and duration of violence on multiple scales. Many do not even respond to petty crimes and lower levels of violence because it is such a common occurrence, almost as if they had become numb to its existence. The youth are often targets of this violence and sometimes perpetrators, as well.

Invisible borders. Gangs, narco traffickers and paramilitary groups have territories they control and the boundaries between these groups are ever changing. It can be dangerous to cross borders when the conflict between two rival factions escalates and many innocent youth and community members are caught in the crossfire of their disputes. These invisible borders limit movement and this affects youth being able to leave their home, go to school, see their families or go to work.

Economic Disadvantage
Stigmatization. There are certain areas of the city that are looked down upon and when applying for employment youth from these areas are stigmatized when they mention their address. This puts them at an unfair disadvantage and aids in perpetuating cycles of poverty and limited opportunities for advancement of youth socially, economically and in education.

Economic instability. There is a lack of economic opportunity for many of the youth from these lower socioeconomic areas because business and industry is limited as violence is a deterrent. Therefore, they are dependent on State-run initiatives that employ local youth and if those municipally funded programs are not available they have no employment. If they are fortunate to find work it is for limited periods of time because municipal programs have limited funding, priorities change and competition is steep.

Increased budget for security. The city has become reinforced with a stronger security presence including daily helicopter surveillance over the neighborhoods. The limited city budget causes a decrease in social programs with the increase in security efforts. This means fewer employment opportunities for the youth who depend on municipal funding for social programs in which they can be employed. They also feel the impact as recipients of fewer social programs.

Other Influences and Limitations
Gender issues for women. Young women are responsible for maintaining the home and that includes housework, cooking and tending to babies and children. If they do want to be educated or participate in community-run programs they need to first complete their chores before any activities outside the home. This can be difficult and complicated, especially

if their chores take a long time and are tiring. It takes a great deal of determination to participate in these outside pursuits. Many young women become pregnant at a young age. In some cases they are raped and in some they become impregnated as a way to be supported by men who have regularly paying jobs, such as police and bus drivers.

Role of the media. The media promotes consumerism in youth so they crave products that they then have to find money to purchase. With fewer employment opportunities they may turn to petty theft in order to purchase these desired advertised items. Some of this petty theft can turn violent. There is an absence of relevant news in the media that would alternatively inform youth more deeply about their situations and from which they can learn.

This is the reality of everyday living for many of the youth in Medellin and the challenges they face in trying to make better lives for themselves and others. With so many obstacles in the way it is easy to see why many youth become discouraged and succumb to keeping their heads down, not making waves, and trying to stay as safe as possible. Yet in spite of all of these violent and systemic deterrents there are youth who manage to find openings that allow them to identify ways to be relevant and productive. We will share some of these stories now in Part II of our findings.

Part II: Youth Interventions in Peacebuilding.

We will expand on examples of peacebuilding interventions by youth from each of the three comunas we explored, 13, 5, 8.

Comuna 13 case: Casa Kolacho.

"Un días estábamos tristes en un callejón

Pusimos todo nuestro amor, mejoró nuestra intención

Y hoy en día gracias a dios algo cambió

Estamos en estos barrios haciendo un proceso de transformación
Ha sido difícil llevar esa información, pero ha mejorado la comunicación
Tenemos una convicción clara y directa

Hemos aprendido a romper las fronteras violentas que nos imponían
Hemos aceptado tantas cosas que decían,
Pero hemos mejorado, hemos perdido la amnesia

Tenemos mejor memoria, y eso es lo que nos ha dado la inteligencia
Para poder vencer obstáculos

Hoy calculamos cada uno de nuestros pasos,

Preveemos, tenemos todo esto y lo damos
Ahora queremos, amamos, a todos nuestros hermanos

Hemos mejorado cuantas manos hemos estrechado,

Algunas las perdimos pero de ese hemos aprendido

Y en el camino, gracias a la vida, no nos hemos perdido.-
-El Zorro, Kasa Kolacho, Comuna 13

"In an alley we lived in sorrow one day.
All our love was invested, and our intentions improved

Today, thanks to God, something changed.

Within these "hoods" we are paving the way for a process of transformation.

Though our communication has improved, it has been difficult to spread this information.
Our convictions are clear and firm.

We were taught to believe in violent borders, but we learned to break them.

We were coerced into many things imposed,
but we have improved, we destroyed our
amnesia.

We have memory now, and this has given us the intelligence and the tactics,
to subvert so
many obstacles imposed.

Today, every step we take, we take it firmly.
We visualize.
Everything we've gained with great effort we share it;
today we cherish,
we love, all of our brothers.

We have enhanced so many hands we have embraced,

We have lost some, but from that we have learned a bunch.

And on this journey, thanks to life, we found the way to not be lost."

--El Zorro, Kasa Kolacho, Comuna 13

The language the Colombian government has used as a way to show its presence and establish a mechanism of control in historically marginalized communities, has been for the most part, the language of violence. On October 16, 2002, thousands of soldiers and police, accompanied by "hooded informants," arrived in SUVs to some parts of comuna 13 following an order of the President of Colombia, Alvaro Uribe Velez. This event, known as Operacion Orion, marked the beginning of a massive urban military intervention in which "launching urban warfare against the FARC and the ELN [...] law enforcement used machine guns, rifles, and Blackhawk helicopters" (Civico 2016, p. 171). This unprecedented urban military intervention lasted two months and according to the Center for Investigation and Popular Education (CINEP), one civilian was killed and thirty-eight were wounded; eight civilians "were disappeared" by members of the military and the paramilitary; three-hundred fifty-nine residents were detained, of which 185 were taken arbitrarily, and "there was massive forced displacement from the inner city" (p.171) . After the massive devastation that this operation left behind, the people of comuna 13 are finding ways to recuperate and heal.

Among the community-based initiatives that both intend to construct a community healing process from years of political violence, and find ways to resist the violence they experience today, lays Casa Kolacho. Casa Kolacho is the expression of a shared commitment to use the hip-hop culture as a way to do community building. What is now a school of urban art was once the dream of Hector Pacheco, "Kolacho," a community leader who instilled among the youth of his community the idea that urban art must be put to the service of communities

in a way that reflects the community's values, beliefs, sentiments, and desires. Casa Kolacho houses passionate young graffiti artists, musicians, rappers, photospheres, and DJ's from comuna 13.

One of their most recognized initiatives is the GraffiTour. This initiative has brought people from all over Medellin, Colombia, and the world, to look at the magnificent pieces of public art that decorate this sector of the city that has experienced brutal violence, but that due to its resilience thrives in peaceful ways. The objective of this initiative is twofold. First, the tour serves to showcase the way community members are in conversation with graffiti artists. They are remembering the history of the comuna, as well as, how they are responding to the violent conflict, while imagining the future, using non-violent, aesthetic, and political language. Second, the graffiti tour is designed to reorganize and strengthen the economy of the community.

One of the principles of Casa Kolacho's director, "Jeihhco," is that graffiti is a peaceful way to respond to the language of violence. Thus, they painted graffiti that depicts Operacion Mariscal, a governmental military operation very much like Orion. The story says that when the violent strikes began, civilians came out of their houses waving white sheets calling for a ceasefire. The grafiteros who painted this graffiti became acquainted with this memory a posteriori, from the testimony of community members who experienced it firsthand. The graffiti represents this story with elephants, infants and adults, waving white handkerchiefs. What these grafiteros are also experiencing is the memory of the aftermath of Mariscal including the recuperation processes, the resistance movements that were born, and the physical and social devastation of their neighborhood. They represented this with a phoenix (rising from the ashes) also holding a handkerchief, but not waiving it like the elephants, rather, holding it towards her heart symbolizing the longing for peacefulness with which comuna 13 was reborn after Mariscal. (See photo above).

Some blocks away from the Marsical mural, there is a sophisticated saying, Desarmemos las palabras, which in English means "let's disarm our language." On the bus ride back to Casa Kolacho from the graffiti tour, El Zorro wanted to tell us about the history of that saying and mentioned that las palabras tienen poder, words have power. In talking about the graffiti we had just seen, he tells us what happened in the neighborhood when the governnet called voters for a plebiscite to endorse the peace treaty between the FARC and the government that resulted from the Havana peace talks. When the referendum did not pass some people became frustrated with these unexpected results. One frustrated graffiti artist in comuna 13 painted a graffiti saying Este pueblo no quiere la paz, these people do not want peace. When some community members saw it they reacted by covering it with another saying, Si queremos la paz, pero una paz digna, we want peace, but one that is dignified. This encounter opened up a conversation in the community about the meaning of peace. A "battle" of words and ideas amongst the community members gave rise to this

new agreed upon saying, Desarmemos las palabras.

Graffiti like this, that depicts different points of the history of the comuna, abound in comuna 13. And given the prosperous nature of the GraffiTour, members of Casa Kolacho have encouraged community members to strengthen their entrepreneurial skills. For example, when someone takes the Tour, that person finds homemade ice-cream, barbershops, corner stores, souvenirs, and music, at their disposal. In this way, the initiative being developed by the youth members of Casa Kolacho is strengthening the social texture of the community by strengthening its material/economical basis, as well as, contributing to the healing process by an aesthetic process of remembering. In a place that once disputed the either/or dichotomy of socialism/capitalism today reins the synthesis of the two. The best of both worlds.

Back in Casa Kolacho, talking with Mike, El Zorro, Jeihhco and Esneider B-boy, they told us about the principles that inform their work as part of creating the Daisy Model. They listed these words on the blackboard alternating between one person writing a word and describing its relevance, and then passing the chalk to the next person until all of these words were written: creativity, love, memory, respect, acceptance, communication, sharing, difference, replication, improvization, resolution, and learning. After a pause examining these words, Mike said Es por medio de la comunicación efectiva que se alcanza lo que una comunidad necesita . . . un debate abierto de comunidad donde se acepte y respete la diferencia es el único camino para resolver conflictos. (Only through effective communication among communities, people meet their collective needs. An open community debate where differences are acknowledged and respected is the only way to resolve conflicts.) Many conflicts in the world today are made up of different perspectives that are not commonly understood or respected. Esneider added, Todo empieza por el reconcimiento del otro, (Everything must begin by acknowledging the other) and Jeihhco closed with entendemos que las palabras tienen poder, y por eso poco a poco, las estamos desarmando. (We understand that words have power, and thus, little by little, we are disarming them.)

Comuna 5 case: Mesa de derechos humanos, Marcha por la vida.

Comuna 5, Medellín, has historically taken numerous collective actions as a response to the lack of services in their community as a result of the government's ineffectiveness in its role as the administrator of these services. The residents of this area, and especially the youth, have historically been the defenders and guarantors of their civil rights, filling the void of the lack of the government's institutional presence. The Mesa de Derechos Humanos (the table of human rights) has been the principal precursor of a social mobilization that strives to demand and defend the right to have access to integral human security for the residents of comuna 5.

As a case in point, during the beginning of 2016, in the Candelaria neighborhood, one of the most affected sectors of the city (reporting 15 murders in the first two months of that year), a seven-year-old girl was wounded by having been the "point of destination" of a "lost" bullet in a crossfire between rival gangs. Members of the community who were fed up with the persistence of violence in their neighborhood, reacted by organizing a public demonstration. They did not have effective organization and support for this so the Mesa de Derechos Humanos, served as the organizing platform. They wanted to support the manifestation of dismay that would take force and be effective not only within the comuna, but throughout the city.

Members of the Mesa de Derechos Humanos with the support of members of the community called the residents of the comuna and from around the city to plan a march. Many social organizations and civil society led by youth, from comuna 5 and from every corner of Medellin, made their presence at what they called La Marcha por la Vida (A March for Life), to show their solidarity towards the people of Candelaria. Collectives from comuna 5 such as, MTR (Movimiento Tierra en Resistencia), Colectivo de Mujeres Tejiendo Red, Eskuela de Arte en Resistencia, Mesa de Discapacitados, and Copacos, joined forces to make this march possible. In the midst of violence and death, residents of comuna 5 celebrated life and demanded the right to live in a state of peace through a feast of art.

These social actors, through direct action, demanded the gangs cease hostilities amongst them amid the unarmed community. From the local government they demanded that the Medellin City Hall secure and guarantee the defense of human rights.They were successful in making both the gangs and the municipality take action on their demands. On their part, the gangs ceased their crossfire confrontations that put residents of the community in danger. The City Hall allocated police officers to the area headed by General Angel Mendoza, to guarantee the transition from an armed conflict to a more peaceful state.

This collective social mobilization resulted in three months of peace, reporting zero violent deaths, in this sector of the city. This motivated the residents to go out to the streets and perform their right to move around freely and make full use of public spaces. More manifestations demanding access and guarantees to human rights continued to take place after the march due to the confidence that this initial event produced in the residents of the community. This collective initiative, motivated by youth community leaders, exemplifies the potential that vulnerable communities have to transform their environments, but also shows some of the limitations. After the third month of the absence of violent deaths, a person was murdered.

The rise of violence that would begin after three months of peace did not surprise the members of the community. In fact, the La Candelaria neighborhood, just like many other neighborhoods of Medellín, have become settings where peace is experienced, you may say, as a form of "tense tranquility." The youth members of comuna 5's Mesa de D.D.H.H, understand the dynamics of violence in their community as a range of mountains that, just like the Andes, has its peaks and its valleys. For them, the state of peace that resulted from the massive social mobilization of youth leaders is like a valley; a valley, however, that ends when it meets the next slope of the mountain range. Because the invisible borders, or "risk borders," as Sara and Juan call them, are present even when rival gangs put their arms down. For example, a simple misunderstanding about what side of the street certain people ought to walk on can trigger disputes that inevitably usher in yet another peak of violence. Violence has been normalized as something that naturally occurs when these valleys reach the slopes of the next set of mountains.

The March for Life was able to attract the attention of governmental institutions in an unprecedented way. The youth members of Mesa de D.D.H.H established channels of communication between them and important actors of the police, like General Angel Mendoza. This fact made community members realize that these kinds of collective actions are powerful tools. When the violence began to escalate again, community leaders, such as the president of the Junta de Accion Comunal (a local

political body that represents the neighborhood in the City Hall) appealed to the youth members of Mesa de D.D.H.H asking them to communicate the situation to governmental officials. Meetings were arranged, conversations began, but because the structural dynamics that sustain violence, such as the "risk borders," are not transformed, violent deaths continue to take a toll on this community.

If peacebuilding initiatives are not supported by local governments and the international community in ways that makes them sustainable through time, it is difficult to produce a real state of peace. It is only through the production of sustainable peacebuilding initiatives that contribute to the strengthening of the social fabric of a community, that the generation of a positive coexistence and effective peace building program is possible.

Mesa de Derechos Humanos was able to articulate this social action and make the demands of a community be heard and acted upon, by activating its citywide network of social activists. Through the Marcha por la Vida, among other collective actions, Mesa de Derechos Humanos is being able to secure, little by little, the human rights of members of comuna 5 that have been violated since the demobilization of the AUC in 2003.

Comuna 8 Case: AR-T C8, Territorio de vida.

Comuna 8 is located in the most eastern part of the center of Medellín, Colombia, and it has been marked historically by urban violence, illegal armed groups, and drug-trafficking. The social turmoil that the presence of these factors has created has pushed some people of this territory to empower themselves in order to improve the social conditions of the people therein.

Given these facts, the Youth Network, a group of youth leaders, has constructed a social project named C8 Territorio de Vida (C8 territory of/for life) with the idea of giving support to strengthen the youth and artistic social organizations that are present throughout comuna 8. Their initiatives range from artistic and cultural formation, understanding of historical and cultural memory, to youth leadership formation. These organizations have contributed to the transformation of violent contexts within their territory.

The members of the Youth Network identified art and culture as powerful tools to confront social and political conflicts, and as such, set themselves the task of promoting artistic and cultural initiatives that were already present in the comuna. They designed the social project, C8 Territorio de Vida (C8 territory of life), with the idea of providing support to stren-

gthen the existing youth artistic and cultural social organizations, but that due to the conflict remained very isolated from each other. In the process of designing this initiative they noticed that youth groups and individuals around the comuna were developing projects in areas of artistic and cultural formation, historical and cultural memory, and youth

leadership formation.

In December 2012, the first C8 Territorio de vida event took place. Each of the youth groups and individuals that participated in this first event demonstrated their work in their territory within the comuna. One group demonstrated juggling, another had clowns, another read poetry, another painting, so that a large part of the comuna was populated with artistic and cultural demonstrations. Each group lit candles forming one word that best represented them. One group had the word art, another memory, another culture, so that night the comuna became a parade of lights, words, and deeds that showed its residents how diverse they were, but above all, how united they could become.

C8 Territorio de vida continues to take place every year since its launch in 2012. During this event, Claudia tells us, los niños, las niñas, los adultos, y los viejitos y viejitas, caminan las calles tranquilos y contentos (children, adults, the elderly, walk the streets of comuna 8 with ease and in celebration). This initiative was able to challenge the dominant geopolitical narratives that both illegal armed groups and the government have planted in the social fabric of the residents of comuna 8. At this event, during this parade of celebration, la comuna nos solo se convierte en un territorio de paz, sino tambien en una zona de diversidad en la que sus residentes se dan cuenta del valor que tienen ellos, ellas y su territorio (comuna 8 becomes not only a territory of life but a territory of diversity, and its members, little by little, understand their territory and their lives are worth as much as any other territory or life) claims Kelly.

C8 Territorio de vida strives to bring together individual youth leaders and organizations present within the territory, to execute common projects in order to have an impact in the community as a whole, and also to change the stigmatized image the city has placed upon this territory.

Part III: Security Council Resolution 2250 Pillars

These three examples demonstrate efforts led by youth, that joined community members together to challenge and defy the violence of the armed actors present. They helped change the narrative that dominated the community members' lives so they were able to live and move freely (Fisher-Yoshida, 2014). We will now connect Parts I and II of our findings with the five pillars listed below.

Participation. The three examples of youth led initiatives that we shared are evidence that youth have ideas about how to effectively create peacebuilding movements. Their passion and energy, plus the positive results, keep the momentum going so that the efforts and outcomes are sustainable. Of course, it is also demonstrated, especially in the example of the Mesa de Derechos Humanos in comuna 5, that the State's presence is critical for sustaining peace- building efforts. The effects of these creative ideas need to be sustained and protected through State presence and the institutionalization of human rights.

Protection. We did note that one of the findings in Part I about the violence and security issues youth face, is gender-based violence in the form of rape or lack of access to education and other resources outside the home. We also mentioned the invisible borders or lines that armed actors draw up and that put the lives of youth and their families in danger and disrupt patterns of normal and safe existence. Youth need to be protected and feel the presence of the State that is not corrupt. Several youth told us they trust the local police less than illegal armed actors because of corruption.

Prevention. There are too few efforts and the ones that do provide employment opportunities for youth are not consistent or dependable. The violence also disturbs them receiving an education because they are unable to get to their schools from their homes. Youth are the future and supporting youth will allow them to prosper and thrive. In our many conversations around the city of Medellín with current and former gang members, one point many had in common is that if they had or knew of other choices, they most likely would not have joined gangs.

Partnership. We have found in our work and demonstrated by the wonderful partners we have on the ground and who helped make this report possible, there are different types of knowledge. Youth leaders on the ground have local knowledge that needs to be highly valued and considered in any interventions aimed at youth and improving communities. The balancing of the elicitive and prescriptive approaches mentioned earlier is one model to use to foster this collaboration. Respectfully listening and observing what is taking place provides the insights to identify opportunities to intervene and enhance what is already being done. In addition, when youth feel heard

Disengagement and Reintegration. It is really critical to continue to think of ways to reintegrate youth into communities. It is through the collective that as humans we satisfy our need of belonging. Many of the youth with whom we work, intentionally reach out to former gang members and those on the cusp of becoming gang members, to deter them from gang- related activities. They understand the need for a second chance and do not shy away from this or reject those who have made poor decisions in their lives.

Conclusion

Youth have so much to offer as leaders. We believe good ideas can come from anywhere and our responsibility is to create the conditions that will allow youth to flourish. We need to keep them safe and provide the support and guidance they need as they make their way in the world. There are so many organic initiatives taking place in many locations around the world. We highlighted but three of many in the city of Medellín alone.

Here are specific recommendations for actions steps we believe need to be taken in order to support, secure and promote youth to advance their leadership and place in transforming conflict for a more peaceful society:

Continue to identify what is working well and share that with other youth around the world for mutually beneficial learning. Best practices can be captured and shared by developing programs to teach others the attributes of these successful initiatives. It is also good for those being recognized for their efforts as they gain more self esteem from this acknowledgement. It is a way to reinforce their efforts through building a global network of youth leaders.

We also need to identify the areas in which youth need learning, such as, planning for the future. After living in violent environments for so long, when tomorrow was not guaranteed, it is a challenge to now consider tomorrow, and the next day after that. Many youth leaders frame their initiatives as "events" and find it challenging to plan beyond those points. We need to develop their abilities at setting goals, short- and long-term, based on a strategic plan and to sequence these events to fulfill these goals in alignment with a carefully thoughtout and articulated strategy.

These youth-led initiatives need to be systematically insitutionalized and supported for longer-term sustainability. Resources need to be made available to support the creation, implementation and sustainability of programs that are developed and to keep youth employed. Youth are more valuable to themselves and society as productive and contributing members, which comes from keeping them gainfully employed, especially in meaningful work. This provides economic and social stability and is one of the biggest deterrents to violence.

Stronger presence of State and other services to protect and secure safe living environments for youth. This means there needs to be efforts to curb corruption within the police, for example, so youth can develop trust in State security mechanisms and know that they have their best physical and socialemotional well-being foremost in their strategies and tactics at keeping order. This is another means of deterring gang violence and organically stopping youth from joining in gang activities because they will not need to align themselves with these armed actors as they keep order because of the lack of State presence.

and acknowledged and see themselves represented in initiatives, there is buy-in and a much more likely chance of success and sustainability.

We need to be mindful of how we can successfully reintegrate youth who are in conflict with the law to become constructive members of society. These youth have the ability to contribute to building their communities into safer and more prosperous environments. They can use their experience with violence to deter other youth from becoming involved in it. They need a combination of socioemotional learning and conflict resolution to help rebuild their character and ways of relating with others, while receiving training to develop employable skills to help situate themselves within their communities in a sustainable manner.

We need to make this happen. As cliché as it might sound to say that the youth are our future, it is important to recognize they are also our present, as well. In order to secure a safe and sustainable future youth need and deserve our support.

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