# Education for Reintegration of Ex-Combatants into Civilian Life in Colombia

*An Analysis of Adult Education Programmes in Medellín and Piedecuesta*

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# Abstract

This thesis examines the provision of adult education for ex-combatants from illegal armed groups in Colombia as a governmental strategy to reduce their vulnerability and enhance their reintegration into civilian life. It does so through a comparative analysis of two local institutions, one providing non-formal adult education in the city of Medellín and the other formal adult education in the municipality of Piedecuesta. Guided by qualitative research design and methods and a human rights approach to education, it explores the views of the programme staff and officials as related to, in order to examine the provision of adult education in response to the needs of ex-combatants. Subsequently, perceptions of ex-combatants of their learning experience and its contributions to their reintegration are examined using Paulo Freire's concept of critical consciousness.

The thesis has found that while both institutions make adult education available and accessible for all ex-combatants - fulfilling their right to education - one is set in a wider security strategy of the local government to prevent recidivism. As a result, many resources have been allocated which facilitates employment of qualified teachers, flexibility in scheduling and inclusion of other vulnerable adults. In contrast, the other programme is understood as an opportunity to reduce illiteracy rates, and is not understood within a specific frame of reintegration of ex-combatants. This affects the adaptability of formal education to the needs of ex-combatants, such as flexibility in scheduling.

Fulfilling the right in and through education of ex-combatants is still a challenge in the two institutions. The accelerated learning pedagogy adopted by the non-formal adult education programme in Medellín seems to have a higher impact on ex-combatants' educational attainment than the one in Piedecuesta, although both institutions suffer from insufficient infrastructure, lack of materials and means to assist ex-combatants with special needs education.

On their part, students suggest that their education is a tool to enhance their functionality in society and foster social mobility, increasing their participation in society and empowering them to formulate personal goals with the aim of improving their lives. This includes enabling them to liberate themselves from the problematic status of ex-combatant, and be assimilated as a civilian without experiencing prejudice. In this sense, the programme of non-formal adult

education in Medellín reflects a more effective response to meet ex-combatants' needs for reintegration and reduce their vulnerability.

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# List of Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| ACR | Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración (Colombian Agency for Reintegration) |
| AUC | Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia) |
| CNMH | Centro Nacional de Memoria Historica (National Center for Historical Memory) |
| CRS | Corriente de Renovación Socialista |
| DNP | Departamento Nacional de Planeación (National Planning Department) |
| DANE | Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (National Administrative Department of Statistics) |
| DDR | Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration |
| ELN | Ejército de Liberación Nacional (Nacional Liberation Army) |
| EPL | Ejército Popular de Liberación (Popular Liberation Army) |
| FARC | Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| HDI | Human Development Index |
| IDDRS | Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards |
| IDP | Internally Displaced People |
| IILS | International Institute for Labour Studies |
| ILO | International Labour Organization |
| IOM | International Organization for Migration |
| MAQL | Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame (Quintin Lame Armed Movement) |
| MAPP-OEA | Misión de Apoyo al Proceso de Paz de la Organización de los Estados Americanos (OEA) (Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia of the Organization of the American States (OAS)) |
| MEN | Ministerio de Educación Nacional (Colombian Ministry of Education) |
| M-19 | Movimiento 19 de Abril (19th of April Movement) |
| NGO | Non-Govermental Organization |
| PEI | Proyecto Educativo Institutional (Institutional Educational Project) |
| PPR | Programa de Paz y Reconciliación de la Alcaldía de Medellín (Peace and Reconciliation Programme of the Medellín Major's Office) |
| PRSE | Política Nacional de Reintegración Social y Económica de Grupos Armados Ilegales (National Policy of Economic and Social Reintegration of Illegal Armed Groups) |
| PRT | Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores |
| SENA | Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje (National Training Service) |
| SGP | Sistema General de Participaciones (General System of Transfers) |
| UDHR | Universal Declaration of Human Rights |
| UN | United Nations |
| UP | Unión Patriótica (Patriotic Union) |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |

# 1   Introduction

The reintegration of former combatants into civilian life at the end of a war has been a crucial aspect of peacebuilding processes to ensure sustainable peace and development in conflict affected countries. The provision of education has played a central role in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programmes to facilitate the economic and social reintegration of ex-combatants (Nübler, 1997; Özerdem, 2003; Nilsson, 2005; IDDRS, 2006; Matsumoto, 2008; ILO, 2010a). Previous experiences of DDR programmes have shown that many ex-combatants had limited skills and were lacking basic and further education (IDDRS, 2006). This limits the possibilities of ex-combatants in the competition for employment and livelihood opportunities, and increases the risk that they turn to violence or become involved in criminal activities to earn a living (ILO, 2010a; Brown, 2011).

Education is fundamental to support ex-combatants to have alternatives to violence-based livelihoods. Nübler (1997) points out that education and training have the aim of equipping ex-combatants with relevant skills, knowledge and competencies, to obtain employment opportunities or any other legitimate income generation to support themselves and any dependents, and to enhance their interactions with the community. The United Nations (UN) states that providing adult literacy, adult education and technical-vocational training for young and adult ex-combatants is important both to help them to gain skills and competencies, and to give opportunities for 'reorientation and demilitarization' (IDDRS, 2006, chap. 4.3, p. 27).

However, aspects such as relevance and quality have been a concern in the provision of education for ex-combatants. Watson (2010) points out that some reintegration programmes offered computer based learning in places lacking electricity and too many ex-combatants were trained in the same field so that the supply exceeded the employment demand. For example, in 2003 during the reintegration phase in Liberia, ex-combatants were brought back to their communities but most could not put the vocational skills they learned in the DDR programme into practice which drove them into unemployment and threatened the post-conflict security in the country (Forsther, 2011, p. 67). Özerdem (2003) states that in some cases DDR practitioners saw education and training as strategies to keep ex-combatants 'busy', and prevent them from becoming security risks. This is problematic because, as

Özerdem (2003) argues, inappropriate education responses can lead to frustration among ex-combatants which poses a threat to security.

According to Nübler (1997) "demobilization of ex-combatants frees human potential that can contribute to achieve the economic, social and political objectives of reintegration if available skills and competence are used effectively, and if people without any, or with only few skills are endowed with useful skills and qualification" (p. 3). Consequently, international donors and scholars have called for the need to deliver educational responses to ex-combatants to help remove barriers to reintegration and foster peacebuilding and human development (Nübler, 1997; IDDRS, 2006). This study examines the provision of education for ex-combatants as part of the reintegration process into civilian life in Colombia.

# 1.1 Colombia as a Case: Reintegrating Ex-Combatants in the Midst of War

Colombia has been chosen as a country case because it has experienced the longest-running internal conflict in the world since the mid-1940s. It has involved state military forces and several illegal armed groups, such as left-wing guerrilla groups and right-wing paramilitary organizations[1]. Since the early 2000s, the Colombian government has carried out an extensive and complex DDR process to demobilize and reintegrate illegal armed groups (Derks et al., 2011). Indeed, the DDR approach in Colombia is very different from that in other countries (Rufer, 2005). It has been carried out during an ongoing conflict, is owned by the national government, and the participation of international actors has been limited to monitoring and evaluation processes (Nussio & Oppenheim, 2013).

The Colombian National Policy of Economic and Social Reintegration of Illegal Armed Groups (PRSE), endorsed in 2008, provided a comprehensive framework for the implementation of the reintegration programme. Reintegration is understood as the process in which ex-combatants change their identities of 'combatants' into civilians through accessing economic and social benefits, such as education (DNP, 2008). This aims at improving the quality of life of the ex-combatants, and their families, and preventing their involvement in

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[1] Non-state armed groups in Colombia have been labelled illegal armed groups in the national legislation. According to Article I of Law 975 of 2005 [Ley de Justicia y Paz], "illegal armed groups refer to the group of guerrillas or paramilitaries, including their blocks, fronts and militias". Throughout this thesis quotes in Spanish have been translated into English by the researcher.

illegal activities. The PRSE defines reintegration in accordance with the UN Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS), namely:

> …the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time-frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility, and often necessitates long-term external assistance (DNP, 2008, p. 6).

The PRSE distinguishes between ex-combatants who are demobilized from illegal armed groups at the age of majority (18 years old and more), and the 'dissociated' [desvinculados] who are demobilized at the age of less than 18 years old (DNP, 2008). The dissociated receive a conflict victim treatment which is different from the reintegration programme for ex-combatants and for which the Colombian Family Welfare Institute is responsible (Thorsell, 2012). This study only considers ex-combatants, i.e. those of majority age.

# 1.2 Promoting Access to and Retention of Ex-Combatants in Education

The PRSE refers to ex-combatants as a population that is characterized by limited education or being functionally illiterate, and lacking life skills (DNP, 2008). This is understood as a vulnerability that makes it difficult for them to become reintegrated. The PRSE considers the provision of education for ex-combatants as a long-term process which has a preventive and remedial role (DNP, 2008). Education facilitates not only the inclusion of ex-combatants into the formal labour market, but also increases their possibilities for active participation in society. It also contributes to eradicating intergenerational transmission of poverty, promotes human and social development, and prevents violent anti-social behaviour (DNP, 2008).

According to the PRSE, ex-combatants must be guaranteed access to quality of education which implies taking into account the social characteristics, needs and ambitions of the ex-combatants (DNP, 2008). The National Ministry of Education (MEN), together with the Colombian Agency for Reintegration (ACR), was given the responsibility by the PRSE to sensitize local governments to guarantee access for ex-combatants and their families to all levels of education, and provide the guidance and tools to implement flexible and relevant education strategies for them (DNP, 2008). Education is to promote values, such as reconciliation, democracy and a culture of peace. It should "encourage learning environments

for socialization in which ex-combatants can exercise citizenship, and learn about their rights and duties to the society of which they form a part" (DNP, 2008, p. 29).

The PRSE strongly emphasizes that all education responses for ex-combatants should focus on encouraging the retention of ex-combatants and their families in education and prevent dropout (DNP, 2008, p. 28). Teachers should receive training about the social characteristics of ex-combatants to motivate them and economic stipends are provided by the government to encourage their retention in education (DNP, 2008).

## 1.3  Adult Education for Ex-Combatants

MEN established that ex-combatants are guaranteed free access to formal adult education since they exceed the official age for access to formal education. Formal adult education is a catch-up strategy for primary and secondary education levels with the objective that ex-combatants improve their skills and obtain the bachillerato (baccalaureate) certificate. Martinez (2010, p. 26) states that the bachillerato certificate is the 'passport' to facilitate access for ex-combatants to vocational training and further education, and to better job opportunities.

In the guidance Circular No. 15 of September 2008, MEN (2008, p. 1) states that *"the provision of adult education is an opportunity for ex-combatants to socialize, develop basic skills and citizenship competences, sharing life experiences and set personal goals"*. MEN indicates that local, certified municipalities[2] are in charge of organizing the pedagogical and administrative aspects of formal adult education for ex-combatants at the local level (MEN, 2008, p. 1). Therefore, local, certified municipalities must include ex-combatants in their local education policies, and ensure sufficient resources to guarantee their access to and quality of formal adult education.

Before the government took the decision to provide formal adult education, ex-combatants mostly received non-formal adult education from private stakeholders. Non-formal adult education has also been used by the national government to assist ex-combatants in places with insufficient formal adult education to reach all of them. However, in cities, such as

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[2] Certified municipalities refer to those municipalities that receive the budget directly from the central government and not through the administration at the department level since their population exceed 100,000 inhabitants (Faguet & Sanchez, 2007).

Medellín with the highest concentration of ex-combatants in Colombia, the local government has primarily made use of non-formal adult education strategies to help them obtain the bachillerato certificate. Martinez (2010), however, argues that some non-formal education strategies have not responded to their needs and has caused many dropouts.

## 1.4  Aim of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of the study is to comparatively examine the provision of adult education for ex-combatants in two local institutions, one providing formal adult education and the other non-formal adult education. The study is guided by the following overall question:

- *How do the two institutions help ex-combatants reduce their vulnerability and foster their reintegration into civilian life?*

This question will be examined through two specific research questions:

1. *How have the two institutions implemented adult education strategies to respond to the needs of ex-combatants?*

2. *What are the views of ex-combatants on their learning experience and its importance for reintegration into civilian life?*

## 1.5  Structure of the Thesis

The thesis has eight chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 introduces the context in Colombia. Chapter 3 presents the analytical framework that has been designed to guide the analysis of the data. Chapter 4 presents the research design and methods used for the data collection and analysis. The findings of the study are presented and discussed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Chapter 5 and 6 examines the adult education programmes viewed in response to the needs of ex-combatants and understood based on the human rights approach to education. Chapter 7 examines the views of ex-combatants on their learning experience in view of the concept of conscientization. Chapter 8 draws the main conclusions of the study.

# 2 Armed Conflict, Reintegration and Education in Colombia

Colombia is located in the northwest corner of South America, bordered by Panamá and the Caribbean Sea in the north, the Pacific Ocean to the west, Ecuador and Peru to the south, Brazil to the southeast, and Venezuela to the northeast (Figure 2.1). It has a population of approximately 48,325,261 inhabitants (World Bank, 2013) and is divided territorially into 32 Departments.



**Figure 2.1: Political map of Colombia**

Source: BC-MAPS (2012)

Colombia is a rich country in terms of natural resources. The adoption of various policy reforms during the 1990s, together with a significant growth of foreign investment, motivated by improvements in the security levels, rising mining production and strong commodity prices, have led the Colombian economy to experience strong growth in the last decade (OECD, 2013). According to international economic organizations, Colombia is an upper-middle income country, and the fourth largest economy in Latin America based on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for 2011 (Isaza, 2013).

However, Colombia is also considered to have one of the most unequal income distributions in the world (Moller, 2012). In 2010 it had the second highest Gini coefficient[3] in Latin America of about 0.554, and the seventh one worldwide, ranking the country at the same level as countries, such as Haiti and Angola (Moller, 2012, p. 2). According to the Human Development Report 2013, Colombia's Human Development Index (HDI) for 2012 was about 0.719, ranking the country as no. 91 out of 187 countries and lower than in 1980 (UNDP, 2013). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) considers that, in 2012, 5.4 percent of the overall population in Colombia lived in *'multidimensional poverty'*, experiencing deprivation in education, health and general standards of living, and another 6.4 percent of the population was vulnerable to multiple deprivations (UNDP, 2013, p. 5).

These inequalities and poverty inputs have influenced the recruitment of combatants for the various illegal armed groups. According to Springer (2012, p. 26), a very high proportion of ex-combatants experienced deprivations caused by the conflict even before joining illegal armed groups. Springer points out that illegal armed groups in Colombia have used systematic methods of recruitment taking advantage of the most vulnerable populations, such as indigenous children and rural communities, which has been facilitated by the high levels of inequality that affects the poorest of the population.

## 2.1 The Armed Conflict in Colombia

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[3]The Gini coefficient was proposed by the Italian statistician Corrado Gini (1984-1965) to measure income inequality. According to ILO, "*it can theoretically take any value between zero (perfect equality, i.e. everybody has the same income) and one (perfect inequality, i.e. all income goes to a single person)*" (2010b, p. 1). ILO (2010b) indicates that in 2010 Colombia had a Gini coefficient of about 0.5 reflecting extreme inequality of its population in comparison with countries such as Finland or Norway whose Gini coefficient stood at 0.20-0.25 meaning low and moderate inequality.

Colombia has been called the oldest democracy in Latin America. Nevertheless, it has endured the longest-running internal conflict in the world dating from the period called *"la violencia"* (1948-1958). In the report *Enough Already! Colombia: Memories of War and Dignity* [Informe BASTA YA! Memorias de Guerra and Dignidad], the Colombian National Centre for Historical Memory (CNMH) states that the ongoing internal armed conflict in Colombia has been one of the bloodiest conflicts in the modern history of Latin America (CNMH, 2013). It has been estimated that 220,000 civilians died between 1958 and 2012 as a consequence of the conflict (CNMH, 2013, p. 31). Furthermore, at the end of 2012, Colombia was considered to have the second highest rate of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the world, more than 5,700,000 people (IDMC, 2014, p. 41). The high number of cases associated with violation of human rights as a result of the ongoing armed conflict has been one of the greatest obstacles to reducing poverty, promoting development and consolidating the process of democratization in Colombia.

## 2.1.1 Origins of the Conflict

Political violence can be understood as the root cause of the ongoing armed conflict in Colombia (De los Rios, 2004). Due to the assassination of the liberal leader, Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, in 1948 Colombia plunged into the most politically polarized country of all times, resulting in a violent confrontation between the Conservative and Liberal parties which had governed for more than a century. This was the beginning of *la Violencia* period which caused the death of approximately 280,000 Colombians (Pitt, 2002; Lopez, 2011). In an attempt to resolve the violent confrontation during *la violencia* period, the liberals and conservatives established the National Front pact (1958-1974) [Frente Nacional] by which each party agreed that the opposite party would alternate power for four presidential periods (Turel, 2013). However, the National Front included only to a limited degree political participation from other parties, and was therefore seen as an exclusionary political regime by the other political movements at the time (CNMH, 2013, p.117).

As a result, various left-wing guerrilla groups appeared during the 1960s and 1980s, influenced by communist and socialist ideologies and mostly formed by peasants, to challenge the legitimacy of the state. The unequal distribution of wealth, the marginalization of the rural poor communities, and the weak presence of the state also contributed to the formation of various guerrilla groups in Colombia (World Bank, 1999; Lopez, 2011). These

included the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)*, *Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)*, the *Movimiento 19 de Abril (M-19)*, the *Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL)*, the *Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame (MAQL)*, the *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT)* and the *Corriente de Renovación Socialista (CRS)* (Guáqueta, 2007, p. 418).

In response to the expansion of guerrilla groups, Colombia experienced the emergence of various right-wing paramilitary groups labelled *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC) during the 1970s. These were defensive groups sponsored by regional political leaders, landowners, emerald producers and some private companies (Tate, 2001). According to Tate (2001), the aim of these groups was to form peasant self-defence groups to fight against guerrillas owing to the unsuccessful effort of the government to negotiate their demobilization.

Furthermore, the boom of drug production during the 1970s became another factor of violence in Colombia leading to the appearance of cartels in cities, such as Medellín and Cali, that were involved in illegal drug trafficking and sponsored the paramilitary groups (Tate, 2011). With time, AUC became heavily involved in illegal drug trafficking, and with the support of the drug cartels fought the guerrilla groups and participated in the assassination of guerrilla supporters, politicians and public officials. AUC has thus been considered as the main responsible for the war atrocities in Colombia (Nussio, 2012, p. 370).

## 2.1.2 First Attempts to Demobilize Combatants

In 1984, the government of Belizario Betancour tried to negotiate a peace agreement with several guerrilla groups, including FARC, that agreed to demobilize and participate in the political arena through the creation of the political party *Union Patriotica* (UP) [Patriotic Union]. However, 3,000 members of the UP were systematically assassinated during 1984-1993 reflecting the lack of political and institutional support of the State to guarantee the security of the ex-combatants at the time (Laplante & Theidon, 2007). This has been considered as a reason that FARC continued the armed confrontation (Holguin, 2010).

In 1988, the government of Virgilio Barco signed a peace agreement with the guerrilla group M-19 that was demobilized and became a political party called AD M-19 [Alianza Democratica M-19]. The peace agreement led to the promulgation of the National

Constitution of 1991 which introduced a multi-party government system. This is one of the biggest achievements in the search for peace alternatives in the last two decades of political violence in Colombia (Holguin, 2010).

It has been estimated that a total of 5,000 combatants were demobilized during the 1980s and 1990s from the guerrilla groups M-19, MAQL, EPL, PRT and CRS (Guáqueta, 2007, p. 419). Nevertheless, FARC and ELN guerrillas continued the armed confrontations, and have also been involved in illegal drug trafficking to finance the war (Guáqueta, 2007). Several violations of human rights have been attributed to these groups, including terrorist attacks and kidnappings (CNMH, 2013).

## 2.2 Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration in Colombia

In early 2002, the government of Alvaro Uribe implemented the DDR framework to collectively demobilize AUC due to international pressure, and as a result of the severe violations of human rights and heavy involvement of illegal drug trafficking of paramilitary organizations (Porch & Rasmussen, 2008). The government also undertook a strong military offensive against FARC and ELN (Nussio, 2012). It has been estimated that around 31,849 members of AUC were demobilized between 2003 and 2009 (Kaplan & Nussio, 2013, p. 10). Nevertheless, the efficiency of the demobilization process of AUC has been questioned by the General Prosecutor's Office [Fiscalía General de la Nación] and several local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Laplante & Theidon, 2007).

In 2006, a mission from the Organization of the American States (MAPP/OEA) discovered that some paramilitary structures continued to operate as criminal gangs who were later labelled *BACRIM* by the government (Porch & Rasmussen, 2008). The emergence of BACRIM showed that not all paramilitary groups were demobilized. BACRIM was formed by 'mid-level AUC commanders' who were still involved in illegal activities, such as drug trafficking, controlling territories, re-recruiting ex-combatants and human rights violations (Human Rights Watch, 2010). Insecurity has, therefore, increased in some regions.

Furthermore, during 2003-2006 Uribe's government implemented the policy of Reincorporation into Civilian Life of Illegal Armed Groups [Programa de Reincorporación a la Vida Civil de Grupos Armados Ilegales] to provide reintegration support for ex-combatants

from AUC. This was carried out by the Ministry of the Interior and was established as a short-term policy based on a reinsertion approach[4] (Thorsell, 2012). However, it did not reach all demobilized combatants. For example, 66 percent did not receive psychosocial assistance, 55.7 percent had no access to education, 55 percent had no healthcare and 31 percent no economic support (Denissen, 2010, p. 334).

Consequently, in 2006 Uribe's government created the Office of the High Counsellor for Reintegration [Alta Concejeria para la Reintegracion]. This was a reintegration policy advisor office in charge of assisting ex-combatants and their families with psychosocial support, healthcare, education, vocational training, productive projects and financial support (Nussio, 2012). According to Denissen (2010, p. 334), the creation of the High Counsellor for Reintegration was a very important achievement in the institutionalization of the policy of reintegration in Colombia because the government acknowledged that the reintegration of ex-combatants demanded a long-term reintegration policy, and strong structures at the institutional level to assist ex-combatants in the transition from war to peace.

Moreover, due to the intensified military offensive against FARC and ELN, Uribe's government decided to use the DDR framework to promote individual demobilization of members of these groups that wanted to desert and return to civilian life, and take part in the government reintegration activities. Anaya (2007, p. 179) argues that individual demobilization was implemented by the government to reduce the military capability of FARC and ELN which was seen as a strategy of conflict resolution. It has been estimated that a total of 23,354 ex-combatants were individually demobilized from FARC, ELN and EPL during 2003-2012 (ACR, 2013a, p. 1).

However, Kaplan and Nussio (2013, p. 36) argue that since the reintegration process in Colombia has taken place during an ongoing conflict, it increases the probability of 'recidivism'[5] of ex-combatants because of the presence of other illegal armed groups and criminal gangs that may offer them opportunities. In fact, the involvement of ex-combatants in organized criminal activities has remained a concern since 11,000 ex-combatants have been

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[4] The IDDRS refers to reinsertion as the short-term material or financial assistance given to ex-combatants during the demobilization programme before the long-term reintegration process. The purpose is to meet the immediate needs of the ex-combatants, such as shelter, clothes, healthcare, food and short-term education (IDDRS, 2006, chap 1, p. 2).

[5] Kaplan and Nussio (2013, p. 1) refer 'recividism' to those ex-combatants who are involved in illegal activities after demobilization, though not necessarily through the armed groups of which they used to be a member.

estimated to have committed crimes after demobilization during 2003-2012 (Kaplan & Nussio, 2013, p. 4).

## 2.2.1 The Colombian Agency for Reintegration and the 'Reintegration Route'

With the endorsement of the PRSE in 2008 and the need to decentralize the reintegration programme to assist all ex-combatants in most regions, the High Counsellor for Reintegration was replaced by ACR in 2011 under the government of Juan Manuel Santos (Thorsell, 2012). The ACR is the government agency in charge of planning and coordinating with other public bodies the implementation of the PRSE. This new structure was established at the level of the State to improve the implementation and monitoring of the reintegration process at the local level (Thorsell, 2012). ACR created, for example, 29 regional offices across the territory called "Centros de Referencia y Oportunidades" (Derks, 2011).

ACR designed a strategy called the 'reintegration route' [Ruta de la Reintegración] to assist all ex-combatants. The reintegration route is "*a work-plan formulated by ex-combatants and ACR to provide personal assistance to each ex-combatant according to his/her needs and personal goals in view of the socioeconomic characteristics of the context, in order to ensure their economic and social reintegration*" (ACR, 2013b, p. 4). Through the reintegration route, the ACR ensures that each ex-combatant formulates his/her own 'life project' with personal goals and aspirations (ACR, 2013b).

ACR provides psychosocial and legal assistance to ex-combatants, helps them get access to healthcare, education and vocational training, and supports them with income-generating activities. ACR provides a monthly stipend at about COP 160,000[6] to support education and vocational training for ex-combatants, and another COP 160,000 for psychosocial workshops (ACR, 2013b). The support is provided for up to six and a half years[7].

The targeted educational programmes and other support for reintegration of ex-combatants into civilian life is rooted in the current attention to the need to address educational issues from a rights perspectives.

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[6]Approximately USD 85. There is a 95 percent attendance requirement for education and training and a 90 percent attendance requirement for psychosocial workshops.

[7] According to the Office of the Comptroller General of Colombia [Contraloría General de la República] (2014), it is estimated that the State spent a total of COP 66,7 million (approximately USD 25,000), at constant prices, for each ex-combatant taking part in the reintegration programme during 2006-2014.

## 2.3  The Educational Situation in Colombia

By 2011, the literate population in Colombia aged 15 years and above was about 94 percent (UNESCO, 2014). According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013, Colombia significantly improved coverage, achieving 90 percent of primary school enrolment between 2005 and 2009, and is expected to achieve 95 percent secondary education enrolment by 2015 (UNESCO, 2014).

However, quality and equity are the biggest challenges for education. The system is characterized by persistent inequalities and disparities in educational provision and outcomes which affect the most disadvantaged populations. For example, based on the results of the Colombian standardized tests for secondary education in 2009 [Pruebas Saber], Duarte et al. (2012) found that the students' academic performance on tests relates to their socioeconomic background, whether they live in wealthier or poorer departments, are in an urban or rural school, and whether they belong to an ethnic minority. The socioeconomic segregation between urban public and rural public schools reinforces the vulnerability of the most disadvantaged social groups (Duarte et al., 2012).

The educational situation in Colombia, therefore, faces several challenges that impedes delivery of quality of education and reduction of the vulnerability of disadvantaged populations. The government, however, seeks to enhance the reintegration of ex-combatants by including them in the education system. This study aims to provide an understanding of how the provision of adult education at the local level responds to the needs of ex-combatants and foster their reintegration into civilian life, taking into account the problematic situation of the education sector in Colombia.

### 2.3.1 The Structure of the Colombian Education System

Law 115 of 1994 became the legal framework for the organization of the Colombian education system after the endorsement of the Constitution of 1991. The Constitution defines education as an 'individual right and a public service' with a social purpose by which *"individuals seek access to knowledge, science, technology, and the other benefits and values of culture"* (Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 14). Law 115 of 1994 introduced the decentralization of the education system to improve educational coverage and access (Melo, 2012). As a result, local governments of departments and municipalities became responsible

for the provision of formal education. Secretaries of Education were created in each of the departments and municipalities to coordinate the management of the education system at the local level (Hanson, 1995).

According to Ramirez et al. (2014), the decentralization of the Colombian education system is a delegation model *"with the subnational government supplying social services, such as education, under the regulation of the central government"* (p. 8). Through the General System of Transfers (SGP) [Sistema General de Participaciones] funding is transferred from the central to the local governments (Ramires et al., 2014). Guided by MEN, schools have the autonomy to formulate their own Institutional Educational Project (PEI) [Proyecto Educativo Institucional] and manage human, physical and financial resources in order to increase levels of coverage and improve quality (Melo, 2012, p. 87).

## 2.3.2 Education for Vulnerable Populations

Law 115 of 1994 recognizes the importance of guaranteeing the right to education for disadvantaged social groups in order to increase literacy levels. This includes education for ethnic minorities, education for rural populations, special needs education, adult education and education for social rehabilitation. In 2005, the government of Alvaro Uribe took a gigantic step to improve access to education for vulnerable populations through formulating the *Policy Framework for the Provision of Education for Vulnerable Populations* [Lineamientos de política para la atención educativa a poblaciones vulnerables] (MEN, 2005).

The policy refers to vulnerable populations as those social groups that, due to their socio-cultural, economic and biological characteristics have been excluded from the education system. They include ethnic minorities (indigenous people, Afro-Colombians), illiterate youth and adults, children with special needs, conflict-affected populations (displaced people, children 'dissociated' from illegal armed groups, ex-combatants and their families, children at risk of being recruited by illegal armed groups, child landmine victims and children affected by violent confrontations), child labour, the inhabitants of the frontiers and dispersed rural populations (MEN, 2005, p. 8). The policy indicates that to overcome vulnerability *"it is important to guarantee access and provide a relevant education to retain all vulnerable populations in the education system"* (MEN, 2005 p. 7). In the case of individuals of majority age, this takes place in formal and non-formal adult education programmes.

## 2.4 The Colombian Adult Education Sector

According to Law 115 of 1994, adult education contributes to *"eradicating illiteracy and increases the economic, political, social and cultural participation of youth and adults with limited education"* (p. 13). MEN formulated Decree-law 3011 of 1997 [Decreto 3011] to regulate the adult education sector. It was endorsed after Colombia had taken part in UNESCO's Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V) in Hamburg in 1997 (Martinez, 2010).

Adult education is based on principles, such as human development, relevance, flexibility and participation (MEN, 1997). It is mostly provided through the formal adult education system which is offered to individuals over the age normally accepted for formal education (15 years and above) who want to complete or retake the cycles of formal education (MEN, 1997). The formal adult education system is organized in *Integrated Special School Cycles* [Ciclos Lectivos Integrados Especiales] (Table 2.1). The curriculum of formal primary basic, secondary basic, and upper secondary education is taught during a total of five years of schooling. Each level of formal education is completed in a shorter time than in the formal system and students obtain the bachillerato certificate at the end of the five years (Martinez, 2010). Formal adult education is provided at night, on Saturdays and Sundays. According to MEN (1997), local secretaries of education of certified municipalities must provide the infrastructure, pedagogical tools and management to deliver quality adult education.

Table 2.1: Structure of the formal adult education system in Colombia

| Education level | Integrated Special School Cycles | Certificate |
|---|---|---|
| Primary basic education | Cycle I: one year (Grades 1, 2 and 3) | |
| | Cycle II: one year (Grades 4 and 5) | Primary education |
| Secondary basic education | Cycle III: one year (Grades 6 and 7) | |
| | Cycle IV: one year (Grades 8 and 9) | Basic Secondary education |
| Upper secondary education | Cycle V: one year (Grades 10 and 11) | Bachillerato |
| Total | 5 years | |

*Source*: MEN, 1997

Decree-law 3011 of 1997 indicates that formal adult education is funded by the SGP. Teachers are hired from the general formal education system and receive an extra payment

per hour in addition to their regular salaries (MEN, 2012)[8]. According to Decree-law 3011 of 1997, adult education can also be delivered through non-formal adult education (MEN, 1997, p. 13). This is generally provided by private stakeholders, for example, the kind of public-private partnership described by Latham (2009): "the government contracts with private schools to deliver education at public expense, often in the form of a subsidy per student enrolled in an accredited or eligible private school" (p. 4).

In 2005, the Colombian National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) reported that 7.5 percent of the population above the age of 15 years were illiterate in Colombia (approximately 2,120,000 people) (Martinez, 2010). As a result, MEN created the National Literacy and Basic Education programme for Youth and Adults [Programa Nacional de Alfabetización y Educación Básica para Jóvenes y Adultos] to increase the allocation of resources for the formal adult education sector and expand the number of people enrolled in regions with high levels of illiteracy, including the ex-combatant population (Martinez, 2010). By 2014 the percentage of illiterate youth and adults was about 5.7 percent and remains a challenge in Colombia (MEN, 2014).

As has appeared from the presentation so far, ex-combatants form part of a social group that has been deprived of formal education but whose needs have been addressed in recent policy documents. Their provision is catered to in formal and non-formal adult education programmes at local levels of administration. This emphasis is based on the government's attention to guaranteeing the right to education and to reintegrating ex-combatants into civilian life to ensure peace and sustainable development. How this is done in two specific adult education programmes in two major cities in Colombia is analyzed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Before that, the analytical framework and research design are presented in Chapters 3 and 4.

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[8] According to MEN, the scale point is based on the teachers' experience and degree (MEN, 2012). Nevertheless, OECD (2014) points out that Colombia is one of the Latin America countries with the lowest teacher salaries which affects the quality of education.

# 3 Understanding the Use of Adult Education for Reintegration of Ex-Combatants into Civilian Life

In order to analyze the use of education as a tool for reintegration of ex-combatants into civilian life, an analytical framework was constructed that understands social exclusion in the context of the rights-based approach to education and the concept of critical consciousness (Figure 3.1). Ex-combatants are understood as a socially excluded group in society (macro level). Their reintegration is understood in light of the human rights based approach at the meso or institutional level and the critical consciousness that needs to appear amongst ex-combatants (micro level).

The rights-based approach to education is used to explore issues of access, equity, quality and relevance of the adult education responses for ex-combatants. The concept of critical consciousness is used to explore ex-combatants' perceptions of the adult learning process as a means for their reintegration.
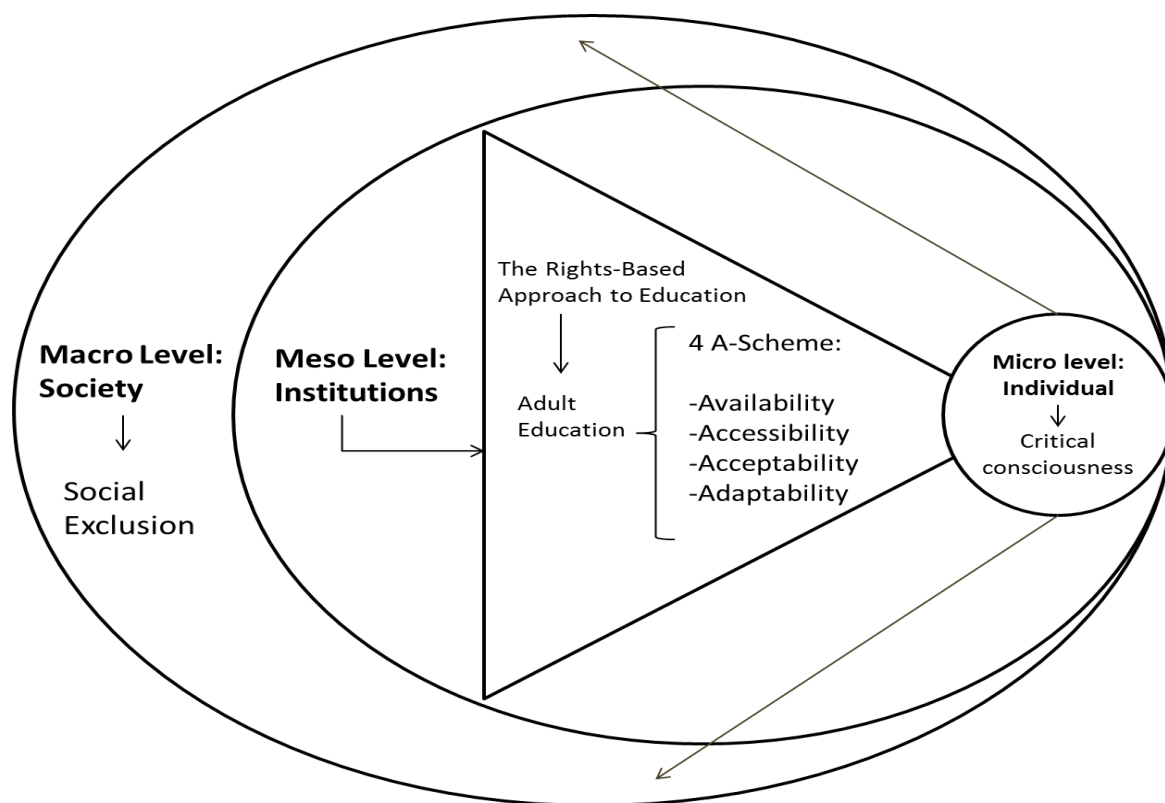


Figure 3.1: Analytical framework for understanding ex-combatants' reintegration into civilian life

# 3.1 Addressing Social Exclusion in Reintegration Programmes

The issue of social exclusion is central in discussions about poverty, inequality and injustice. Kabeer (2000) argues that institutions can be an exclusionary mechanism (p. 84). The International Institute for Labour Studies (IILS) identifies institutions as decisive agents in the "production of social exclusion since they structure the relationship between macroeconomic change and economic growth at the macro level, and how this affects life circumstances of individuals and social groups at the micro level" (In: Kabeer, 2000, p. 84). Reintegration of ex-combatants, therefore, has to be understood in the context of social exclusion because ill-designed reintegration strategies, especially disjuncture between policy guidance and practice at the local level (McMullin, 2013), can reinforce already existing stigmatization of ex-combatants as 'perpetrators, barbarically violent, apolitical, greedy, and nihilistic'. As understood by McMullin (2013), demobilization is not only about "getting DDR right, but the social capital of ex-combatants is a potential resource for the peacebuilding process only if the state and its patrons design and implement the right programmes" (p. 414).

Institutional analysis is valuable to explore how institutions contribute to the 'production of disadvantage through the active dynamics of social processes' (Ibid). Kabeer (2000) argues that disadvantage leads to social exclusion when "different institutional mechanisms function in such a way that the resources allocated and value assigned at an institutional level, deny systematically access of particular groups of people to resources and recognition, which would allow them to participate fully in the life of that society" (p. 86). As explained by Folbre (1994), "institutions embody different patterns of rules, norms and asset distribution which together help to spell out people's membership of different kinds of social groups…" (In: Kabeer, 2000, p. 89). Social exclusion may be reinforced through economic and cultural factors. Fraser (1989) categorizes forms of disadvantage in these ways: in economic terms, such as exploitation, marginalization and deprivation; in cultural terms referring to representation, interpretation and communication; and a hybrid form which encompasses economic and cultural dimensions, such as ethnicity (In: Kabeer, 2000, p. 84-86).

The focus in this study is how the two selected adult education institutions function to reintegrate ex-combatants understood as a socially excluded group in light of the government's attempt to guarantee the right to education for all.

## 3.2 The Rights-Based Approach to Education

The right to education was defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the General Assembly of the UN in 1948. According to Article 26: "Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory…" (UNESCO, 2000, p. 93). The principle has been supported in a range of international conventions, treaties and declarations. The World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) issued in Jomtien in 1990 proclaims that every person – child, youth and adult – shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities that allow them to meet their basic learning needs and develop their potential, without any type of discrimination (UNESCO, 2004).

The right to education must be guaranteed by the state as the main institution responsible for protecting human rights (Tomasevski, 2006). According to Tomasevski (2001), the right to education encompasses the right *TO* education, the right *IN* education and the right *THROUGH* education. The right *TO* education gives emphasis to guaranteeing equitable access to education for all people. The right *IN* education stresses the obligation of providing quality of education that is respectful and protects human rights (Tomasevski, 2006). The right *THROUGH* education must ensure that the education provided is relevant, and contributes to the fulfilment of other human rights that guarantee full participation in society.

### 3.2.1 Adult Education as a Strategy to Fulfil the Right to Education

The rights-based approach to education is applied in this study in the context of adult education. According to Tomasevski (2006), the rights-based approach to education is a multiplier, enhancing human rights and fundamental freedoms when education is effectively guaranteed. It also establishes mechanisms to restore the right to education when people are denied from participating in education, e.g. adult education to fulfil the right to education of illiterate youth and adults. In this study, adult education is, therefore, understood as an opportunity to fulfil the right to, in and through education of ex-combatants.

Adult education is defined by international conventions as a fundamental human right and a condition for full participation in society of illiterate youth and adults (UNESCO, 2000). According to UNESCO (2000), since the first principle of Article 26 of the UDHR stipulates

that 'Everyone has the right to education', it has to be interpreted to apply throughout life. The Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning asserts that:

> Recognition of the right to education and the right to learn throughout life is more than ever a necessity; it is the right to read and write, the right to question and analyze, the right to have access to resources, and to develop and practice individual and collective skills and competences (UNESCO, 1997, p. 4).

Adult education is clearly understood as a lifelong process:

> The objectives of youth and adult education, viewed as a lifelong process, are to develop the autonomy and the sense of responsibility of people and communities, to reinforce the capacity to deal with the transformations taking place in the economy, in culture and in society as a whole, and to promote coexistence, tolerance and the informed and creative participation of citizens in their communities, in short to enable people and communities to take control of their destiny and society in order to face the challenges ahead (UNESCO, 1997, p. 2).

Adult education encompasses formal and non-formal learning processes aimed at "developing the abilities of adults, enrich their knowledge, and improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction to meet their own needs and those of their society" (UNESCO, 1997, p.1). Governments are obliged to mobilize resources and establish mechanisms to facilitate access to educational opportunities throughout life, such as through adult education (UNESCO, 1997).

## 3.2.2 Applying the 4A-Scheme in the Provision of Adult Education

Katerina Tomasevski, a former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, developed the so-called 4A-Scheme in order to translate the principle of the right to education into its application in education. The 4As underline the need to make education available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable (Tomasevski, 2001, 2004, 2006). The 4As address the important issues of access, equity, quality and relevance of education and underlines that the rights perspective needs to ensure the right *to*, *in* and *through* education.

### Availability of education

Availability of education is a precondition to fulfilling the right to education. Governments are obliged to guarantee sufficient and adequate means to meet societal demands for education (Stephensen, 2010). For instance, education must be free or affordable, government-funded, have adequate and appropriate physical infrastructure and facilities, and professional teachers to deliver quality of education (Tomasevski, 2001; ActionAid, 2007).

According to Tomasevski (2001, p. 13), availability emphasizes two government obligations: the right to education as a social and economic right in which governments have to establish and fund education; and the right to education as a political and civil right with governments allowing non-state actors to establish education institutions.

## Accessibility of education

Accessibility of education is also a requirement to fulfil the right to education. It emphasizes equity and requires governments to eliminate all obstacles to making education accessible (Tomasevski, 2006). Governments must ensure that education is physically and affordably accessible to all and non-discriminatory. It must take action to ensure the inclusion of the most marginalized, vulnerable and disadvantaged social groups (Tomasevski, 2001; ActionAid, 2007). Governments must abolish all types of discrimination on the basis of gender, race, religion, disability, socioeconomic status and political affiliation for those participating in education (Tomasevski, 2006).

## Acceptability of Education

Acceptability of education emphasizes the rights in and through education. Governments have the obligation to ensure that the content of the education that is available and accessible is relevant, non-discriminatory, culturally appropriate, of good quality, that the conditions and environment of the school are safe and healthy, and that teachers are professionals and well-trained, in order to deliver quality of education that protects and enhances human rights (Tomasevski, 2001, p. 13; ActionAid, 2007).

Governments are obliged to establish and enforce mechanisms that guarantee minimal standards of health and safety in schools, and professional requirements for teachers to make education acceptable, including budgetary allocations and redistribution of funds (Tomasevski, 2006).

## Adaptability of Education

Adaptability of education is also a precondition to the fulfilment of the right in and through education. It requires that schools respond to the specific needs of each learner as well as to the social characteristics of the local context and the changing needs of society (Tomasevski,

2004; ActionAid, 2007). Public schools need to be 'flexible' and 'responsive' to the communities for which they work (ActionAid, 2007). Tomasevski (2006) argues that it is the education system that has to adapt to the learner rather than the learner adapting to the system.

Adaptability of education obligates governments to protect all human rights in education, and enhance human rights through education, in particular for vulnerable populations, such as children with disabilities, ethnic minorities, rural populations, conflict-affected populations and out-of-school children (Tomasevski, 2004).

Although the 4A-scheme was proposed for education of children, it is adapted in this study in relation to adult education (Appendix I). As appears from Appendix I, Tomasevski developed specific dimensions for translating the four concepts into practical policy dimensions for implementation in education. All categories are not relevant for this study, for example, 'schools matching school-aged children, language of instruction or parental choice of education for their children'. Others have been adapted, for example, 'elimination of obstacles to compulsory schooling' which in this study is understood as 'elimination of obstacles to adult learning (distance, schedule)'.

The fulfilment of the 4As and the right In, To and Through education necessitate the active participation of the learners. This is particularly important in the case of adult learners who are characterized as disadvantaged and excluded, an aspect that is examined in this study.

## 3.3  Adult Education for Critical Consciousness

The Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire based his literacy model for adults on the notion of conscientization aimed at promoting change in society. He developed this model at the beginning of the 1960s in response to the urgent need to eradicate illiteracy in the northeast of Brazil. According to Freire, half of the population lived in a 'culture of silence', being illiterate, "*apathetic, down-trodden, and fatalistic in their attitudes"* (Nyirenda, 1996, p. 5).

Freire (1970) understands literacy as a process of 'awakening people´s consciousness' rather than promoting a 'purely mechanistic' literacy program. Freire's literacy model seeks to make people transform their 'apathetic, fatalistic and naïve view of reality as given and immutable' through conscientization (Nyirenda, 1996, p. 5). According to Taylor (1993) "consciousness

is understood in the sense of having power to transform reality" (In: Nyirenda, 1996, p. 5). So, the role of men and women is not only to be in the world, but to engage in relations with the world (Freire, 1972, p. 5). As pointed out by Freire (1972), without consciousness to see the world people cannot liberate themselves from oppression.

Dialogue is Freire's means to achieve conscientization. The "educator's role is to enter into dialogue with the illiterate about concrete situations and give him or her the means with which he or she can teach himself or herself to read and write" (In: Nyirenda, 1996, p. 7). Through dialogue people learn not only to read words, but also to read the world through discovering 'the meaning of humanity' from interacting with other humans (Nyirenda, 1996). According to Freire, when a person perceives a challenge, comprehends it, and recognizes the possibilities of addressing it, he/she acts (Freire, 1972).

The analytical framework, thus, helps to understand how government emphasis on the right to education is translated into practice in specific adult education programmes focusing on ex-combatants understood as a socially excluded group. While the human rights based approach and the guiding 4-As are used as the lens to analyze the provision of education for ex-combatants, the concept of critical consciousness guides the examination of ex-combatants views of their learning experience and its importance for their reintegration into civilian life. This is elaborated in the following chapter.

# 4   Research Design and Methods

The study is based on a comparative research design to better understand the social phenomena under investigation (Bryman, 2012). According to Azarian (2011), comparative research permits drawing assumptions about the social world rather than making generalizations because no social phenomenon happens in the same way in different settings. The focus is to compare a formal and non-formal adult education programme for ex-combatants in terms of the formation and impacts on participants. Comparing various cases can lead to theory-building and help explain social phenomena. (Azarian, 2011),

The study adopts a constructivist ontological position and understands the social world and its meanings as the result of people´s continuous interactions, rather than as something external that is imposed on them (Bryman, 2012). Adult education provision for ex-combatants is understood as socially constructed by and in interaction amongst different actors, such as officials, teachers and students. An interpretative epistemological position is assumed which seeks to understand the social world from the standpoint of an individual's subjectivity because, as Burrell and Morgan (1999) point out, the social world is a process created through people's consciousness. The objective is to explore the perceptions of people participating in the adult education provision to capture the particularities of human actions as they occur within the specific contexts.

The study applies a qualitative research strategy. It assumes an exploratory position that seeks to provide deep and detailed knowledge about the provision of adult education in two local institutions in Colombia. According to Ary et al. (1996, p. 473), qualitative inquiry aims to understand human and social behaviour as it is experienced, and the meaning that is constructed by individuals involved in specific social settings, such as the community, institutions and schools. The focus in this study is to understand and explain how the various social actors involved in adult education provision for ex-combatants constructed and experienced it.

## 4.1  Selection of Education Programmes

Two purposive sampling techniques were used for the selection of the main units of comparison for the study, i.e. the two education programmes. Institution A is located in the

city of Medellín. It was chosen through extreme or deviant case sampling which emphasizes cases that are rich in information because their particularities make them unusual or special cases (Patton, 1990, p. 169). The Medellín Mayor's Office created a non-formal adult education programme to assist ex-combatants independent of MEN. In fact, Medellín is the only case in Colombia where a local government manages and funds its own adult education programme for ex-combatants (Rozema, 2008).

The second institution was chosen using a generic purposive sampling, i.e. a case that addresses the research questions (Bryman, 2012). The interest was to gain access to a school in the formal adult education system. It was selected through ACR since the information about the location of such schools is not public information. The selection process was long and time consuming because of bureaucratic issues. When I arrived in Colombia for fieldwork (mid-September to mid-November 2013), ACR contacted me to discuss the research proposal. They suggested selecting one public school from four local schools located in different municipalities that had participated in the pilot project *Modelo de Formación para la Reintegración* [Educational Model for Reintegration]. This is a project in which government agencies, international donors and private NGOs participated to formulate the first reintegration curriculum for ex-combatants, but it is implemented by ACR. After contacting the four schools, Institution B in Piedecuesta in the Santander Department was the only one that immediately confirmed its readiness to participate in the research.

Azarian (2011, p. 121) argues that one limitation in using a comparative research design is that the cases are selected not because they are the best ones but because they are the only ones available. Azarian (2011) understands this as an inherent bias, especially for studies whose aim is to generalize. Since the purpose of this study is to analyze differences and similarities between formal and non-formal adult education programmes rather than making generalizations, this does not necessarily apply in this case. However, the comparison is asymmetrical because of size. At Institution A, there were more ex-combatants enrolled, it has a larger human resource base, and is located in a large city compared to Institution B. As a result, the data gathered for Institution A is quite extensive, whereas the information for Institution B is more limited.

## 4.2  Research Sites

### 4.2.1 Institution A in Medellín

Institution A is located in the city of Medellín which is the capital of the Antioquia Department and the second largest city in Colombia after Bogotá (Figure 4.1). The population in Medellín is estimated at about 2,390,000 inhabitants (Proexport-Colombia, 2011).



Figure 4.1: Political map of the Antioquia Deparment

*Source:* Maps of World, 2014a

Affected by drug-related conflict involving drug cartels and paramilitary organizations, Medellín became the most violent city in the world during the 1980s and 1990s (Cerda et al., 2011). By 1991, Medellín was considered to have the highest rate of homicides in the world at about 348 per 100,000 inhabitants (Duque et al., 2011). The rate decreased to 34 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2005 but increased again to 94 during 2009-2011 (Duque et al., 2011). In the last decade, local governments in Medellín have carried out several reforms related to urban, social and economic reforms which have allowed Medellín to experience a significant transformation process (Cerda et al., 2011).

By 2003, Medellín was the center of the demobilization of the paramilitary group Bloque Cacique Nutibara. In all 873 members were collectively demobilized by the national government. During 2003-2006, more than 3,000 members of other paramilitary

organizations are estimated to have settled in Medellín (Rozema, 2008). As a result, Medellín became one of the cities in Colombia with the highest concentration of ex-combatants (Rozema, 2008).

## 4.2.2 Institution B in Piedecuesta

Piedecuesta is a municipality in the Santander Department. According to the Piedecuesta Major's Office the population is about 120,000 inhabitants and is one of the municipalities, including also Floridablanca and Giron, of the metropolitan area of Bucaramanga (Figure 4.2) (Piedecuesta Major's Office, 2012). Bucaramanga is considered to be the fifth largest city in Colombia which directly influences the economic growth of Piedecuesta because of its proximity. By 2010, the Santander Department represented 7.3 percent of the total GDP in Colombia, and was among the top five economies in the country (DANE, 2013).



Figure 4.2: Political map of the Santander Department

*Source:* Maps of the World, 2014b

While FARC had a strong presence in the Santander Department during the 1990s, the paramilitary groups gained a stronger presence in the region during the 2000s (MAPP/OEA, 2007). Paramilitary organizations controlled the urban centers of the municipalities of Floridablanca, Lebrija and Piedecuesta (MAPP/OEA, 2007). According to MAPP/OEA (2007) violence related to crime, such as selective assassinations, was the most common type

of violence experienced in the Santander Department during the late 1990s, and mostly perpetrated by paramilitary groups.

According to ACR, during January-December 2013, 1,553 ex-combatants were registered as participants in the reintegration program in the Santander Department (70 percent from AUC, 18 percent from FARC, 9 percent from ELN, and 1percent in total from EPL) (ACR, 2014b). ACR indicates that 114 ex-combatants were located in Piedecuesta in 2013 which corresponds to 7 percent of the total number of ex-combatants located in the Santander Department (ACR, 2014b).

# 4.3  Sampling of Research Participants

The choice of research participants was guided by the type of purposive sampling technique which Patton (1990) calls *'Maximum variation sampling'* which aims to explore and explain central themes or main outcomes that cut across a varied number of actors. The research participants included different types of social actors, such as officials, programme coordinators, curriculum developers, teachers and ex-combatants from the two cases under investigation (Table 4.1). In all, 29 interviewees were selected distributed rather evenly across the two institutions (17 in Institution A and 12 in Institution B).

The objective was to explore the perspectives, views and experiences of the interviewees of the programs in order to examine possible differences and similarities in understandings amongst the different groups. According to Patton (1990, p. 172) choosing a sample of great diversity permits the researcher to understand and explain more deeply the variations and similar patterns across the groups rather than making generalizations.

Table 4.1: Research participants

| Institutions | Officials | Programme Coordinator | Curriculum Developer | Teacher | Ongoing/ Graduated ex-combatant | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Institution A | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 9 | 17 |
| Institution B | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 6 | 12 |
| Total | 3 | 2 | 1 | 8 | 15 | 29 |

Officials included members from the Medellín Mayor´s office and staff from the Piedecuesta Secretary of Education. They were chosen based on the relevance of their positions. The

programme coordinator and curriculum developer were purposefully selected, being the only ones, while teachers from each programme were randomly selected.

The selection of ex-combatants was the most difficult part of the sampling process. The bureaucratic processes behind the reintegration of ex-combatants made it difficult to access the population for security reasons. Interviewing participants was not always easy because some were afraid of retaliation. Therefore, the research purposes were constantly reviewed and adapted to what was feasible in the context. This also meant that I did not attempt to construct a representative sample of ex-combatants because even if they were chosen based on criteria (grade, age or armed group affiliation), there was no guarantee that they would accept to cooperate in the research. According to Nussio and Ugarriza ( 2013), *"generally speaking, ex-combatants are a difficult population to interview: fear of discrimination, a desire to avoid public appearance, and anxiety due to security threats may reduce their willingness to participate in academic investigations"* (p. 15). Thus, ex-combatants were selected based on their willingness to cooperate in the research. Teachers generally proposed certain participants who were then asked for their oral consent to participate in the research. Most ex-combatants that accepted to be interviewed are currently enrolled in the two institutions but some had already completed the programmes (3 at Institution A and 1 at Institution B).

Informal conversations were also held with members of the ACR, one member from MEN, and a recognized professor from a university in Bogota who is an expert on reintegration of ex-combatants.

## 4.4  Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods in qualitative research include observations, interviews, documents and visual images (Creswell, 1994, p. 148). The methods employed in this study included semi-structured interviews, document analysis, observations and informal conversations.

### 4.4.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the main tool of data collection due to the complexity of the issue of reintegration of ex-combatants. According to Barribal (1994), semi-structured

interviews allow for exploration of the views of respondents concerning complex and sensitive issues (Bryman, 2012). The semi-structured interviews were carried out based on pre-prepared questions for each of the group of interviewees at the two institutions (see Appendix II, III, IV, V).

The interviews were mostly conducted in the institutions, but some were done outside. The first interviews were with officials, programme coordinators, curriculum developers and the teachers with the aim to become familiar with the school environments before interviewing the ex-combatants. All participants gave their oral consent to be interviewed.

### 4.4.2 Document Analysis

Document analysis was used to help ensure the validity of the findings since they constitute representations of the reality of the organizations (Bryman, 2012, p. 554). Official documents published by MEN and ACR form part of the analysis in Chapter 2. Local policies, such as the development plans of the Medellín Mayor's Office and the Piedecuesta Mayor's Office, and institutional documents from both schools issued since 2004 were analyzed. The results were compared with responses from the research participants on specific issues that are analyzed in Chapters 6 and 7.

### 4.4.3 Observations

Unstructured observations were conducted to understand the environment in both institutions in terms of, for example, infrastructure (school conditions, health-sanitation and security), teacher and learner relationships, and students behaviour. Mulhal (2002) refers to unstructured observation as a method to understand and analyze the complexities of a particular social setting or event, with the aim of developing a richer and direct comprehension of the phenomenon under research. In this study, observations were used to gain insights regarding the physical and social characteristics of the two learning environments and how these might influence the learning process.

## 4.5  Fieldwork

The fieldwork was carried out from mid-September to mid-November 2013. It took place in Medellín, Piedecuesta and Bogotá. Institution A in Medellín was the first to be visited. Upon

my arrival in Medellín, I had a meeting with institution A staff during which I presented the research proposal. Staff at the institution was very receptive and supportive. The fact that the institution was included in an academic piece of research motivated them to participate since little research had previously been done. The teachers proposed to do classroom observations before starting the interview process. I was introduced by teachers as a student from an international university that was interested in observing how Institution A works. I managed to observe the teaching-learning dynamics and interacted with some of the students. When I carried out the interviews, most were very open about their experiences. I spent three weeks at the Institution and collected data as planned.

Subsequently, I travelled to Piedecuesta where the fieldwork was conducted over two weeks. The formal adult education programme at Institution B is smaller than at Institution A. The research proposal was presented to staff who were equally supportive and receptive. I did classroom observations before carrying out the interviews and experienced no particular difficulties.

I, finally, spent two weeks in Bogotá having informal meetings with members of ACR, MEN and SENA, and with a professor from a private university. Despite the ongoing conflict in Colombia, the fieldwork was conducted in relatively safe environments.

## 4.6  Data Analysis Procedure

The interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees. I started the data analysis process with the transcription of the recordings and translations from Spanish into English. Interview codes were assigned based on interviewee characteristics as displayed in Table 4.2.

The coding information was organized for each institution separately and categorized for further analysis into themes concerning the Right In, To and Through education, and to Freire's concept of critical consciousness. This concerned, in particular, elimination of discriminatory denial of access to education and ex-combatants' views on their learning experience. The findings are presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 in the form of stories and personal accounts which implies using extensive quotes. The objective is to compare the understanding and experiences of the respondents in the two contexts under investigation.

Table 4.2: Coding manual for analysis of data from field work

| Institution | Code | Respondent Type | Code | Armed Group Filiation | Code |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Institution A | A | Official | $AO_1$, $AO_2$... | FARC | $F_1$, $F_2$... |
| | | Coordinator | ACo | ELN | $E_1$, $E_2$... |
| | | Curriculum Developer | ACu | AUC | $A_1$, $A_2$... |
| | | Teacher | $AT_1$, $AT_2$... | n/a | n/a |
| | | Ex-Combatant | AEx | n/a | n/a |
| Institution B | B | Official | BO | n/a | n/a |
| | | Coordinator | BCo | n/a | n/a |
| | | Curriculum Developer | BCu | n/a | n/a |
| | | Teacher | $BT_1$, $BT_2$... | n/a | n/a |
| | | Ex-Combatant | BEx | n/a | n/a |

# 4.7 Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are concepts generally applied to evaluate the quality of quantitative inquiry. In qualitative research these concepts are more associated with trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness is limited to the concept of credibility which relies on the researcher's ability, skills and rigor when collecting and analyzing data (Bryman, 2012, p. 390). In this study, several steps were taken to gain the trust of the respondents in order to gather data for the research. For example, showing the presentation letter from the University of Oslo and the research clearance obtained from ACR (Appendix VI) to the respondents helped gain their trust and openness since they felt protected by the information. The presentation of the research proposal, the guarantee of anonymity and the emphasis on consent had the same effects on the institutions.

Triangulation was deliberately used to corroborate the findings of the different kinds of data sources (Patton, 1990, p. 467). For example, semi-structured interviews of respondents were triangulated with data from document analysis and unstructured observations. Although the study focuses on constructing a unique interpretation of two particular cases, some of the key findings might be replicated in other schools with the aim to improve the quality of adult education provision for ex-combatants.

# 4.8 Ethical Considerations

The most important challenge was to ensure that the participants and Institutions were exposed to no harm because of the information they shared. As Wood (2006, p. 374) states field research in conflict-affected areas is characterized by the presence of armed actors, political polarization and lack of security for most citizens.

I, therefore, signed an agreement with ACR to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of all respondents taking part in the study, including the institutions (Appendix VI). Officials agreed to allow me to mention the cities (Medellín and Piedecuesta) where the institutions are located without revealing their names. I ensured that all participants gave me their oral consent to take part in the study. During the interviews, respondents indicated that I could refer to their status as government officials, programme coordinator, curriculum developer, teachers, and ex-combatant group affiliation and age. The tape recorder was used with the consent of the participants. Transcribed interviews have been saved in a file hosting service for safekeeping so that I am the only one who can access it. When they are no longer needed, they will be destroyed due to the sensitivity of the information. After the thesis has been submitted and defended, copies will be submitted to the two institutions and to government agencies, such as MEN and ACR.

Another challenge was to stay unbiased as a researcher. Even though I had studied the literature and developed my research proposal and, being a Colombian, am familiar with the research context, I was at first scared of interacting with the ex-combatants, and to be surrounded by them. I thought that ex-combatants are dangerous because of the crimes of illegal armed organizations against the Colombian population, as reported in the media and research studies. When I arrived at Institution A in Medellín, I mentioned my fear to the staff. I was reassured that the learning environment at the Institution ensures that nobody is exposed to any harm and that students understand this. In fact, Institution A has security guards in order to protect all staff and students. Teachers and participants interacted in a friendly and respectful manner which helped me overcome my fear. In Piedecuesta I felt more confident and, with the support of the staff, I was able to carry out the data collection process without fear.

Overall, I consider the data collected as valid and reliable to highlight the two specific research questions. The findings of the analysis appear in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 which have been organized in view of the analytical framework in Chapter 3.

# 5 Making Adult Education Available and Accessible to Ex-Combatants

The following analysis focuses on how the two institutions have structured the adult education programmes to make them available and accessible. This is analyzed in view of the categories proposed for each concept of Tomasevski's 4A Scheme framework for the analysis of the right to education. The data is presented in a comparative manner for the two institutions based on an analysis of the categories displayed in Table 5.1. According to Tomasevski (2001) "securing that education is available reveals a variety of models: the government can fund diverse schools but not operate any, or operate a network of state and/or public schools without funding any non-state schools" (p. 19). Funding allocation and teacher recruitment criteria are used below to examine how adult education is made available at both institutions, and how their education is accessible to ex-combatants through elimination of administrative, financial and discriminatory procedures.

**Table 5.1: Making adult education available and accessible for ex-combatants**

| Category | Institution A | Institution B |
|---|---|---|
| Fiscal allocations | ✓ | ✓ |
| Criteria for teachers' recruitment | ✓ | ✓ |
| Labour rights | ✓ | ✓ |
| Elimination of administrative barriers | ✓ | ✓ |
| Elimination of financial obstacles | ✓ | ✓ |
| Identification and elimination of discriminatory denial of access | ✓ | ✓ |
| Elimination of obstacles to adult learning | ✓ | ✓ |

Note: √ = emphasized

## 5.1 Institution A

### 5.1.1 Funding Non-Formal Adult Education

Institution A was established in 2005 as a non-formal adult education institution for ex-combatants from AUC. It is funded and operated by the local government of Medellín. There are several reasons why the local government decided to do so.

During the collective demobilization of AUC, most ex-combatants demobilized in Medellín displayed a certain anti-social behaviour that affected the security in the city. Respondent AO$_1$ commented that:

> The reintegration of the paramilitary ex-combatants in Medellín was very different from the rest of the country. Paramilitary organizations operated through urban criminal gangs [combos] that committed several acts of urban violence. As a result, most ex-combatants had problematic behaviours that made reintegration more difficult, such as criminal records, drug addictions and lack of discipline.

In 2003, the Medellín Mayor's Office created the Peace and Reconciliation Program (PPR) to implement and monitor, in coordination with ACR, the reintegration process in the city. Through the PPR, the Medellín Mayor´s Office decided to provide vocational courses for ex-combatants to facilitate their quick insertion into the labor market. However, several problems emerged because most ex-combatants lacked the required levels of reading and writing skills, leading to a considerable number of dropouts (Medellín Mayor's Office, 2011).

After this failed attempt, ex-combatants were offered literacy programs in a private school, but teachers were not willing to work with them. This led to occasional confrontations and some teachers were threatened by participants (Medellín Mayor's Office, 2011). According to respondent AO$_2$ "*not only did we realize that most ex-combatants were functionally illiterate but it was also clear that we had to support them to develop positive attitudes towards accessing a learning environment*".

Officials at the Medellín PPR discussed the need to create special education models for ex-combatants and the local government of Medellín decided to establish Institution A to provide non-formal adult education for ex-combatants. According to respondent AO$_1$:

> The creation of Institution A was a very 'sui-generis process' since it is funded and operated by the Secretary of the Government of Medellín and not by the Secretary of Education that is responsible for the education system in the city. This is because ex-combatants have been seen by local governments as a security issue that could affect the security and coexistence in the city. In fact, Medellín has a culture of violence which has become natural to the life of some of the communities in the last four decades and has also caused the spread of a culture of lawlessness that has been very difficult to change.

From its creation until recently, Institution A has been supported by the government of Medellín. In 2012, the total budget amounted to approximately COP 2,176,300,000[9] (Alcaldía de Medellín, 2012). The Office has been able to do so because, during 2007-2011, Medellín was the city in Colombia that had the most funding for social investment programs

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[9] Approximately USD 1,000,000.

(Muñoz, 2005). According to Muñoz (2013), Medellín had the highest per capita income in Colombia during this period, at about US$ 6,740,10.

Nevertheless, the continuity of Institution A depends on political will of ensuing local governments of Medellín since it was established as a local government responsibility and was not a part of the National Policy of Adult Education. According to respondent $AO_2$, *"Institution A has been included in the local development plans of the last three local governments of Medellín. However, its continuity is only guaranteed until the year 2015. After that, it will be the next local government that decides whether Institution A will continue to function"*. Tomasevski (2003) states that *"human rights correctives lie at the boundary between political and legal processes"* (p. 20). Resource allocation for Institution A is a political decision. This makes it sensitive to disruption at the local government level. As respondent $AO_1$ commented:

> Institution A was very close to being closed by the Major in 2009 when Medellín's Municipal Ombudsman [Personería Municipal de Medellín], in his report about the human rights situation in Medellín between 2007 and 2008, indicated that 16 percent of the human rights violations in Medellín during that time could be attributed to ex-combatants. This report had very strong political implications for the local government making the Mayor think of closing Institution A. The Mayor said that he was not going to invest public funds in the education of ex-combatants who are still involved in criminal activities. So the ACR made an agreement with the local government. The Mayor continued the program and ACR assumed the responsibility to address the antisocial behaviour of ex-combatants.

## 5.1.2 Criteria for Teacher Recruitment and Labour Rights

The teachers at Institution A are private ones. They have been employed by the Medellín Secretary of Government. They usually are contracted for no more than a year, and renewed each year. *Social sensitivity* is the criteria used to recruit them. According to respondent ACo:

> Teaching ex-combatants requires that teachers have social sensitivity. It is very important that teachers are aware of the social characteristics of ex-combatants. That is, if teachers do not understand why ex-combatants take part in a reintegration program, they might be prejudiced and the contribution would not be the best. In addition, working with ex-combatants is very demanding. Teachers have to be prepared to listen to all the difficulties they face due to their status. Therefore, it is crucial to strengthen the social support network of ex-combatants because they are more vulnerable when they do not have one. If teachers do not have social sensitivity, the learning process will be mediocre.

The teachers at Institution A form a multidisciplinary team. It includes pedagogues and professionals holding degrees in social work, engineering, journalism, psychology and sociology. Most teachers mentioned having previous experiences from social programmes for vulnerable populations, such as IDPs and marginalized communities. Respondent ACo

commented that even though teachers receive training by the curriculum developer before starting teaching at Institution A, their previous experience from working with vulnerable populations has made it easier for them to work with ex-combatants. Respondent $AT_1$ is an ex-combatant from a paramilitary organization who became an engineer after the demobilization and has taught math at Institution A for a long time. According to him:

> Every time we start a new academic term, I introduce myself as an ex-combatant and I explain why I joined the armed group. I also explain what I have been doing after the demobilization process. I like to talk about this with the participants, not because I want to show myself as an example. I want to make them understand that it is possible to move ahead after the demobilization and to start a new life without being involved in violence. In the case of ex-combatants the fact that they see that I am an ex-combatant and a teacher motivates them significantly to pursue their learning process.

Teacher payment was described as satisfactory and an important, motivating factor to work at Institution A. Respondent $AT_1$ stated that:

> Medellín's local government has understood that working with vulnerable populations is very demanding. The salary that I earn motivates me to work here. For example, when there is a shortage of teachers to assist all participants, we have double duties. But I feel that the job is well paid and that I can work extra time when it is needed.

Nevertheless, the process of employing teachers established by the Secretary of the Government of Medellín has caused discontinuity of the learning process due to political influence because some teachers have been replaced when their contract ended (ACo, Personal communication, September 2013). This shows that the local government does not have any mechanism to guarantee teachers' rights which can affect the learning process because teachers apply for other jobs if they can obtain better contractual terms and more stability.

## 5.1.3 Eliminating Administrative Barriers and Financial Obstacles

Tomasevski (2004) states that by eliminating administrative and financial obstacles individuals can benefit from basic education. At Institution A new ex-combatants can be enrolled on Wednesdays throughout the year since they constantly arrive to Medellín. Ex-combatants bring their personal identification cards and certificate showing that they are part of the reintegration programme which they receive once they are demobilized. Respondent ACu mentioned that some ex-combatants have completed the first or second grade but have no certificate. In that case, they are asked to do a test to assess their level of education.

The Medellín Major's Office has decided that participants do not have to pay fees. They do have to pay COP 5,700[10] to cover expenses for official tests done by external institutions, bring their own materials, such as pens and notebooks, and sometimes pay a small fee for photocopies. Respondent ACu explained:

> The fact that participants have to pay for the official tests and sometimes for their photocopies is meant to encourage them to take responsibility for their education. We cannot be too generous since ex-combatants are adults, and receive economic benefits from the government to support their education. They have to understand the importance of education for their lives and how they can contribute to this.

## 5.1.4 Elimination of Discriminatory Denial of Access

Institution A has substantially evolved over time. At the beginning, it was to assist only ex-combatants from AUC. But in 2007, as a result of the promotion of the individual demobilization programme by the National Government, the local government decided to also admit ex-combatants from FARC and ELN guerrillas who were rival groups. According to respondent ACo *"both groups assumed their roles as students and Institution A became a space where social actors that seemed to be irreconcilable could interact together without using violence"*.

Furthermore, the local government decided to enrol adult IDPs as a strategy to guarantee the right to education of conflict victims. IDPs and ex-combatants could also interact without difficulty (Institution A Coordinator, Personal communication, September 2013). In 2008, members of the Medellín Fuerza Jovén programme were enrolled, including ex-convicts and young people at risk of being recruited by criminal organizations (Alcaldía de Medellín, 2011). Hence, the local government decided to include all vulnerable youth and adults with limited education. According to respondent ACo*, "the inclusion of all vulnerable youth and adults in Institution A is seen by the local government as a strategy to promote social inclusion, improve the coexistence levels in the city and contribute to eradicating poverty through education"*.

At the time of the fieldwork, there were about 1,391 students at the Institution of whom 156 were ex-combatants from the paramilitary groups, 175 from the guerrilla groups, and the rest were from more than 15 programmes of the Medellín Mayor's Office for Vulnerable

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[10] Approximately USD 2.

Populations, such as ethnic minorities and marginalized communities (Respondent ACo, Personal communication, September 2013).

**Facilitating Access of Women to Institution A**

Tomasevski (2004) stresses that Education for All must take account of the need of the most disadvantaged social groups, including respecting the human rights of women. In 2008, a nursery was created at the Institution to facilitate access for women. Around 300 female students have children, and most bring them along since they have nobody to take care of them (Respondent ACo, Personal communication, September 2013). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) provided the funding for the facilities. A private university has sent students from their early childhood education degree programmes to do internships and assist the children (Alcaldía de Medellín, 2011). Respondent ACo confirmed that the nursery has facilitated female attendance, and promoted early childhood education of vulnerable populations.

## 5.1.5 Eliminating Obstacles to Adult Learning

There are seven teaching shifts to facilitate access to adult learning at the institution. They take place throughout the week and at different hours (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Teaching hours and shifts at Institution A

| Shifts | Days | Time | Total Hours per Course |
|--------|------|------|------------------------|
| 1 | Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday | 8:00 - 12:00 | 15 hrs. |
| 2 | Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday | 13:00 - 17:00 | 15 hrs. |
| 3 | Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday | 18:00 - 21:00 | 12 hrs. |
| 4 | Thursday | 7:00 - 16:00 | 10 hrs. |
| 5 | Friday | 7:00 - 16:00 | 10 hrs. |
| 6 | Saturday | 7:00 - 16:00 | 10 hrs. |
| 7 | Sundays | 7:00 - 15:00 | 9 hrs. |

Source: Respondent ACo, Personal communication, September 2013

The Sunday shift is the most popular since most participants work during the week. Respondent ACo stated: *"we had to create the Sunday shift to give ex-combatants and other students a suitable time to come to study"*. This significantly helps prevent dropout.

The flexibility in teaching hours is also due to issues of security in the city. Some ex-combatants drop out because they suddenly have to move to another city. As respondent ACu pointed out:

> Medellín is a city with high levels of urban violence. There are several armed confrontations between criminal gangs fighting to control drug-trafficking and territories in the city. Many ex-combatants live in the slums [comunas], and sometimes they cannot come to study because of armed confrontations between criminal groups in the areas where they live. Criminal gangs have established invisible boundaries where people cannot move because if they cross them, they can be shot. The reintegration process of ex-combatants in a city like Medellín, with high levels of urban violence, is extremely difficult. At Institution A we have not only given notice to the officials about this situation, but we try to help the participants, telling them that they can come another time.

This was confirmed by most ex-combatants. For instance respondent AExA$_1$ said:

> I do not tell anybody that I am an ex-combatant, even my classmates at Institution A because we are vulnerable to criminal organizations that operate in the city. I live in the most dangerous slum in Medellín, 'comuna' 13. If you want to live, you have to talk less. There are several criminal organizations that, if they know that you are an ex-combatant, force you to join them. If you refuse there will be consequences for you and your family.

According to Respondent ACo *"it is common to hear ex-combatants say that they feel pressure where they have settled because of criminal gangs that want them to join illegal organizations. While some ex-combatants reject this, others get involved"*.

The same dimensions of availability and accessibility are presented in following as regards Institution B.

# 5.2 Institution B

## 5.2.1 Funding Formal Adult Education

In 2008, the local government of Piedecuesta started the formal adult education programme at Institution B for illiterate youth and adults. This included ex-combatants and other vulnerable populations, such as displaced and marginalized people (Respondent AR1, Personal communication, 6 September 2013). Institution B is a public school operated by Piedecuesta's Secretary of Education since Piedecuesta is a certified municipality. The formal adult education programme is funded by the State through the SGP. Piedecuesta's Secretary of Education receives the transfer directly from the central government for each youth and adult

enrolled in formal adult education. The funding amounted to COP 523,000[11] for cycle I-II and COP 789.000[12] for cycle III-V in 2012 (Piedecuesta Mayor's Office, 2012).

Local governments of Piedecuesta understand adult education for ex-combatants as part of their local policy to eradicate illiteracy amongst youth and adults, rather than as a dimension of the reintegration process (BO, Personal communication, October 2013). According to the Development Plan 2008-2011, "*there is a high number of people in Piedecuesta that lack basic skills to communicate in society which prevents their integration into the economic life of the country, and the opportunities offered by economic growth. So our goal is to implement flexible education models for all illiterate youth and adults*" (Piedecuesta Mayor's Office, 2008).

According to respondent $BO_1$:

> The current government of Piedecuesta has set the goal of reducing illiteracy for four hundred illiterate youth and adults during its four years of administration. The objective is to reach one hundred per year. In this strategy, we include all adult vulnerable populations, including ex-combatants and, above all, armed conflict victims such as IDPs.

## 5.2.2 Criteria for Teacher Recruitment and Labour Rights

There are eight teachers of formal adult education at the Institution. They are all public teachers that work extra time in formal adult education. There is no specific criterion for teacher recruitment. They are employed based on their motivation and availability since it is an extra effort. In some cases, teachers have been employed because of political influence of the local government (Respondent BCo, Personal communication, October 2013).

Most teachers mentioned that this was their first time teaching ex-combatants. They found that that their pay does not correspond to their effort because they have to work in night shifts. According to respondent $BT_1$:

> The pay we receive per hour is very low. Although MEN has established that a teacher can only work 20 hours in formal adult education, there are days when we work 26 hours because we meet for 2-3 hours after class to discuss student progress. Nobody is going to pay for this. My personal motivation to work in this program is to increase my experience as a way to gain higher salaries.

Teachers have complained about their salary to the local Piedecuesta Secretary of Education but no solution has yet been found.

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[11] Approximately USD 217.
[12] Approximately USD 328.

## 5.2.3 Eliminating Administrative Barriers, Financial Obstacles, and Discriminatory Denial of Access

As in the case of Institution A, in order to be enrolled in the formal adult education programme at Institution B, participants have to bring their personal identification card and do a test to assess their skills in case they have completed education. Intitution B is open to enrolment any time new students want to access it. Students do not pay fees but have to bring materials, such as notebooks and pens, to buy a uniform and have a student card. The uniform and the student card are needed for security reasons, the more so because they study at night (Respondent BCo, Personal communication, October 2013).

At the time of fieldwork there was about 142 students of whom 25 were ex-combatants (16 from the guerrilla groups and 9 from the AUC). The rest were from other vulnerable populations, such as adult IDPs, early school leavers and marginalized adults. According to respondent BCo:

> Institution B has established itself as an inclusive school at the municipal and departmental level, focusing on providing adult education for illiterate youth and adults. The provision of adult education is based on the principle of diversity. We provide adult education not only for ex-combatants but also for adult IDPs, adults from the lowest socio-economic strata, adults with disabilities, youth expelled from other schools, and other vulnerable populations. All participants have free access to Institution B.

## 5.2.4 Eliminating Obstacles to Adult Learning

The formal adult education programme is provided on weekdays during the night from 6:30pm to 9pm, and on Saturdays from 7am to 5pm. Some students, in particular ex-combatants, struggle to arrive on time because they work. Respondent BCu mentioned that they were generally one hour late (information that was confirmed during the observations), and often came to class only to sign the attendance list in order to obtain their economic support. According to respondent $BExF_1$:

> Every day I finish working at 6pm. I work in a construction company which is 45 minutes away from the school. I have to run every day to try to be on time but it is very difficult due to heavy traffic. I cannot change for the Saturday shift because I work on Saturdays. I told my supervisor that I study and asked if I could finish earlier. But he cannot do anything since I have a contract, so I have to work until 6pm. I have been thinking of dropping out because in my job they do not help me with this situation and in school teachers sometimes do not understand.

Respondent BCo mentioned that some married ex-combatants from FARC who were only three months from finishing their programme and obtain their bachillerato certificate, had to

leave for another city because of threats from an illegal armed group. I contacted these students through ACR. According to respondent BExF$_2$:

> We married after the process of demobilization and we came to Piedecuesta to be safe. We established ourselves with a house and jobs. We enrolled at Institution B starting together from the first grade and were in the last grade. One day, we received an anonymous call saying that FARC found out that we are in Piedecuesta and they wanted to kill us because we deserted. We had to leave everything and come to Bogota. Things have been very difficult because we do not have jobs, and it is a more expensive city. ACR is helping us to resolve some issues, such as finding a house. But we have to look for a new school ourselves. We have contacted three schools that ACR suggested but they said that there is no space available for us. So we have to wait until next year to get enrolled in a new institution and retake the last grade.

Most ex-combatants indicated that they feel relatively safe living in the municipality of Piedecuesta. Institution B is located in a safe place which makes it possible to carry out the educational process without exposing students and staff to security risks.

## 5.3 Conclusion

Both institutions have made adult education available and accessible for ex-combatants, thus fulfilling their right to education. The provision of adult education for ex-combatants at Institution A is embraced in a security strategy of the local government to prevent recidivism. As a result, the local government of Medellín has allocated many resources to provide non-formal adult education according to the particularities of ex-combatants. This facilitates employment of qualified teachers who have previous experience from working with vulnerable populations. This is a crucial aspect of the learning process of ex-combatants. The funding has allowed the local government to include all vulnerable adults at Institution A according to a strategy of promoting social inclusion through adult education. However, Institution A is not supported by a long-term local policy. This makes it fragile because the funding can be cut through a political decision any time a new local government is elected. It also means that teachers do not have adequate contractual terms that protect their rights.

In contrast, the provision of formal adult education for ex-combatants at Institution B is understood as an opportunity to reduce illiteracy rates in Piedecuesta. The local government of Piedecuesta does not recognize the reintegration process and even the ex-combatant population. Besides, there is a no specific criterion for selection of teachers, and the funding allocation is considered to be low compared to the needs of the programme.

Both institutions have made efforts to eliminate administrative, financial and discriminatory denials of access. They both have flexible mechanisms to facilitate enrolment of ex-combatants any time they want. Likewise, ex-combatants are not required to pay fees to be enrolled in the programmes, although they do have to cover the expenses for the materials and other items required for the school. These can be described as affordable taking into account that the students receive financial support from the central government to access education. Both institutions have also made significant efforts to eliminate discriminatory denial of access not only for ex-combatants but for all vulnerable adults. They both promote social inclusion of vulnerable adults through adult education. This means that it is difficult to establish adult education programmes only for ex-combatants.

As regards eliminating obstacles to schooling, Institution A has facilitated access of ex-combatants to adult education through the creation of multiple shift schooling, especially during weekends. Sunday shifts are particularly suitable since most students work. In contrast, Institution B has only two shift schooling. Most ex-combatants are enrolled in the night shift during weekdays and struggle to be on time because of work. Saturday shifts are also difficult because of work. This has caused tensions between school staff and ex-combatants and has increased the risk that they drop out, also because employers have been unable to accommodate their contract.

Staff at both institutions indicated that lack of security is the main obstacle to access by ex-combatants, and the most important reason for drop out. The ongoing armed conflict and urban violence in the case of Medellín force ex-combatants to leave school and move to other cities because of fear of being recruited by criminal organizations. These are very complex situations that the central and local governments have not yet fully addressed.

# 6 Making Adult Education Acceptable and Adaptable to Ex-Combatants

This chapter presents in a comparative manner how adult education is acceptable and adaptable for ex-combatants in light of Tomasevski´s 4A-Scheme framework and the right to education. Tomasevski (2004) points out that "no education system can help each individual develop his or her potential to the full if schools are poorly equipped or unsafe, and teachers are untrained" (p. 28). The categories used for the examination of each institution are minimum standards, respects of diversity and the rights of the learner, contents, school discipline, and assistance for ex-combatants with special needs as displayed in Table 5.2.

**Table 5.2: Making adult education acceptable and adaptable for ex-combatants**

| Category | Institution A | Institution B |
|---|:---:|:---:|
| Enforcement of minimum standards | ✓ | ✓ |
| Respect of diversity | ✓ | ✓ |
| The rights of the learner | ✓ | ✓ |
| Orientation of contents | ✓ | ✓ |
| School discipline | ✓ | ✓ |
| Assistance for ex-combatants with special needs | ✓ | ✓ |

Note: √ = emphasized

## 6.1 Institution A

### 6.1.1 Minimum Standards

Institution A is located in the city center of Medellín and was described by participants as reachable and a safe place for all students. The Secretary of the Government has rented a six floor building which has been adapted and equipped with all necessary materials to facilitate the learning process, including desks, boards and computers (Photo 5.1).

Photo 5.1: Institution A in Medellín

Institution A has infrastructure that facilitates the learning process. However, it could be improved with green areas and better conditions for people with disability. This is important because some participants, especially ex-combatants, have physical disabilities, such as leg mutilation caused by landmines. Respondent $AT_1$, who is himself an ex-combatant, commented that:

> I am handicapped because of the war. A difficulty that I have at Institution A is that it does not have an elevator, and to get into classrooms it is necessary to use the stairs. I have been complaining about this with the officials for more than four years but there is no change. However, this has not prevented me from teaching because students have been sensitive and always carry my wheelchair from floor to floor. Sometimes I do not even have to ask them because they are already waiting to help me move.

According to respondent ACo, the infrastructure at Institution A, especially during the weekend shift, is insufficient to accommodate all students, resulting in overcrowded classrooms of 40-50 students. The number of teachers is also insufficient for the large number of students enrolled. According to respondent ACu:

> Teachers have to duplicate their duties in order to assist all participants. This means that teachers do not have enough time to prepare classes, and dedicate enough time to work with participants when they have difficulties. For example, Institution A has a psychologist who is also a teacher, and instead of providing psychosocial assistance he is teaching all the time because there are not enough teachers. We have informed officials about this situation but they always mention that funding for Institution A is too limited to hire additional teachers. So we have to maximize our efforts but the reality is that teachers are overloaded.

It was observed during the fieldwork that teachers lack materials to support the learning process. A couple of years ago, ACR provided several copies of the *Modelo de Formacion para la Reintegracion* which were used by teachers and ex-combatants. However, they ran out of copies and the local and national governments are unwilling to assume the production cost (Personal communication, September 2013).

## 6.1.2 Respect for Diversity and the Rights of the Learner

According to Tomasevski (2004) *"education strategies… ought to include human rights safeguards that formally recognize diversity but which protect all those who may be perceived as different from discrimination and victimization (p. 31)"*. In this regard, teachers mentioned that they have learned through the teaching process that all participants must be treated equally, whether they are ex-combatants or individuals from other vulnerable populations. The objective is that participants assume their roles as students and understand that Institution A is a space for learning. Respondent $AT_2$ explained that:

> At Institution A there are classrooms where ex-combatants and other vulnerable populations interact together. I always refer to them as students without saying who is an ex-combatant or who is a displaced person. I always tell participants that Institution A is an environment for learning letters and numbers, and everyone here is equal regardless of the situation experienced in the past. Also, I constantly tell them that the classroom is a space for peace and reconciliation. This has resulted in good coexistence amongst participants and it is rare to find confrontations among them or that students feel discriminated because of their backgrounds.

Respondent $AT_1$ added:

> The essence of teaching ex-combatants is to recognize that if ex-combatants sit in the classroom it is because they have been given a second chance to stop using violence as a means of life. Hence, I have the role of maximizing this opportunity doing my best to deliver quality of education that helps them demilitarize their minds, and develop their potential to be able to interact in society without resorting to violence. The same happens with the other vulnerable populations. Our goal is to contribute to fulfilling the right to education of all individuals enrolled at Institution A without discrimination.

Therefore, respect for diversity is understood at Institution A in the sense of treating students equally and guaranteeing that all, without emphasis on their backgrounds, have the right to receive education of quality.

## 6.1.3 Content Orientations

The Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning (UNESCO, 1997) states that *"Learning throughout life implies a rethinking of content to reflect such factors as age, gender equality,*

*disability, language, culture and economic disparities"* (p. 1). In this regard, Institution A has designed a non-formal adult education curriculum to prepare students to take official tests to obtain official credentials, such as the bachillerto certificate. The curriculum has been developed through an accelerated learning methodology by which an academic year of formal education, including all five grades from primary education (1-5) and four grades of basic secondary education (6-9), are integrated into three months of learning. The last two grades of upper secondary school (10-11) are covered in six months for a total of three years of schooling (Respondent ACu, Personal communication, September 2013).

Since Institution A depends on Medellín's Secretary of Government, it cannot issue official completion certificates for any grade of primary and secondary education owing to MEN regulations. Therefore, two formal schools, one private school for primary, and one public school for secondary education, have been assigned by the local Secretary of Education of Medellín to design tests and provide official completion for each grade. Respondent ACu explained that teachers from the two external institutions and teachers from Institution A regularly meet to structure and update the contents. Teachers receive guidance to specify goals for each student for the official test and can use the strategy they consider most appropriate to develop the contents (Respondent ACu, Personal communication, September 2013). Teacher autonomy was highlighted as fundamental in the learning process at Institution A. According to respondent ACu:

> The learning process at Institution A should not be based on traditional methods where the teacher only comes to teach and do exams. Teacher autonomy gives them the flexibility to have more interaction with participants through listening to participants when they have difficulties. This is extremely relevant when working with vulnerable populations, such as ex-combatants.

In addition, the curriculum is based on the idea of preparing students to reformulate their life project. Respondent $AT_3$ explained:

> The learning process cannot be only understood in the sense that participants come here to study mathematics or computer science and acquire new knowledge. It is important that they formulate their own goals, such as what they want for their life and where they want to go, and the steps for how to do so. Also, it is crucial to work with them on the role of their families.

This shows that the contents are based on the approach of 'significant learning'. According to respondent AT1:

> Structuring each level into a three and six months period implies that the thematic contents are relevant in the sense that participants apply what they learn in their lives. For example, eight years ago when Institution A was created we did not have computers. Today we have a computer laboratory so we introduced computer science subjects to teach participants from all levels how to

use computers and the internet. This is very useful to access job opportunities or further education. Likewise, the curriculum is relevant for students because it was formulated according to the needs of adult learners. That is, an adult with limited education is not thinking of spending a long time (re)taking primary and secondary education. What we have understood here is that ex-combatants see the adult education programme in terms of how they can move on very fast to obtain the bachillerato certificate to access better job opportunities and further education.

Motivating ex-combatants is very important and is constantly emphasized by teachers to avoid drop out. Respondent ACo explained:

At the beginning when Institution A started, we noticed that some ex-combatants were only motivated to come to study because of the economic support they receive from the reintegration programme. They did not work in class and their motivation was low. Therefore, with the consent of the external institutions, we decided to add a qualitative indicator in the evaluation process. This was based on aspects, such as student participation during class, participant attendance and homework. Hence, they knew that if they scored very low on the tests, the effort they made during class could be taken into account for the final grade. This considerably improved the commitment and motivation of ex-combatants.

## 6.1.4 School Discipline

Teachers mentioned that coexistence is a very important concept which is strongly emphasized by Institution A. In 2009, a paramilitary ex-combatant was killed by members of a criminal gang at the entrance to the Institution. Respondent $AT_2$ commented that "*this was a very difficult moment. There were some drop-outs but we decided to continue to show students that violence cannot stop the learning proces*s". As a result, teachers and participants worked together on the formulation of the coexistence manual to establish the rules of the Institution with restrictions and prohibitions (Alcaldía de Medellín, 2011). For instance, students are not allowed to carry guns, knives or be under the influence of drugs. The rules appear on a poster at the entrance of the Institution.

Officials also adopted security measures to protect everyone. This includes security guards who checks that students adhere to the rules. Respondent ACo mentioned that since the manual was put into practice, security levels have considerably improved, and there have been no security problems since then.

Respondent $AT_1$ added that:

Institution A organizes activities to integrate participants, such as sports events, visits to the botanical garden or to see some plays, and events to integrate student families and civil society, for example, coexistence and peace festivals. The purpose of these activities is to provide a space where participants feel welcome, where they can strengthen their capacities and establish social ties to facilitate their interactions.

However, it appeared from an interview with respondent $AR_1$ that some students, including ex-combatants, continue to consume drugs which affects the discipline.

## 6.1.5 Assisting Ex-Combatants with Special Needs

When Institution A was set up, teachers noticed that many ex-combatants stayed at the same level of primary education for nine or ten months while the time for each level was only three months. The teachers realized that many ex-combatants had deficient cognitive skills in terms of memory, attention span and logical reasoning. Their motivation was very low because of their slow progress (Respondent $AT_1$, Personal communication, September 2013).

Respondent $AT_2$ explained:

> Teachers from the primary levels had to sensitize the other teachers from the secondary level and officials to the fact that the learning process of ex-combatants is not the same as in a formal school with children. Ex-combatants are adults that experienced deprivation in education, some of them have war traumas, and the cognitive skills of many are distorted. As a result, their learning process is slow. Teaching ex-combatants to recognize letters and vowels or how to use a pen takes time. But teachers and officials were critical of the fact that ex-combatants did not learn to write and read immediately. Thus, sensitizing teachers and officials was hard but with time they understood how the learning process of ex-combatants works.

As a result, the Institution created a special needs education group to help students with cognitive difficulties. Hence, when teachers realize that students have difficulties, they send them to the group. They make an evaluation that includes tests about language, logical reasoning and the psychological state to plan how to work with the student. According to respondent $AT_4$, some ex-combatants have common difficulties with reading and writing, but they learn mathematics more easily since they have been exposed to counting. Some ex-combatants stayed in the first grade for two or three years and they only learnt how to distinguish the sound of some vowels and to write their names. Respondent $AT_1$ remarked:

> I can say that the policy of reintegration has overlooked the fact that some ex-combatants have special needs. If the policy does not recognize this, the provision of education for ex-combatants is exclusionary. We have sent reports to ACR but nothing has happened. Indeed, not all ex-combatants have cognitive limitations. For instance, there are ex-combatants who are relatively young or with minimum education levels who tend to learn fast.

The special needs education group is, therefore, very important to support participants when they have cognitive limitations. However, it is not functioning as it should. During the fieldwork it was noticed that the teachers in charge of the group do not have enough time to assist all the participants because of their other teaching obligations. Whether the same circumstances exist at Institution B appear in the following.

## 6.2  Institution B

### 6.2.1 Minimum Standards

Tomasevski (2001) emphasizes that "the minimal standards of health and safety, or professional requirements for teachers… thus have to be set and enforced by the government to provide quality education" (p. 13). Compared to Institution A, Institution B is larger, have green areas, sport zones, two computer labs and auditoriums. It is located in a relatively safe place. However, some parts have deteriorated, such as the sanitary drainage system which is damaged, classrooms have not been painted, and some classrooms have broken desks and chairs. This affects the quality of the adult education provision. The high number of students enrolled in formal education has also caused a deterioration of infrastructure as have natural disasters such as flooding (Photo 5.2). There has been no effective response from the government to solve these problems (Respondent BCu, Personal communication, October 2013).



Photo  5.2: Institution A after flooding in Piedecuesta

*Source:* Carvajal, 2013

Institution B also lacks materials to support the teaching process, such as textbooks, computers and projectors, which were highlighted by teachers as important to improve the quality of the learning process (Respondent BCu, Personal communication, October 2013).

### 6.2.2 Respect for Diversity and the Rights of the Learner

According to BCo, when the local government took the decision to include ex-combatants at the Institution, they did not prepare teachers to work with them (Personal communication,

October 2013). As a result, most teachers had to learn themselves how to do so. Respondent BT$_2$ pointed out that:

> This experience has been a very good lesson for me. I have to admit that when I started working in the program I was scared to work with ex-combatants. I had the perception that ex-combatants were individuals with an aggressive behaviour but most of them are friendly and respectful. Sometimes when I teach ex-combatants I think of how they once were fighting and using violence but now sit in a classroom being respectful and grateful. I feel very motivated to teach them, to help individuals that once took the decision to join an armed group improve their skills and be reintegrated into society. Teaching ex-combatants is a process of reconciliation because you have to forgive all violent acts they have committed in order to be able to help them in their learning process.

Respondent BT$_3$ added:

> Teaching ex-combatants has been a lesson not only for teachers in formal adult education but also for teachers in formal education. At the beginning it was common to hear comments from teachers from formal education criticizing teachers of the adult education programme for working in it. They said things, such as ex-combatants are unfit to live in society and are dangerous. In science we decided with the adult education students to improve the gardens of the Institution which were in a bad condition. The green areas were greatly improved and the school looks much nicer now. This has showed other teachers and also students from formal education the commitment of participants in formal adult education and that they are not dangerous.

Teachers confirmed that the identities of ex-combatants are not revealed to the other students for security reasons. However, despite the fact that teachers and ex-combatants are friendly and respectful, some teachers are prejudiced. For example, during private conversations some teachers referred to ex-combatants in a derogatory way because they did not follow the rules of the Institution: *"ex-combatants do not follow the rules because as criminals they do not like to respect the law"*. This may affect the quality of the adult education for ex-combatants because they can be stigmatized. In fact, during a review of the Institutional Educational Project, no mention was made of the adult education programme or the ex-combatant population which may affect the guarantee of the respect for diversity.

## 6.2.3 Content Orientations

Formal adult education at Institution B is structured according to the Integrated Special School Cycles established by MEN in Decree 3011 to cover five years of schooling. Since Institution B is part of the project *Modelo de Formación para la Reintegración*, the contents of the curriculum are based on this. According to respondent BCo:

> The *Modelo de Formación para la Reintegración* has been extremely relevant because we did not have any materials to support the learning process of adults, and even ex-combatants. Simply put, it was the first time that teachers received training to work with ex-combatants and adults. This has given us the most useful tool to structure a relevant curriculum according to the education needs of

ex-combatants and adults in general. The model is relevant because it has been developed based on the needs of adults and focuses on their individual life project. It encourages participants to recognize themselves as adults who are able to formulate their own personal goals and to propose the way to achieve them.

Teachers can add new contents to the curriculum if they want. Respondent $BT_3$ emphasized that the *Modelo de Formación para la Reintegración* is understood at Institution B as an educational model both for ex-combatants and for adults in general. Respondent $BT_3$ stated:

> When ACR and the institutions that participated in the formulation of the Modelo de Formación para la Reintegración began to implement this strategy at Institution B, we had a disagreement since they considered that it should only concern ex-combatants. Teachers strongly disagreed saying that if they wanted to implement the model, it should also be for youth and adults in general. The reason is that most of the contents are relevant for all adults. Institution B does not have enough teachers and logistics to exclusively work with ex-combatants separate from the other groups. Besides, the aim of Institution B is to be an inclusive school that should guarantee the provision of adult education for all vulnerable youth and adults. Consequently, ACR and the other institutions agreed that other groups could also benefit from this strategy.

As a result, *the Modelo de Formación para la Reintegración* is still used by teachers although the Institution has run out of the materials for students. Respondent $BT_4$ commented:

> The *Modelo de Formación para la Reintegración* has been very good for all participants. At the moment we have run out of materials to give to participants. As a result, we have to ask participants to pay for photocopies of the textbooks. We have contacted ACR asking them for more materials but they say that the local authorities should bear the costs. But the local authorities in Piedecuesta have not assumed the costs because the provision of education for children has higher priority than adult education.

## 6.2.4 School Discipline

Respondent $BT_1$ pointed out that when participants are enrolled at Institution B they have to follow the rules of the coexistence manual. Participants have to wear the school uniform, bring their student card, be on time, respect teachers, avoid physical aggression, and not consume alcohol and drugs in the Institution. In fact, the manual is the same as the one for formal education. Respondent $BT_2$ commented:

> At the beginning when the formal adult education programme started there were fights between ex-combatants from AUC and from guerrilla groups. This was a difficult time for us since we had to learn how to mediate disputes between them. Nobody prepared us to work with this population. So we developed the coexistence manual promoting values, such as tolerance, at all levels. This considerably improved coexistence. For instance, I have to teach science in formal education with forty kids in the classroom and controlling them is sometimes difficult. But in formal adult education there are fewer students, so the interaction between teachers and students is much easier.

## 6.2.5 Assisting Ex-Combatants with Special Needs

Since the formal adult education programme at Institutions B is understood by Piedecuesta's Secretary of Education as a strategy of social inclusion for illiterate youth and adults, adult learners with cognitive difficulties can get help from teachers to go as far as they can in their education. This ensures that participants at least develop minimum skills and knowledge for daily life (Respondent TB$_3$, Personal communication, October 2013). For example, on a voluntary basis some teachers help students with difficulties two hours before the night shift. But ex-combatants who are the most needy cannot come because they are working (Respondent TB$_4$, Personal communication, October 2013). As a result, some ex-combatants have not progressed in their learning.

## 6.3  Conclusion

The two institutions have several challenges to fulfil the right *in* education of ex-combatants. Even though they are both located in relatively safe places, they both have difficulties meeting minimum standards in relation to infrastructure which affects the quality of adult education provision. For example, Institution A does not have an appropriate infrastructure for students with disability, especially the handicapped and people with leg mutilations. The local government of Medellín has made significant efforts in terms of including all vulnerable adults at Institution A, but the infrastructure, facilities and human resources are insufficient compared to the number of participants enrolled. This has led to overcrowded classrooms and overloaded teachers and limits their time for crucial activities, such as psychological assistance and special needs education. In the case of Institution B, its infrastructure has deteriorated affecting the quality of the adult education programme.

Both institutions significantly differ in the way they address diversity. Institution A treats all participants as students without emphasing their background. In contrast, at Institution B teachers have not received training about the social characteristics of ex-combatants by the local government although they generally discriminate ex-combatants because of their status.

The curriculum is structured differently in the two institutions. Institution A makes use of an accelerated learning pedagogy in which the curriculum is taught in three and a half years of schooling. It gives teachers autonomy to develop the contents according to the methods they consider most appropriate for students. By contrast, Institution B uses the Integrated Special School Cycles over a period of five years. The contents are based on the *Modelo de*

*Formación para la Reintegración* which gives less autonomy to teachers. This model is also used in Institution A as regards teaching materials. Both institutions have run out of the materials which have not been replaced by the central and local governments. Both programmes agree on framing the learning process towards the reformulation of the students' life project setting their personal goals and steps to achieve them.

Coexistence is a crucial aspect promoted by both institutions to ensure school discipline and they both have a coexistence manual. Teachers and students at Institution A participated in the formulation of restrictions and prohibitions in the manual and the local government has established security measures at the Institution. In contrast, Institution B uses the same coexistence manual in both formal education and formal adult education. It emphasizes values such as tolerance among participants, especially ex-combatants.

Some ex-combatants in both institutions have cognitive difficulties caused by previous lack of education and war traumas. Institution A has identified several ex-combatants with cognitive difficulties and has created a special needs education group to assist students. The group provides important support also of other adults with cognitive difficulties. However, the teachers who are responsible for the group have insufficient time to support it owing to their general teaching duties. In contrast, Institution B decided that students with cognitive difficulties should be assisted by teachers to develop minimum skills and knowledge to function in society. Some teachers provide voluntary assistance in their free time for students with cognitive limitations.

The two institutions have thus made significant progress in eliminating obstacles to fulfil the right *To* and *In* education of ex-combatants. Ex-combatants are guaranteed access to adult education although general insecurity in the surrounding area, particularly in Medellín affects their access. Both institutions may also need more effective responses to make adult education more acceptable and adaptable to ex-combatants needs. How ex-combatants themselves view the value of the education they have received as a means to realize their right *Through* education is analyzed in Chapter 7.

# 7 Raising Critical Consciousness of Ex-Combatants through Formal and Non-formal Adult Education

The perceptions of ex-combatants about their learning experience are examined in the following to understand the importance of adult education for their reintegration into civilian life. This is understood in light of Freire's concept of critical consciousness. According to Freire (1972), *"a perception of reality would make illiterate people know what needs changing. Hence it is important to raise the critical consciousness of illiterate people"* (In: Nyirenda, 1996, p. 4).

## 7.1 The General Characteristics of the Selected Ex-Combatants

A total of fifteen ex-combatants were interviewed from the two institutions of whom nine were from Institution A and six from Institution B. The majority had belonged to FARC and a few of them to AUC. Most of them were enrolled as students while two of them were former students at Institution A and one at Institution B. Their age ranged from 18 to 38 years.

All ex-combatants had little education before they joined the armed groups since education was not seen as a priority by their parents, or their learning process had been disrupted because of the presence of illegal armed groups in their territories. Some of them came from dysfunctional families or broken families because of violence. Others had been abandoned or had to provide child labour because of general poverty. In some cases the school was too far away. All of them came from conflict affected regions characterized by a strong presence of illegal, armed groups, such as Uraba, Carepa, Daveiba, El Catatatumbo, La Macarena and San Vicente del Caguán. Respondent BExA$_1$ explained:

> My mother died when I was a baby. Then, I lived with my father who worked in agriculture so we used to move from one city to another frequently. This affected my educational progress since I had to move from school to school each year. I went until fifth grade and then my father sent me to work in a farm so I could not continue studying. My father died when I was 14 years old. Later I was offered to join a paramilitary organization to earn money. So I decided to join them because I needed the money to survive.

Respondent AExF$_1$ added:

If my parents had supported me to go to school I would have completed primary and secondary school, and perhaps further education. But I was denied school because my mother abandoned me when I was two years old and I never knew my father. Then, I was sent to live with my godfather on his farm where I started working when I was five years old. He did not allow me to go to school. He said it was not important. One day a friend of mine came to talk about FARC to convince me to join them. I decided to join the armed group when I was sixteen because I was tired of working all the time.

# 7.2 Challenges to the Reintegration of Ex-Combatants

All the ex-combatants interviewed agreed that their status of 'ex-combatants from illegal armed groups' is problematic because of the way it is constructed in society. On the one hand, ex-combatants are looked upon by society from a threat narrative perspective. As argued by McMullin (2013) "the threat narrative makes all ex-combatants dangerous, whether employed or unemployed". As a result, most ex-combatants usually do not mention their status to prevent being excluded from participation in social life, especially from working opportunities. Respondent $AExF_1$ commented:

> For ex-combatants it is very difficult to get a job. If people realize that we are ex-combatants they are not going to offer us a job because they think we are dangerous and violent. For example, I applied for work in a clothes shop once, telling them that I was an ex-combatant. But they said they would not hire me because they did not want trouble. So, you usually have to tell lies. Now I am working in a restaurant as a waitress but they do not know that I am an ex-combatant.

Respondent $BExF_1$ added:

> When you are looking for jobs people ask you if you have the bachillerato certificate. Since I do not have this I show them a letter from the school saying that I am enrolled in a school and that I am only three months away from obtaining it. Most of them accept it but they also ask for references. I do not have references because I have been living in this city for a year and I have never worked here. So, I explain that I am part of the government reintegration programme for illegal armed groups and I can show them a letter from ACR which is my only reference. They normally reject me because they think all ex-combatants are dangerous and unfit for society. I got a job as a gardener because an official from ACR recommended me for that position. Otherwise I would still be looking for a job like many other ex-combatants I know.

Most ex-combatants were working in informal jobs, such as restaurants, bakeries, supermarkets, small clothing manufacturers, gardening and construction. The majority agreed that they usually tell lies about their status as ex-combatants to get a job. They fear that one day their employers will discover their status and kick them out. Respondent $BExF_2$ said:

> I was working in a bakery a couple of years ago. I became a good friend with another guy and I told him that I was an ex-combatant. He told everyone in the company including the bosses. After this, some people insulted me and I was kicked out of the company very quickly. I told ACR but nobody did anything.

Insecurity is another challenge for ex-combatants in civilian life as has been mentioned previously. Ex-combatants hide their status because they are exposed to retaliation from the illegal armed group they deserted, in the case of FARC or ELN, or because members of criminal gangs want revenge because of criminal acts that were committed. Respondent AExF$_2$ explained:

> As ex-combatants we cannot disclose our status and even our past because we are vulnerable to harm all the time and everywhere, e.g. in our houses or on the way to our jobs or school. It is difficult to rely on people because you do not know if this person works for an illegal, armed group or a criminal gang. For instance, I was living with a friend who is an ex-combatant. She told a guy from the neighbourhood that she was an ex-combatant from FARC. As a result, some guys came one day to our house and killed her. That was a very hard situation for me because I had to move to another neighbourhood. So you must not tell anybody in your social life that you are an ex-combatant if you want to live.

The fact that most ex-combatants feel threatened because of their status has affected their reintegration process because they are forced to move to other cities to hide their identity. This has not only caused fear but also demotivation and frustration among ex-combatants because the progress they make in the different activities of the reintegration programme, including education, is disrupted. Furthermore, they have to adapt to new environments which can sometimes be difficult for economic and social reasons. Their social reality is, therefore, very difficult and factors, such as stigmatization and insecurity, act against their reintegration and increase the risk of recidivism.

# 7.3 The of Role Adult Education in the Reintegration

All ex-combatants agreed that adult education is vital for their reintegration. This means both to adapt to civilian life and to have social mobility and liberate themselves from the status of being an ex-combatant.

## 7.3.1 Education as a Tool for Adaptation to Civilian Life

For most ex-combatants adapting to civilian life after demobilization is a very difficult process. Adult education has facilitated the process since most ex-combatants have learned how to read and write so that they can use public transport, read signs, open a bank account, express themselves and solve problems without being violent. According to respondent AExF$_3$:

> Returning from the armed group to civilian life is like if you open a cage full of cows in the middle of a big urban city. You do not know where to go. For example, when I arrived in Medellín I did not know how to use the metro and take a bus because I could not read a word. I tried to take the buses based on their colours but I always took the wrong bus. As a result, I always had to call a friend who knows the city who helped me move around. I furthermore enrolled at Institution A where I learned how to read and write. Now I can move around, use the bus and the metro, fill in a job application and open a bank account which has facilitated my adaption to civilian life.

Respondent BExF$_4$ also indicated:

> Coming from war to civilian life is very hard for us. We lived in the jungle where we had basic things to survive, such as food and a roof over our heads. But in civilian life everything is more difficult for us because we have to learn to do things that we were not used to. For example, I have to look for a job and pay rent and bills, and interact with people to obtain things I need, such as in the supermarket, in the bank and in the medical center, which are things I did not know how to do. When I demobilized I was afraid of talking with people because I did not know what to do and sometimes I reacted violently. At Institution B I have had the chance of meeting other students which has helped me establish social networks and interact with them and to express myself without being violent.

Most ex-combatants agreed that obtaining the bachillerato certificate through the adult education programme is fundamental because it is the main requirement for a job. In fact, they now have families and children so earning a salary is crucial for their existence. Respondent AExF$_4$ who obtained his bachillerato certificate at Institution A said: *"if you have the bachillerato certificate you have a better chance of being hired because people will know you have some skills, such as reading and writing, to do basic jobs, and people do not ask you for references"*. Ex-combatants also indicated that although ACR told them that the economic support they receive when being enrolled in adult education should only be used to buy materials for their learning process, it is used to cover their expenses in civilian life, such as rent and food, due to lack of employment opportunities and high living costs. The economic support for ex-combatants is also important to prevent them from dropping out.

Living a civilian life is a new process for ex-combatants which demands that they have basic skills and employment opportunities to meet personal needs and avoid segregation. Adult education has helped ex-combatants to improve their skills, increase their social interactions and reinforce their status as civilians.

## 7.3.2 Adult Education for Social Mobility

Freire (1972) argues that "a study of their [illiterates] concrete social reality should lead to critical awareness of the possibilities for action and change". Most ex-combatants highlighted that adult education is important to formulate new prospects for their lives that are different from holding guns and using violence as a means of life, and to improve living conditions in

civilian life. Some ex-combatants described having been part of an armed group as an experience they did not regret, while others did. But they all agreed that they did not want to experience this again. The fact that they have families motivates them to have ambitions and aspirations to acquire new skills and knowledge, and offer their children living standards that are different from what they experienced. Gaining recognition as a person and not as an ex-combatant is important for them. According to an ex-combatant at Institution A:

> I was in FARC for more than 10 years. I was responsible for administering the money of the group which was millions of dollars. After I demobilized I am now working in a supermarket where I earn the minimum salary which it is nothing compared to all the money I used to administer in the armed group. At the beginning I was feeling very frustrated because I do not earn so much money. Later I had my first son who became my biggest motivation to carry on with my life and prevent recidivism. I started in the third grade of the primary level. This was not easy for me. I had to make a big effort to obtain my bachillerato certificate. Nowadays, I am studying Human Resources at SENA which has been very useful for me because I am in charge of managing twenty five people. The government also helps me to construct a new house in which I am living with my family. It is not pretty but I am working very hard to make it prettier.

Respondent $AExF_5$ added:

> I want to show people that I am able to rehabilitate and carry on with my life without being the combatant who only knew one thing, to use a gun. For instance, I have heard many times that some civilians refer to ex-combatants as animals. I do not want to be recognized as an animal and having education I might be recognized as something else. I started at Institution A in the second grade and now I am in the eighth grade of basic secondary education. I am planning to study gastronomy in the future so I am making a big effort to obtain the bachillerato certificate and continue with my studies.

Similarly, ex-combatants at Institution B pointed out:

> I want to finish my studies to give the best to my son because he does not have a father and I do not want him to join an armed group. I started at Institution A in the first grade and now I am in the fifth grade. I did not know how to write and read but I can do it now, including add and subtract. I want to obtain my bachillerato certificate to become a tailor and give a better future to my son.

Respondent $BExF_1$ said:

> Coming to study every Saturday in Institution B has been a personal sacrifice because I live in another town which is two hours away from Piedecuesta. I have to work from Monday to Friday and even Sundays. My only free day is Saturday which I use to study here. This has been very hard because you get tired. But I have been motivated to continue with my studies at Institution B for five years because I want to be a different person from the illiterate person I used to be. I am in the last year of secondary education. I am planning to study accounting after getting the bachillerato certificate. I want to sit in an office where people can value my capabilities and not judge me because of the fact that I am an ex-combatant.

Likewise, respondent $AExA_6$ mentioned that after obtaining the bachillerato certificate at Institution A, he enrolled in SENA to study gastronomy and he was planning to study food engineering because he got a scholarship from the Medellín Major's Office. Respondent

BExF$_2$ became an administrative assistant after obtaining the bachillerato certificate at Institution B and is now working at the ACR office.

What appears from these accounts is that most ex-combatants at the two institutions respond critically to the challenges of reintegration into civilian life. They view adult education as a crucial tool to adapt to civilian life, gain social mobility and liberate themselves from the status as an ex-combatant. It has empowered them to take some action to transform their realities because of in addition to the knowledge they acquired through their studies.

# 7.4 Opinions of Ex-Combatants on the Adult Education Programmes

## 7.4.1 Institution A

The ex-combatants at Institution A identified two particular aspects that were important for them to go through their learning process and not drop out: the teacher student relationship; and the accelerated learning pedagogy and flexibility in scheduling.

### Teacher student relationship

According to Sanders (1968) "conscientization derives from interpersonal dialogue in which one discovers the meaning of humanity from encounters with other humans". All ex-combatants pointed out that they feel very motivated in their learning process because teachers have understood their social characteristics and are constantly motivating instead of discriminating them. Respondent AExF$_4$ stated:

> The most difficult part of studying at Institution A was at the beginning when I realized that I was sitting in the classroom with ex-combatants from the paramilitary groups who were our rivals. I thought that I would not be able to handle this. But the teacher who was also an ex-combatant helped me overcome this. He talked to me about the importance of studying which motivated me to continue studying instead of dropping out. I became friends with everyone, including the AUC ex-combatants. The teachers know that you are an ex-combatant so they are very supportive.

Respondent AExF$_8$ also explained:

> The teachers at Institution A are not like the teachers I knew in other schools who are afraid or treat you badly because you are an ex-combatant. The teachers are always kind and they treat you like any other person without discriminating you. They are very supportive and help you make progress to avoid dropping out from school because many ex-combatants are not used to education. This significantly motivates you to continue studying.

Respondent AExF$_6$ added:

> I was sad when I finished the learning process at Institution A. I like being there because teachers understand who we are and the circumstances that we experienced before being enrolled. They never treated me badly because of my status as an ex-combatant. I am thankful to all teachers at Institution A because they taught me many things, and they answered all the questions from students without being rude. I think that without the support of teachers I would not have been able to obtain the bachillerato certificate.

In the classrooms observations it appeared that most students were generally enthusiastically waiting for the teachers to come to the classrooms to start the lessons. Teachers were always willing to dedicate time to student that had difficulties learning or talking about personal issues that affected their academic achievement.

## Accelerated Learning Pedagogy and Flexibility in Scheduling

For many ex-combatants the possibility of completing each level of adult education in three months was very motivating for their academic achievement because they could obtain the bachillerato certificate in a relatively short time. Respondent AExF$_2$ pointed out:

> While in a public institution each level of adult education takes six months, at Institution A it is completed in three months. I started here at the second level and now I am in the eighth grade of basic secondary education, meaning that I have spent one year and six months at Institution A. This is very good for ex-combatants because we struggle to find employment and we need to obtain the bachillerato certificate very fast. Also, for security reasons because we could be forced to move to other places, so the learning process should be fast.

Ex-combatants also mentioned that they usually come to study on Sundays because they have to work from Monday to Friday, and it is the only free day during the week which can be used to study. Indeed, ex-combatants have to alternate their working shifts which are very demanding, with the time to come to study. Therefore, the length and time of the adult education programme facilitate their progress and prevent them from dropping out.

## Challenges for Ex-Combatants with Special Needs

Some ex-combatants had struggled to make progress partly because they did not receive the appropriate support. As stated by respondent AExF$_9$:

> I have been studying at Institution A for three years starting in the first grade. During the first two grades, I received support from the special needs education group. As a result, I managed to make progress until the fifth grade. Nevertheless, I have not progressed for a year and I have not received support because there are not enough teachers to help me. My situation is that I can distinguish some letters but I cannot read a word. When we have dictation I do not understand what the teacher says. Each time I come to class the teacher explains something and after I leave I forget everything. Even if I look in my notebook I do not understand what is there. Because I lost

my leg in a landmine explosion it is difficult to find a job. I live alone and my only income is what I receive from the ACR to study which may end soon. The government has not provided any support for ex-combatants with disabilities, and even for me it is difficult to move around in Institution A because there is no elevator.

During the fieldwork, teachers mentioned that some ex-combatants, especially from the paramilitary groups, had severe drug addictions. They were enrolled, but they did not receive any treatment. As a result, some were involved in criminal activities. Respondent AExA2 explained:

> I started consuming drugs when I was 12 years old. I became part of the urban militias of the paramilitary group Bloque Cacique Nutibara when I was 17 years old when I increased the consumption of drugs. Since I demobilized I have been struggling to stop consuming drugs but I always failed. This situation led me to prison twice for illegal possession of weapons after I demobilized. The money that I receive from ACR to study I generally use to buy drugs. I know that consuming drugs can make me commit illegal acts but I do not know what to do because I do not receive any support from the government to help me deal with this problem. However, I like to study at Institution A. I am in the sixth grade and I have changed since I started studying. For instance, I am more tolerant and I can relate to people without being rude.

Respondent AExA3 added:

> When I demobilized from the paramilitary groups I started consuming drugs with some other demobilized individuals from the same group. I became aggressive committing domestic violence against my wife and daughter. I was sent to prison for seven months. After this, I have been trying to look for a job but I have not been successful since I do not have the bachillerato certificate. However, there are many offers from gangs asking me to join them to commit banditry. Until now I have said no because I made an agreement with the national government during the demobilization process and if I commit a crime I will lose all the benefits from the reintegration program. But I am scared that my drug addiction will lead me to commit a crime some day.

Institution A has not been able to help those particular students because it lacks the means to assist them. While it has made significant efforts to guarantee access to adult education of vulnerable adults, it has also reduced its capacity to assist ex-combatants with cognitive difficulties. This is partly because the local government has not increased the number of teachers to support the special needs education group, and because it has no professionals to handle the drug addictions. Many of the same issues and opinions were expressed by ex-combatants at Institution B.

## 7.4.2 Institution B

When ex-combatants at Institution B were asked about their opinion of the adult education programme, most agreed that teachers generally explained the topics and answered their questions well. They particularly pointed out that the activity to formulate their life project

was very significant for them because it made them know themselves better and identify their talents in order to formulate personal goals to adapt to civilian life.

Some ex-combatants indicated that they were previously enrolled by ACR in a private school in another city in which the learning process was based on filling in a student's textbook and less on interactions with teachers. As a result, ex-combatants were promoted very fast to the next level reaching the fifth grade without teachers evaluating their progress and skills. When they enrolled at Institution B they had to start in the first grade because their reading and writing skills were deficient. These ex-combatants mentioned that since they started at Institution B they have improved their skills since teachers explain better, pay constant attention to their progress and help them when they have difficulties.

However, the fact that the programme has no flexible shifts means that they struggle to be on time for school during the night and Saturday shifts. This is the main reason for drop out. According to respondent $BExF_1$:

> I work in construction and I finish every day my work shift at 6pm. Then, I go home and take a shower so I am usually at Institution B at 7pm which teachers complain about because I am always late. Two months ago I had an accident with my motorbike where my liver was severely affected. As a result, I lost my job. My wife and two children depend on me and the economic support I receive from the reintegration programme is not enough to cover our expenses. So when I recovered I got a job in a cleaning company where I finish at 8pm every day. I missed several classes and I thought of dropping out but after several attempts I managed to change my shift to work in the morning and I thus returned to school. Sometimes it is hard because I have to choose between coming to class or going to work.

## 7.5  Conclusion

Assimilating the status of civilian implies a change of identity for ex-combatants and an adaptation to a social order that is very different from the one in an armed group. Ex-combatants must get used to function in civilian life through having social interactions to meet their needs and avoid segregation. This is difficult for ex-combatants because they face a difficult social reality because of issues such as stigmatization and insecurity that are attached to their status.

Adult education is, therefore, viewed by ex-combatants as a tool to enhance their functionality in society and foster social mobility. It has improved most ex-combatants' skills allowing them to increase their participation in society. It has also empowered them to formulate personal goals with the aim of realizing new prospects to improve their living conditions. The

two programmes have contributed to foster conscientization among ex-combatants in the sense that they have understood adult education as a tool to liberate themselves from the problematic status of an ex-combatant, and be assimilated as civilians without experiencing prejudice. Through acquiring knowledge and skills, ex-combatants seek to prevent that their children follow their example of joining an armed group, by becoming a role model and also to provide better living standards for their families. This shows that ex-combatants respond critically to the challenges of reintegration. According to Sanders (1968) "an 'awakening of consciousness' is a change of mentality involving an accurate, realistic awareness of one's locus in nature and society; the capacity to analyze critically its causes and consequences, comparing it with other situations and possibilities; and action of a logical sort aimed at transformation" (In: Nyirenda, 1996, p. 5). In this sense, as described by ex-combatants, adult education is important not only for knowledge acquisition but also to generate a transformation of their status as ex-combatants in civilian life through having better assimilation as civilians.

The strategies used in the adult education programme to facilitate their educational attainment were viewed differently by the ex-combatants at two institutions. At Institution A, they underlined that the student teacher relationships and the flexibility in scheduling have significantly helped them to make progress in their learning process. Ex-combatants felt that teachers understand their particular status and were not discriminating; instead they are constantly motivated to go through the learning process. The flexibility in scheduling has helped to do so.

However, in its effort to guarantee access to all vulnerable adults, Institution A has overlooked the particularities of some ex-combatants. That is, the adult education programme does not respond to the needs of some students with cognitive difficulties and drug addictions. As a result, a few ex-combatants experienced stagnation in their learning process, and those with drug addictions were likely to fall into recidivism because their problem has not been well handled by the local government and because the Institution does not have the means to assist ex-combatants. As mentioned by some ex-combatants, Institution A needs to improve its capacity to assist ex-combatants with special needs education to help them make progress and foster their reintegration into civilian life. In the case of Institution B, ex-combatants underlined the need for more flexibility in the scheduling because of their work requirements. This shows the need for more adaptation to the particular needs of the ex-combatants.

# 8  Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to explore whether adult education can help ex-combatants to reduce their vulnerability and enhance their reintegration into civilian life. To do so two specific research questions were formulated: 1) how have two selected institutions implemented adult education programmes to respond to the needs of ex-combatants? And 2) what are the views of ex-combatants on their learning experience and its importance for reintegration into civilian life?

The two questions were explored in two locally run institutions: one providing non-formal adult education in Medellín; and the other providing formal adult education in Piedecuesta. The findings were interpreted in view of the human rights approach to education and Freire´s concept of critical consciousness.

The most important findings and their implications are discussed in the following.

## 8.1  Similarities and Differences between Institution A and B in the Provision of Adult Education for Ex-Combatants

The study has shown that the local governments of Medellín and Piedecuesta have restored the right to education for most of those ex-combatants who had experienced deprivations in education and who were enrolled in the adult education programmes made available to them.

The government of Medellín allocated more funding for non-formal adult education than Piedecuesta because reintegration of ex-combatants has been among its priorities to prevent their recidivism into violence and improve coexistence in the city. As a result, teaching at Institution A was inclusive and the learning process has taken the ex-combatants' particular social characteristics into consideration. This was done, for instance, by employing private teachers who have previous experience working with vulnerable populations. It has resulted in high motivation among ex-combatants and prevented drop outs. However, Institution A lacks a supportive long-term local government policy which makes the programme fragile even in the short term.

In contrast, Institution B in Piedecuesta has limited funding for formal adult education and low salaries for teachers. It does not focus specifically on the particularities of ex-combatants who are rather treated as illiterate adults. Neither the local government nor Institution B has a specific emphasis on reintegration of ex-combatants into civilian life.

Both institutions have, however, ensured that adult education is accessible to ex-combatants in accordance with the principle of the right *to* education. In the case of Institution A, its flexibility in scheduling has facilitated the progress of most ex-combatants in their educational attainment because they can alternate school with other important social activities, such as work. The creation of a nursery has facilitated access for female ex-combatants and prevented them from dropping out. In contrast, Institution B does not offer any flexibility in scheduling which has affected the learning of ex-combatants because they are always late because of their jobs, especially during the night shift. In addition to guaranteeing the accessibility of adult education for ex-combatants, the local governments of both Medellín and Piedecuesta have also restored the right to education of other vulnerable adults who have experienced deprivation in education. It shows that it may be difficult to develop a specific adult education model exclusively for ex-combatants when there are other vulnerable adults who demand education as well. On the other hand, the integration of ex-combatants with other vulnerable groups can help further coexistence and reconciliation. With the support of the teachers, ex-combatants at both institutions have assumed their roles as learners and become more tolerant and respectful resulting in peaceful learning environments as a basis to prevent potential violent acts in civil life as well. However, since ex-combatants are constantly exposed to security risks because of their status, there is no guarantee against recidivism. This underlines the importance of more government attention to the issue.

The fulfilment of the right *in* and *through* education of ex-combatants appears as the biggest challenge in both institutions. They both suffer from inadequate infrastructure in terms of teaching and learning materials and from other impeding factors, such as space and sanitation facilities. However, they have structured the learning process differently. The accelerated learning pedagogy in Institution A has facilitated the learning achievement of most ex-combatants and ensured that most obtain the bachillerato certificate in a short time. In contrast, the time needed in the formal adult education programme at Institution B is longer which has prevented some ex-combatants from completing their study and thus from having a positive impact on their vulnerability and reintegration. This is exemplified by the fact that

some of the ex-combatants were only three months away from obtaining their bachillerato certificate when, after more than four years of study, they were forced to travel to another city where they could not immediately re-enrol in another school for lack of space.

Regarding the adaptability of education, Institution A has a special needs education group to provide assistance for students with cognitive difficulties. This has helped some ex-combatants making progress in their learning process. However, the functionality of the group has been affected by the high number of students enrolled at the institution since the responsible teacher has had to focus on his general teaching duties which has limited his attention to ex-combatants with special needs. At Institution B, teachers have also identified ex-combatants with cognitive difficulties and helped them individually on a voluntary basis for lack of a special needs education group.

Overall, Institution A seems to have a more effective response to addressing the needs of ex-combatants for reintegration into civilian life than Institution B. The local government of Medellín has redistributed resources and also recognized the status and social characteristics of ex-combatants in its education policy. This has helped address the issue of the continued social exclusion of ex-combatants, since, as indicated by Kabeer (2000): "disadvantage leads to social exclusion when different institutional mechanisms function in such a way that the resources allocated and value assigned at an institutional level, deny systematically access of particular groups of people to resources and recognition, which would allow them to participate fully in the life of that society".

However, there is no guarantee that the funding for Institution A will continue in the immediate future since it relies on regular, supportive local policy decisions. In the case of Institution B, the local government of Piedecuesta has not allocated sufficient resources for formal adult education in general or for the institution specifically. Furthermore, the programme is inclusive of all disadvantaged groups with no particular attention to ex-combatants which has increased their risk of dropping out and readapting to civilian life.

## 8.2 The Impact of Non-Formal and Formal Adult Education on Ex-Combatants' Reintegration

From the perspective of the ex-combatants, education is viewed as important for their critical consciousness and for changing their daily reality. Achieving reintegration of ex-combatants

into civilian life is a complex process because issues, such as stigmatization and insecurity resulting from the continued armed conflict in Colombia are attached to their status. Ex-combatants need to be recognized as civilians rather than stay marginalized because of their status. Education is for them a tool to mitigate this complex reality and enhance their reintegration.

Most ex-combatants have seen adult education as a means to facilitate their functionality in civilian life and to ensure social mobility that can lead to better prospects and living conditions for themselves and their families. Most ex-combatants have improved their skills through education which has allowed them to participate more in social life, including accessing better employment opportunities, vocational training and higher education. The non-formal and formal adult education programmes have helped the ex-combatants to think critically about the importance of transforming their realities and to assimilate the status of a civilian rather than an ex-combatant.

According to Kabeer (2000) "institutions distribute resources, both symbolic and material, so that institutional rules are, among other things, rules about membership and access". As mentioned previously, Institution A has managed to structure non-formal adult education in a way that has had a higher impact on ex-combatants' reintegration. Most ex-combatants indicated that aspects, such as the teacher-student relationships, accelerated learning and shift flexibility have been important for the progress in their learning process and has prevented them from dropping out. This has led to better employment opportunities, improved living conditions and lowered security risks for many of them. In this sense, Institution A has embedded different rules for membership and access of ex-combatants to education which have contributed to reducing their vulnerability and enhanced their reintegration. However, in some cases Institution A has also reproduced disadvantage and thereby reinforced potential social exclusion, particularly of ex-combatants with special needs and drug additions. This is because the learning process has not been adapted to their needs in terms of necessary infrastructure or professional assistance.

While Institution B has improved the skills of many ex-combatants, it needs to make formal adult education more adaptable to ex-combatants in order to help them reduce their vulnerability and foster reintegration.

## 8.3  Implications of the Findings

The study has, thus, shown that education can be used as a tool to reintegrate ex-combatants into civilian life in the midst of the ongoing armed conflict in Colombia. Through non-formal and formal adult education ex-combatants have improved their skills and knowledge and have been empowered to change their identities from being an ex-combatant to being a civilian. This has increased their participation in civilian life in a non-violent way, mitigated social segregation and recidivism. The most important factors have been the redistribution of resources to make adult education available and accessible in fulfilment of the right to education of ex-combatants, and the recognition of their social characteristics when making education acceptable and adaptable and thus foster their reintegration.

However, continued funding of the programmes in the two institutions is not ensured and none of the programmes fully addresses the particular social characteristics of the ex-combatants. It is, therefore, suggested that the Colombian government should make adult education a priority in its education public spending in accordance with the international Education for all Goal 4 which aims at: "Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults" (UNESCO, 2013). The Colombian State is committed to achieve the goal – even after 2015 - but has not yet managed to do.

The Colombian adult education sector has contributed to restoring the right to education of vulnerable adults who have experienced deprivations in education, such as ex-combatants, and thus also to reducing their poverty levels. However, the sector needs more resources from the central government in order to improve the quality of formal adult education. In the case of Institution B in Piedecuesta, resources are needed to increase teacher salaries and facilities for adult learning. In the case of Institution A in Medellín, the local government of Medellin needs to continue to provide resources to improve its quality and guarantee its sustainability. In both cases, the educational support addresses needs of vulnerable adults which can help reduce poverty and build sustained peace in Colombia.

The Colombian State has made a significant improvement in building peace after legally recognizing the existence of the armed conflict after the endorsement of the Victim's Law in 2011. In view of this, it is important that the central government sensitizes its institutions to the work for peace building, such as the reintegration of ex-combatants, by specifying their

roles. For instance, MEN needs to integrate education policies with the policies of reintegration that aim at promoting peace and reducing poverty. MEN has made efforts to include the ex-combatant population in the education policy to guarantee their access to education as vulnerable adults. Unless MEN understands the provision of adult education as a peace building action, the local Secretaries of Education will hardly use it to promote peace and reconciliation. Moreover, taking the example of Piedecuesta, the decentralization of the provision of adult education for ex-combatants does not enhance their reintegration unless the reintegration process is explicitly recognized to do so. In this sense, the Colombian case shows weaknesses at the institutional level to integrate education policies with reintegration policies. This affects the quality of the adult education provision for ex-combatants, and also impedes that the recognition of education for ex-combatants as a peace building action that can contribute to reduced violence and poverty levels.

As the leading structure in the reintegration process of ex-combatants in Colombia, the central government should also sensitize local governments to the social characteristics of ex-combatants to enhance reintegration. As has appeared from this research, ex-combatants constitute a very heterogeneous social group that need special assistance through education to meet their educational needs. Some lack free time for school because of demanding work shifts, others are single female heads of household, some have cognitive difficulties, some have drug addictions and others have disabilities.

These characteristics are overlooked in the policy of reintegration which underlies the planning of the adult education interventions. Policy makers need to design reintegration initiatives based on dialogue with practitioners and ex-combatants at educational institutions in order to make adult education more adaptable for them. Some positive ways of doing so have, however appeared from the analysis of Institution A.

Finally, the two institutions are environments for reconciliation in the sense that ex-combatants from the different armed groups and victims of armed conflict interact in positive coexistence. The central and local governments should take advantage of this through creating strategies that involve civil society more broadly to promote reconciliation and enhance the acceptability of ex-combatants by the communities. This thesis has shown that the quality and relevance of the education programmes can increase the possibility that ex-combatants can be reintegrated into civilian life. More research on this very subject could help sustain policy making for further demobilization and peacemaking in Colombia.

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# Appendix I

The categories for the analysis of adult education as a strategy to fulfil the right To, In and Through education of ex-combatants have been selected and adapted from the 4A-Scheme presented in Tomasevski (2001).

| Tomasevski's 4A-Scheme | | | Categories adapted and selected for the analysis of adult education |
|---|---|---|---|
| Right To Education | Availability | -Fiscal allocations matching human rights obligations<br>-Schools matching school-aged children (number, diversity)<br>-Teachers (education & training, recruitment, labour rights, trade union freedoms) | -Fiscal allocations matching human rights obligations (Funding for public schools, public funding for private schools)                       -Teachers (Criteria for recruitment, labour rights, academic freedom) |
| | Accessibility | -Elimination of legal and administrative barriers<br>-Elimination of financial obstacles<br>-Elimination of discriminatory denials of access<br>-Elimination of obstacles to compulsory schooling (fees, distance, schedule) | -Elimination of legal and administrative barriers<br>-Elimination of financial obstacles<br>-Elimination of discriminatory denials of access<br>-Elimination of obstacles to adult learning (fees, distance, schedule) |
| Right In Education | Acceptability | -Parental choice of education for their children (with human rights correctives)<br>-Enforcement of minimal standards (quality, safety, environmental health)<br>-Language of instruction<br>-Freedom from censorship<br>-Recognition of children as subjects of rights | -Enforcement of minimal standards (quality, safety, environmental health)<br>-Respect for diversity and rights of learners<br>-Orientation and contents<br>-School discipline |
| | Adaptability | Minority children<br>Indigenous children<br>Working children<br>Children with disabilities<br>Child migrants, travellers | Adapting Adult Learning for Ex-Combatants' Needs |
| Right Through Education | | Concordance of age-determined rights<br>Elimination of child marriage<br>Elimination of child labour<br>Prevention of child soldiering | |

*Source:* Adapted from Tomasevski, 2001, p. 12

# Appendix II

**Interview guide for officials**

1. What is your position within this organization?

2. How do you understand the role of adult education in the process of reintegration of ex-combatants into civilian life?

3. What mechanisms have you established to ensure access of ex-combatants to adult education?

4. Can you explain how the adult education programme for ex-combatants is funded?

5. How do you guarantee quality in the adult education provision for ex-combatants?

6. How do you prevent ex-combatants from dropping out?

7. What impacts do you consider is the adult education programme having on ex-combatants to enhance their reintegration into civilian life?

8. Are there any factors affecting the learning process of ex-combatants? If the answer is yes, can you explain these?

9. Do you have any question for me?

# Appendix III

**Interview guide for programme coordinator and curriculum developers**

1. How long have you been working at this Institution?

2. How do you ensure access of ex-combatants to Institution B?

3. What requirements ex-combatants are asked to enrol at Institution B?

4. Have you established any criteria to employee teachers?

5. How do you prepare teachers to work with ex-combatants?

6. What is the aim of the curriculum and how this is structured to facilitate the leaning process of ex-combatants?

7. How do you ensure quality and relevance of the adult education programme?

8. What mechanism have you established to promote discipline at this institution?

9. Can you explain how ex-combatants behave at this institution?

10. What challenges do you consider affect most the learning process of ex-combatants?

11. Do you have any question for me?

# Appendix IV

**Interview guide for teachers**

1. What is your profession?

2. How long have you being working at this institution?

3. What are your duties at this school?

4. Is this your first time working with ex-combatants?

5. Did you receive any training to work with ex-combatants?

6. Do you like working at this school? Why?

7. Do you consider this school meets minimum standards to deliver quality adult education provision?

8. Are there any factors that motivate you to work here? Which ones?

9. Does this school protect your labour rights?

10. How do you describe the process of teaching ex-combatants?

11. Do you have autonomy to apply the methods do you considered most appropriate for ex-combatants and change the curriculum if you consider to?

12. What methods do you use to motivate ex-combatants?

13. Can you describe how the learning process of ex-combatants is?

14. At the personal level, how do you feel teaching ex-combatants?

15. Has your integrity been harmed within this school?

16. Do you have any question for me?

# Appendix V

**Interview guide for ex-combatants**

1. How old are you?

2. Where you were born?

3. Are you working?

4. Describe your family members?

5. Which armed group did you belong to?

6. Can you explain the reasons why you decided to join the armed group?

7. Did you have access to education before joining the armed group?

8. Why did you demobilize from the armed group?

9. How long have you been enrolled to this school?

10. Can you describe your academic level before being enrolled at this school?

11. Can you describe the changes you perceive is the adult education programme having on you in comparison before you entered this institution?

12. Do you like this school?

13. Do you consider education is important for you? Why?

14. What would you like to do after finishing the programme?

15. Have you felt discriminated at this school?

16. How do you describe your experience being part of an armed group? Would you like to be part again?

17. What is reintegration for you?

18. What challenges do you face in order to be reintegrated into civilian life?

# Appendix VI

ACR Confidential Agreement Sample to carry out research with ex-combatants people in Medellín and Piedecuesta.

<div align="center">

**COMPROMISO DE CONFIDENCIALIDAD**

</div>

Yo, **JORGE LUIS BONILLA SILVA**, mayor de edad, identificado con la cédula de ciudadanía No. **1.018.405.624 de Bogotá**, en adelante el **INVESTIGADOR**, según documento de presentación enviado por **Universidad de Oslo** mediante la suscripción de este documento asumo como obligación unilateral a favor de la **AGENCIA COLOMBIANA PARA LA REINTEGRACIÓN SOCIAL Y ECONÓMICA DE PERSONAS Y GRUPOS ALZADOS EN ARMAS**, en adelante **ACR**, el compromiso de confidencialidad que se regula a través de las siguientes cláusulas:

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Por, el INVESTIGADOR


**Jorge Luis Bonilla Silva**
                Nombre y firma


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