

# On the Way to a Real Restitution of Rights

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Master Thesis

“This I cannot understand, I was reading one day in internet that this program is for the reestablishment of our rights... I don't think that they reestablished our rights, I don't think that we make part of a family, here in the program you feel different in comparison with the other ones, you feel different in comparison with the normal children” . (Interviewee 9; 37:07)

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# Abstract

Colombia has lived in an armed conflict for over 50 years. The causes of this war are deeply historical linked to high social inequality. The majority of the Colombian population has suffered in a direct or indirect way the consequences of this inequality and the armed conflict itself. Due to the Colombian social conditions, children and teenagers have been forced to be part of illegal armed groups. In this situation, Colombian government has alternatives in place for those who leave the armed groups through a reintegration program with the reestablishment of children's rights as the main goal

The objective of this research is to determinate how the reintegration program for young ex-combatants in Colombia is impacting their wellbeing in the sense of quality of life and freedom. Qualitative methodology based on narrative approach was implemented to know teenagers' ideas, perceptions and knowledge about their process in the reintegration program.

It was found that the Colombian reintegration program is based on policies that perceive wellbeing just as economic growth, perpetuate structure of power that establish and maintain control over people and displaces the causes of the conflict from the social conditions to an ex-combatant pathology. The way the program is structure creates a negative influence in the freedom and development process on teenagers.

This negative influence of the program on the freedom and development process on teenagers were condensed in two identified issues.

1. The teenagers are under a big umbrella of stigmatization: their condition of being under-age makes them to be perceived as incapable, their condition of being victims implies losing their individuality and their condition of being ex-combatant makes them to be perceived as not trustworthy. The teenagers' wellbeing has been affected because the perception and recognition of them undermines who they are and their potentiality.

2. Even though the teenagers have changed the place of origin and got involved in different social institutions, the dynamics inside of these new institutions (foster family, organization, school) are still the same as the ones they experienced inside their own families or communities. Teenagers are internalizing these authoritarian power structures making them perpetuate the conflict in their life beyond war.

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# 1. Introduction

Children have been involved in the armed conflict in Latin-American countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Peru. However, an alarming rate of figures has been reported in Colombia. In recent years, no less than 14,000 children have been recruited as soldiers. This signifies that one in every four illegal combatants is underage. It is estimated that at least two thirds of these warrior children are less than 15 years old and the youngest recruits are only seven (Tribunal Internacional sobre la Infancia afectada por la Guerra y la Pobreza del Comité de Derechos Humanos , 2012) .

The way in which children and young people enter into these illegitimate armed groups has several forms. Forced recruitment is not the only mechanism by which they manage to enlist the children, as it is commonly believed. This national reality has many factors, that which are complex and diverse. The Colombian Office of the Ombudsman in 2004, reported that 90% of children who were in the Guerrilla, said they entered “voluntarily”. Of these, 33% said they were attracted to the weapons and uniforms. Another 33% was due to poverty conditions that which led them to make this decision. 16.60% was because they grew up living around the Guerrillas and 8.33% were motivated by infatuation, heartbreak or a feeling of revenge because their families and property had been destroyed by other participants in the armed conflict. Becoming part of one of these organizations was the only way that they considered it would allow them to someday take revenge (Lorente, Chaux, & Salas, 2004).

Voluntary recruitment is actually not the result of a free and autonomous decision from the children, but a way out of their precarious living conditions. A study by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2002) shows that children who become soldiers during wartime, would be living on the streets or working under hard conditions if they were not part of the armed conflict.

From this perspective, we cannot perceive these children or the problems they encounter as a byproduct of war. We need to see it as a consequence of Colombian social reality (family, social and/or environmental dynamics) which is inadvertently imposed upon them to thus take drastic measures against their safekeeping or desire. Additionally, in our society the children are not a collective, they do not have their own movement that can claim for their needs and fight for their rights. And, because we are in a representative democracy, the basic problem of the children and teenagers is that they cannot represent themselves; without social power it is hard to build political power. Without the capacity of self-representation, the defense of the children's rights has been handled by the adults (Bustelo, 2005).

Perhaps, this explains why most of the actions taken on behalf of the children in Colombia, victims of the armed conflict, have been more reactive than proactive, and have been developed in response to a series of circumstantial events that made the problem in the nineties come to the surface today<sup>1</sup>. Similar situations of what has been mentioned above have occurred in Central America and Africa. Here, children involved in the armed conflict were not taken into consideration during the peacetime process. The consequences were of such that children continued having difficulties finding themselves in the society, and therefore, becoming members of crime organizations within the city (Pachón, 2009).

Even though, the politicians are more aware about the importance of providing differential attention to this population during their reintegration process, the perspectives from the demobilized children have gained little attention (Wessells, 2006). Still, there is missing information about what the children think about the peace process and the needed actions to re-build society (McEvoy-Levy, 2001). There is not a clear picture about these childrens' realities, as well as their transition process and demilitarization

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1 The Report of the Colombian Office of the Ombudsman in 1996, called: "The childhood and their rights: victims of the violence. The Colombian Armed conflict and the underage", it is one of the first reports that mention the illegal recruitment of children by the legal and illegal armed groups; and the surrender of six teenagers by the guerrilla of ELN in 1997, event that was highly covered for the media (Feo & Fernandez, No disponible)

experiences (Denov & Maclure, 2007). This was confirmed at the First International Congress on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), held in Cartagena (Colombia) in 2009, where it was concluded that the demobilized children require a better support that includes the mapping of their opportunities and needs due to the lack of strategies that prompt them to express themselves (Congreso Internacional de Desarme, Desmovilización y Reintegración , 2009).

It is important to recognize the work that the Colombian welfare institution (ICBF; for its acronym in Spanish) is doing to face this problem. However, specialists in this phenomenon, international cooperation representatives, and the Attorney General's Colombian Office, are pointing out that there are many failings in the system and in the programs aiming to demobilize and reintegrate those children (Pachón, 2009). They have also highlighted the low coverage, irregularities in the process, and the lack of clarity that the children and teenagers have about their current situation and about their future. There are high numbers of children that have run away from the program and do not finish the established process, approximately 25% (Coalition to stop the use of child soldiers, 2008). Around 48% of the teenagers that finish the program at the age of 18 do not continue on to the Colombian Reintegration's Agency program that has been proposed for demobilized people in the adult age.

Amartya Sen (1998) opens a new perspective of the human development; his contribution is based on three main concepts: freedom, capability and agency. Through them he creates a perspective of human development based in increasing the richness of the human life rather than increasing the richness of the economy in which people live. Sen thinks that the freedom that a person has to develop and apply its capacities is what defines the person's personal and social conditions as well as the society where he/she belongs.

From this perspective, in most of the cases the lack of freedom and opportunities is what makes the children/teenagers to take the decision that goes against their wellbeing or others wellbeing. In this case, it would be when they took the decision to join an illegal armed group. This is the reason why, the current research seeks to answer the following

question: **How does the reintegration program for young ex-combatants in Colombia impact their wellbeing in the sense of quality of life and freedom?**

This research is using the concept of wellbeing defined by Amartya Sen (1998), where the wellbeing is measured through the freedom of the people to develop and enhance their capacities, and at the same time, to have the agency to interact and affect their environment in their best interest. Being the teenagers' life the main focus of what the reintegration program aims to promote. This research has opted for a qualitative methodology, using a narrative approach based on experiences, perceptions and ideas that a group of Colombian children/teenagers have about their process in the reintegration program. This approach allows mainly to track and to examine changes and transformations in crucial moments of the people's life and also to cover wider experience such as the one related with a trauma and to the psychological aftermath, on the basis of their own voices and narratives (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008).

This data is analyzed through five categories based on the five instrumental freedoms, proposed by Sen (1998) in the Capability Approach theory, to evaluate whether a society or organization is offering the right conditions for people to freely develop and interact in their environment.

## 1.1 Objectives

The general objective of this research is to analyze **the perceptions and ideas of a group of teenagers that are part of the Colombian reintegration process, in order to determine the impact of the program in their wellbeing in the sense of quality of life and freedom.**

To reach this, 4 specific objectives have been proposed:

1. Describe the approach of international and Colombian organizations towards demobilized children.



2. Describe the capability approach, proposed by Amartya Sen, focusing on the five instrumental freedoms (political freedom, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency warranties, and protective security).
3. Categorize the perceptions and ideas of the teenagers about their experience in the program.
4. Identify and problematize the main issues that may be preventing the program to generate the appropriate environment for the teenagers' wellbeing (quality of life and freedom).

## 2. Framework

### 2.1 When the society produce more harm than war itself:

The children have been involved in the war and armed conflicts since immemorial times. However, with the emergence of lighter firearms that made easier to operate them, their duties have increased and they have assumed roles of direct actors in the conflict. Simultaneously, the society started embracing the concept of modern child characterized by their dependence and powerlessness, where family and school are providers for their protection. Therefore, the childhood was conceived as a period of life where the child needs to be protected morally and physically. With this change of mentality, the society started to blame the presence of children in the battle field, and in any war activities that could put them on risk (Pachón, 2009).

In Colombia the war is characterized by the confrontation between the State, guerrilla groups<sup>2</sup> and paramilitary groups which has a sad tradition of over 40 years. The causes of this war are deeply historical linked to high social inequality; in fact, only 0.005% of the population, equal to 2,428 people, dominate 53% of registered land (Leiteritz, 2008) while almost 4 million Colombians are internally displaced persons, shows the dimensions of social injustice.

Between 2003 and beginnings of 2010, 52.385 people have demobilized in the midst of armed conflict. Most of them have demobilized collectively through the peace agreement signed under the government or the former president Alvaro Uribe with the paramilitaries. Close to 19.000 guerrillas in their majority FARC's members voluntarily disarmed (ODDR, 2010). Among those 52.000 demobilized people a significant number of them were under age.

In Colombia, the data on the number of the child soldiers is vague and there is just an approximation calculated through indirect methods. Different people, kidnapped by

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<sup>2</sup> FARC (The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and ELN (The National Liberation Army)

illegal groups (i.e. guerrillas), have testified that children, not older than 15 years old, were often the responsible of their supervision, and they also manifested the high presence of them in those armed group. In 2000, for example, the Colombian army surrounded one of the FARC's subgroups in Santander. In that place, 100 people were killed, 90 were captured and of those, 72 of them were under 18 years old (Mejía Azuero, 2009).

The number of combatant's children has considerably increased year by year. For example, in 2004, the Colombian army claimed that at least 3.000 children were trapped in the illegal armed groups, and then, another 8.000 turned 18 years old while they were in the group. By the end of 2004, the ICBF stated that 6.000 children were involved in the illegal armed forces (Ejército Nacional, 2004). At the beginning of 2005, the International Human Rights Watch calculated that approximately 11.000 children were involved in the Colombian conflict armed (Human Rights Watch, 2005). According to Save the Children and the UNICEF, 14.000 children were involved by 2005. Furthermore, those organizations assured that thousands of those children were less than 15 years old, violating the minimum age of recruitment for the armed forced established in the Geneva Convention (UNICEF, 2005).

The children that join the illegal armed group are part of the hundreds of illiterate or with a low level of education in Colombia. According to the Colombian Office of the Ombudsman, in 1996 the 55% of the children involved in the Colombian conflict had completed primary school, 4% were completely illiterate, and only 8% were at a secondary level of education. Additionally, the levels of schooling found in this population, were directly related with the geographical regions, urban or rural and the family income (Alvarez-Correa , Aguirre Buenaventura, Ochoa R, Vargas G, & Forero Angel, 2002).

As it is mention in the introduction we cannot talk about “voluntary recruitment”, the decision to join the armed group is actually not the result of a free and autonomous decision by the children, but a way out of their precarious living conditions.

According to the Colombian Family Welfare Institute, the street children population in Colombia is around 30.000 children, of which 75% of them have been victims of domestic abuse (Procuraduría General de la Nación & UNICEF, 2005). Along the same line, UNHCR revealed that more than two million displaced children estimated in Colombia only 1 in 4 continues their studies. Given the low percentage of children who have been registered, just a few have access to health services (Caracol Radio, 2007).

In Colombia contradictorily, there are more and more children living in poverty, extreme poverty and inequality, and every year there is less budget designated to education, health and social care services for children (OHCHR & UNICEF, 2006).

The participation in the armed conflict substantially increases the vulnerability of children, destroys their childhood and marks their physical and psychological development. In a research done by the Colombian Ombudsman in relation with the demobilized children, it explains that the physical aftermaths are generally derived from the dynamics of armed clashes, but can also result from heavy physical work, diseases they are exposed to, the poor diet and punishment, and sexual abuse they are victims of. The psychological effects of the recruitment can usually manifest in to the inability of children to "develop its lifecycle; affecting them at the academic, family and social level (Procuraduria General de la Nacion, 2005).

Furthermore the same research points out that the child soldiers experienced the trauma of witnessing kidnapping, torture and murder. The research also reveals that while participating in the conflict 28% of children get injured, 18% kill someone and 40% shoot firearms. The decisive role of the vulnerability of children, prior to recruitment and the aftermath of it, show the relevance of any State to assume its commitments to the rights of the children.

Since 1999, the ICBF heads the reintegration program for young ex-combatants in Colombia, officially called: Care Program for demobilized young people from illegal armed groups (Programa de Atención a Niños, Niñas y Jóvenes Desvinculados de Grupos

Armados Organizados al Margen de la Ley). In 2001 the international cooperation through the International Organization for Migration (IOM), USAID and Save the Children-UK began to intervene directly with advice and program funding. Supported by international law ICBF is building its philosophy and intervention on the restoration of the rights of children and putting the age limit to 18 years old. The idea of victim complements its discourse and in this way to take away any responsibility from the young ones. The aim of the program is supposed to prepare them for civilian life. The path of transformation from an exploited and helpless child soldier to an independent and caring citizen needs to be accomplished through the program. This would be through its three phases; diagnosis, intervention and consolidation (Rethmann, 2010).

## 2.2 A structural view of the program

Care Program for demobilized young people from illegal armed groups is based in the restitution of the children's right after they have been demobilized, regardless if the children are rescued or they escaped from an armed group. The army, police or civil institution has 36 hours to bring the kids to the ICBF, during those 36 hours the children cannot be submitted to interrogation or any intelligence activity. For the safe of the children and their families, the children are located in places physically far away from the places they were coming from in a nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) contracted by the ICBF. Those organizations carried out the phases of the program.

The First phase is *Identification, diagnostic and Establishment*, the idea of this phase is to create a working plan according with the characteristic and necessities of each child; the phase is taking place in the Temporary Homes; and all these children need to go through those homes, their stay can last up to 45 days. Here it is decided whether the young continues with the other two phases in the social-family or institutional environment. If the ICBF choose the social-family environment for the minor, this teenager lives after Transitional Home in foster houses or Gestation Homes (The last one are places where

they can live with their own family)<sup>3</sup>. ICBF agents, usually social workers and psychologists, constantly accompany families and teenagers.

The second Phase is *Intervention and Projection*, this phase is developed according to what was found in the first phase in relation to the needs of each child or adolescent. The focus at this stage is based on each of the components that the program have established, including health and nutrition, psychosocial support, formal schooling, socialization, citizenship and protection.

The shift to the Youth House demarcates the third stage of the program; *Preparation for their independence*. While the first two stages are characterized almost exclusively by protection measures, the third stage gives priority to the participation. The young people must learn to live in independence and responsible, they need to fulfill their school and duties. The stay lasts one year unless entered before their 18th birthday.

## **2.3. Previous research:**

### **2.3.1. International researches:**

In the early 2000s a publication of the World Bank said that although several countries had demobilization and reintegration process with children, the record of those experiences was poor and the programs were inefficient (Verhey, 2001). Now researchers recognize that demobilized children have received increasing attention and have come to be at the forefront of the political, humanitarian and academic agendas (Honwana, 2006). Their reintegration is seen as a priority in post-conflict to reduce their propensity to use violence as an instrument to meet their needs and continue the cycle of violence (Wessells M. , 2005) going against the construction of peace and democracy. The reason is that these children will soon become young, that is, both the group with the greatest difficulties to properly reintegrate and imposes greater risks for peace, as the largest group of potential contributors to the economy and rebuilding a country (Specht, 2006).

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<sup>3</sup> This option is not very common for security reasons. Most of the children stay with not related people.

It has also increased the awareness that disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs should create a specific and individual program for groups such as female ex-combatants, demobilized and disabled children as they require special support (Congreso Internacional de Desarme, Desmovilización y Reintegración , 2009). Despite these advances in the recognition of the importance of this population, DDR processes have focused on adults, leaving aside children specially girls. Consequently, many children have not received the required assistance to successfully return to their communities and families (Coalition to stop the use of child soldiers. , 2008), and have been drifting in the reintegration process; the most difficult and crucial stage of the DDR program which requires 3 to 5 years of committed resources (Verhey, 2001). This put in risk the stability in the program due to unattended teenagers can become more radical and harmful people, as they are easily influenced and manipulated (Specht, 2006).

Most recent operations DDR with children has taken place in Africa. The scale and ferocity of the conflict (Muggah, 2009) and the prominent use of children in the war, has possibly made this continent be considered the epicenter of the phenomenon (singer, 2006). This may explain why studies about demobilized children have focus its attention specially in Sierra Leone, which was one of the first programs and is the most instructive according to Singer, He also point out that in Mozambique the formal demobilization process did not include child soldiers and the social impact was long-term with high levels of banditry in the next decade. In another hand, there are publications that have studied the processes of Latin American countries like El Salvador and Colombia. The latter is the only one today has a DDR process in the region, which occurs during the conflict (Coalition to stop the use of child soldiers. , 2008).

Colombia and other few countries have had programs of reintegration while the hostilities continue. Studies claim that reintegration programs in the midst of the conflict are really difficult, and the best results are obtained when the violence ends (Verhey, 2001). Due to the continuous conflict (Coalition to stop the use of child soldiers. , 2008) the demobilized people can be recruited again, returning to criminal networks (El Salvador

and Mozambique are examples of this) using the skills they acquired in the war (Congreso Internacional de Desarme, Desmovilización y Reintegración , 2009), making it more likely the failure of reintegration process.

### **What is missing...**

The academy has recently started to study the DDR process with children and identify lessons learned on the long-term impact (Rivard, 2010). Even though in the literature is mentioned a lot about the lessons learned, few are based by robust quantitative information, as mentioned by Stark, Boothby, & Ager (2009) "there have been few systematic efforts to establish successful strategies for the reintegration of children associated with armed forces". What seems amazing is that there has not been a "rigorous attempt to identify factors that may explain why some individuals are able to reintegrate after the conflict and others not" (Weinstein, 2005, p. 3 in Stark, Boothby, & Ager, 2009). Therefore, it is important to mention the lack of "good science" behind of what is done on the field of children's worldwide (Leaning, 2001 in Stark, Boothby, & Ager, 2009).

A recent research made by Stark, Boothby and Ager (2009) summarizes the "barriers" that exist to reach a consensus on good practice regarding the reintegration of this population: (a) the definition of the term child soldier and the roles that this term involved, (b) the lack and the difficulty to obtaining accurate data about this phenomenon and (c) the multitude of factors that can diverge from one conflict to another. The document, also reveals some certainties: children experience psychological and social problems after they return to the communities (many experts believe that the most effective care program is the psychosocial and community-based model, which emphasizes the psychological process in a social context with the family and the community, instead of focused on the trauma, which focuses is on the psychological impact of the individual). The acceptance of the community and the family seem to be the key in the reintegration process.



The long term aftermath of being a child soldier and to have had a socialization process into violent environment is the possibility of the interruption of the psychological and moral development, and potential neurobiological effects that can have consequences on brain development and in the child's personality, leading them sometimes to take antisocial behavior (Singer, 2006). When children are forced to grow up within a dynamic of war, this by consequence, could determines their personal development, the way how they relate to other, affect their scale of values and how they see the world (Bachanovic, 2002). Maybe this is why is mention that the worst legacy about the experience is that never ends because it defines the development in the childhood and adulthood. Therefore, a really important step in the process of reintegration will be a continuous follow up that can help make sure that children do not engage in criminal activities again (Singer, 2006).

Whereas the hazard of comeback to use the violence as a way of life always exists, the belief that child soldiers are a lost generation and a time bomb have a weak support. There is, however, empirical evidence that demobilized people have a huge desire of doing something positive with their life and also they have a great resilience (Maulden, 2007). Resilience is defined as the adaptive capacity to overcome adverse and threatening situations and emerge stronger. In this way children can experience positive social relationships and to be a good asset for society again (Verhey, 2001). In fact, it has been concluded that the greatest psychosocial impact at this stage come from the stress they are experiencing outside of the armed group and not from what they have experienced in the past (Wessells M. , 2006).

### **Children´s role in the reintegration program and as peace-builders:**

According with Robert Muggah (2009) academic disciplines such as political science, economics, security and peacebuilding studies, are not saying much about whether if DDR activities in general, really works or not. The same goes with the problematic of demobilized children, as most of the literature that addresses the problems have been located in the fields of law, medicine and psychology (McEvoy-Levy S. , 2011). This is

entirely related to the way conceive the reintegration process of demobilized children and it would definitely affect the measures taken by the ones are in charge of designing public policies to address this population.

The DDR standards of the UN system (which the National Reintegration Policy of Colombia is aligned with), in addition to the ratification of the responsibility of states to create measures to promote the social reintegration of children, conceive such reintegration as composed of family reunification, child care system, health and medicine, education and / or vocational training, psychosocial support and social and community reintegration. For adults, the standards refer to the process in which ex-combatants acquire citizen status and sustainable forms of work and income, and are seen "as essentially a social and economic process with an open frame of time, which mainly takes place in local communities ". In the specific case of young people (15-24 years old), it is specified that without a paid job, a sense of political inclusion or access to education, these individuals could contribute to politically destabilize the country or region (UNICEF, 2006).

Although, it is clear that the DDR is "essentially a political process" (Congreso Internacional de Desarme, Desmovilización y Reintegración , 2009), the definition of reintegration of child does not have a political dimension to United Nations standards and in a big part of the academic literature , which has been seen as a long-term process that depends in part on the political will of the authorities and of the available resources (Verhey, 2001).

There are few studies which take in consideration the political reintegration of minors (McEvoy-Levy S. , 2001), understood as their participation in decision-making and local and national political structures (Veale, 2003). A recent definition about the political reintegration of adults made by Colombian researcher Alexandra Guáqueta, broadens the concept which is usually limited to the creation of political parties, and includes a larger range of opportunities for participation, which contains design of policies and public debates by think tanks, NGOs, journalism and workers in the public sector (Berdal & Ucko, 2009).

The omissions highlighted above, draw attention, as it has been recognized that the demobilized people have needs for participation or political needs that are often overlooked (McEvoy-Levy, 2001), and they see themselves as social actors and often as political actors able to contribute to their communities (Maulden, 2007); there is even empirical evidence supporting that they may have greater political commitment after their experiences in the armed group (Blattman & Annan, 2009). In addition, it is well known that participation increases interpersonal trust of individuals (Putman, 1993), and also raises the hope and resilience in the demobilized people (McEvoy-Levy, 2011).

Moreover, the UN standards have stipulated that children affected by war, especially teenagers, should be involved in the peace process and in developing policies and programs for their rehabilitation and local developing agendas within their communities. However, the programs tend to follow a "paternalistic trend" and are designed, financed and judged by adults, so youth is excluded [and children] of the analysis and planning of the programs. This occurs even though it is known that if the issues that are important to young people are not considered, the interventions will have limited impact. What it seems more crucial, is that if the programs fail to engage them in meaningful ways in structures of decision-making (participation) in the post-conflict, it's more likely that peace efforts will fail (UNICEF, 2006). It was concluded, that their participation impacts the viability of sustainable peace, but does not guarantee it (Maulden, 2007).

As far as the type of participation that they may have, recently it has drawn attention to the possibilities of being bearers of peace or porters of prevention and transformation (McEvoy-Levy S. , 2011). In the same direction the UN standards considered that change the perception about young people is crucial, there is a need to see them as positive assets to the society, and in this way to prevent that they become alienated and return to activities that can destabilize the society (UNICEF, 2006) and possibly keep them excluded from the democratic system and away from using their potential of being agents of positive change, being part of the economic system and the reconstruction of their communities with energy and innovation. Those ones, indicates the literature, are valuable resources that "no country or society can afford to squander" (Specht, 2006).

Taking in consideration the above mentioned McEvoy-Levy (2006) suggest that the political participation of young people can be a peacebuilding mechanism in four ways: (a) their militarized identities or behaviors can be transformed through political participation, which can improve their resilience and can take them away from violence. (b) On the basis of consultations or talks with the young at the same time with their participation within the power structures it can be a transfer of more authentic information about their needs and the appropriate way to fulfill them. (c) Young people have the right to participate; compliance with this right, besides being positive, is a practical manifestation of a human rights culture in continuous motion. And finally, (d) the political participation of youth offer a real exercise of power distribution that facilitates the sustainability of peace agreements.

Although, there are not many researches that relate recidivism and reintegration on adult ex-combatants, the six more recurrent factors in the theoretical literature and international case studies to explain the phenomenon of recidivism are: lack of political participation, economic reasons, lack of physical security, lack of social acceptance, the presence of disruptive peace elements and absence of the state (Nussio, 2012). Moving from an active participation in an armed organization to a "political marginalization" (as lack of participation) after the demobilization it can endanger the reintegration process (Nilsson, 2005).

### **2.3.2 Previous researches about children reintegration in Colombia**

In Colombia, the demobilization of children from the war is not something new, just acquired visibility only to the second half of the nineties, after the handing-over of six teenagers arrested and detained by the ELN in 1997; and the rescue of 73 children held by FARC, in a military operation carried out in 2000. Since then there has been a reflection on the issue in the academic community and in the circles of those responsible to make public policies and political leaders (Defensoria del Pueblo & Unicef, 2006).

The recruitment situation has been often described, providing updated information. It has been so prolific production that states that most of the studies on conflict and childhood focus on the issue of recruitment of children and youths, their characteristics and motivational factors that led them to armed groups (Ruiz & Hernández, 2008). Some of those researches can be extended until the moment that they leave the armed groups, unfortunately is not the same with the reintegration process; this phase has had little attention in the literature despite demobilization and social inclusion has gained visibility and importance on the agenda.

In Colombia, researches about demobilized people have been focused on the population that has been attended by the state program, even though, this program does not reach the total of affected population (Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación , 2010), there is an estimated 45% of children leaving the armed groups in Colombia that do not go to the authorities (Mariño Rojas, 2005). This is a complex scenario, because it is known that "the recruitment is not the end of the criminal careers of children, resulting in most of the cases in an intermediate point where the escalation of criminal violence is encouraged" (Andrade, 2010)

The Observatory of Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration (ODDR), made a "theoretical compilation" of the "academic voices" about demobilized children and young people. The document, highlights crucial issues as their rights and legislation, children protection and care assistant inside of institutional environment, and the area of the governmental action that is "primarily defined by national and international law" in the literature. According to the ODDR, while "the academics prioritize to show the different institutional efforts related to the consolidation of a policy of care, are being unaware or making invisible the participation and the role played by children and young people in the armed conflict" (DDR, 2009).

The criticism about the Care Program for demobilized children are diverse. Recent research published by the Foundation "Tierra de Hombre", points out that there is not a proposal for addressing gender, offering a differing treatment for demobilized girls, even

though a third of the population tended to by ICBF's Program has been girls (Castillo-Tietze, 2010). Cielo Mariño (2005) indicates that the program, although it is based on the international standards, this one does not meet the objectives because of the way that the institutional care is implemented. For Mariño neither the restitution of children's rights (which is the main goal of the program) it is impossible from the institutionalization without family; nor, can ensure the restitution of rights to those who entered to the illegal armed groups by social and economic reasons, due to those conditions have not changed. Therefore, Mariño believes that children can opt again to go back to criminal activities, representing the failure of the reintegration policy.

## 2.4 Capability Approach

The main points about Sen's moral and political philosophy are summarized below according with the introduction of the book *Wellness, Justice and Market* (Sen, 1998).

Sen disagrees with the presumption of traditional economists that the market mechanism is all what is needed to achieve the common benefit. For distributional reasons, the society would require more structure than the one that the only existence of the market would assure, introducing a problem for judging the social states; how to making judgments on the common good. The answer that Sen gives to this question is one of his most original contributions to politic philosophy.

In welfare economics, justice is the result of choosing the institution or policy that maximizes social welfare. In the utilitarian welfare economies, the institutions or social policies should be judged by the common well that they produce, that is to say, by its consequences; additionally, these social welfare states will be judged only in terms of the value or utility that different individuals would obtain from those states. In this way, the utilitarian criterion would determine as fairest, the social state that produces higher global value.

According with Sen, the fact of having subsumed the idea about justice into the concept of maximization has constituted a very limited sense of justice. He considers that the justice of an institution should be judged based on its consequences, for the social welfare that it can produce, as well as the promotion of the ideas of freedom and equality; the last

one being more related with the distribution of resources. He argues what make impossible an appropriated consideration about the distribute problem is based in conceptualization of wellbeing as utility.

Usually the utility is presented as unique concept, where the value which has some mental states and the value of the staff are conceived as equal.

Sen considers inadequate to reduce the value of wellness to the value of the mental states of pleasure, happiness or satisfaction. They are subjective elements which cannot embrace the whole concept of wellbeing. He thinks that assets are valuables as means to other purposes, where the important thing is not what you have but the kind of life you have. The different things that it can be achieve through the possessions it what Sen calls “realizations” and the different kind of realizations it what indicates the state of wellbeing.

The simple possession of goods cannot be an indicator for wellness, because the goods are only the means of wellness. The Sen’s central concept about social welfare judgments is introduced to determine that realizations represent the person’s different ways of being and its capabilities reflect the possible combinations of realizations that it has the opportunity to choose, and it have selected one of them. And, certainly, the set of capabilities of a person reflects the level of freedom he/she has had for choosing its own lifestyle. In order to evaluate wellness, the information that is required. Then, is the group of realizations among which was chosen, what means, the set of capabilities of election. And the criterion of justice must be the equality of capabilities, since only these represent the real freedom to choose lifestyles.

While economic sciences has evaluated in terms of wellness the market mechanisms, Sen evaluates them in terms of freedom, as a matter of individual rights, distinguishing two aspects of freedom in the areas where the institutions have to test the welfare of its effects: 1) generation of opportunities for people to get their valuable goals; and 2) the aspects of freedom that people will value when they stand up by their own act as agents

who have in their hands the decision-making mechanisms and exercise them without interference of other people.

Three fields are formed analytically separable of evaluation of the consequences of the institutions on the freedom of people.

A. Freedom referred to the opportunity that the people have to get the things they give some value.

B. Freedom refers to the role that people have in the decision-making process.

C. Freedom refers to the immunity that people have to possible interferences from other people.

Amartya Sen conceptualized development as a process of expansion of the real freedoms that the people enjoy. This contrast focuses attention on the end of the development and not only on the means to achieve it (Sen, 2000).

To be able to achieve development there is a need to eliminate sources of deprivation of freedom: poverty and tyranny, limited economic opportunities and systematic social deprivation, abandonment in providing public services and intolerance or excessive intervention of repressive states.

There are two reasons why the freedom is fundamental for development process:

1. The reason for the evaluation. The way to evaluate the progress of the people is a function of how their freedoms increase or not. The success of a society must be measured in terms of the fundamental freedoms enjoyed by its members. This position is different from traditional regulatory approaches, which focus its attention on variables such as utility, the means to achieve freedom or income.

2. The reason of efficiency. Development depends on the free agency of the people. Increasing freedom improves capability of individuals to help oneself and influence the world.

This second reason is justified by the connections between the different types of freedoms mutually supported and allows showing the importance of conceiving the development as a process of expansion of fundamental freedoms related between them.



In this process play important role several different institutions as the markets and organizations associated with them, governments, local authorities, political parties and other civic institutions, systems of education and opportunities for dialogue and public debates Including the social media. In this approach it has important role the social values and existing customs which influence on the individual's freedom and the reasons to add value on them (Sen, 2000).

In his work, Sen conceptualized five different types of freedom: 1) Political freedoms; 2) Economic facilities; 3) social opportunities; 4) transparency guarantees; and 5) protective security (Sen, 2000).

1) Political freedoms, including human rights, refer to the opportunities for the Individuals to decide who and under which principles they should be governed. In addition, these also include the political rights that embrace the possibility of dialogue, discern and criticize in the political arena, the right to vote and participate in the selection of legislative and executive power. 2) Economic facilities refer to the opportunity that individuals have to use the economic resources for their consumption, production or trade. 3) Social opportunities refer to education and health systems, among others, that society has and influence the fundamental freedom of the individual to have a better live. These services are important on the privacy life of individuals to have a healthy and long life, and also to participate more effectively in the economic and political activities (Sen, 2000). 4) The guarantees of transparency refer to the need for openness and trust that the people can expect in their social relationships, the freedom to interacts with guarantee of disclosure of information and clarity. These guarantees play clear role in prevention of corruption. 5) Protective security provides a social protection network for people in situation of vulnerability and with vast deprivations, covering fixed institutional mechanisms such as unemployment benefits, indigent economic aids, as well as public employment emergency service to provide income to poor people.

For Sen (2000), these instrumental freedoms enhance the capability of individuals, but also complement and reinforce each other. These freedoms must be accompanied by the creation and support of many institutions, such as democratic systems, legal mechanisms, market structures, systems of education and health, the social media, among others.

In the axis of his reference to freedom he concludes:

*The ends and the means of development require placing the perspective of freedom in the center of the stage. In this approach, the individuals must be seen as people that have an active role -If they give then a change- to shape their own destiny, not just as simple recipients of the fruits from ingenious program of development. The state and the society have an important role to accomplish in the promotion and safeguarding of the human capacities. Their role is to help not to give something that is already finished. The ends and the means of development's approach demands our attention (Sen, 2000, p. 75).*

The theory that interprets economy and development process based on freedom is a theory that is based heavily on the concept of agency, referred to the ability of individuals to shape their own destinies and help each other, and this can be achieved when they have sufficient social opportunities and when they aren't seen as passive recipients of benefits from development programs. Is the person who decides to act and produce changes and its achievements can be judged according to its own values and goals, independently they are evaluated in function of some external criteria. The role of the agent is referred to its participation in economic, social and political activities.

Development, for Sen, must focus in improving the lives of the people and the freedoms they have access to. The expansion of the freedoms that they value the most enriches their life and make them free from restrictions, allowing them to have full lives, exercising their own will to influence the world in which they live.

The concept of freedom using by Sen "involves the processes that make possible the freedom of action and decision as a real opportunities individuals have, given the personal and social circumstances" (Sen, 2000, p. 33). This approach gives special attention to the expansion of the individuals 'capabilities to achieve the lifestyle they value. These capabilities can be enhanced through public measures, but, at the same time, by the efficient use of the capacity for the participation of the people in the destination of these measures.

As it seeing, they are three fundamental concepts in the Capability Approach: freedom, capability and agency, which they are related to each other. "Freedom of wellness is a freedom connected to the individuality of the person. It focuses on the capability of a person to dispose from different realization vectors and enjoy of wellness "(Sen, 1998, p. 85).

On the other hand, to have agency: "refers that this person is free to do and to achieve any goal or values that he/she consider important" (Sen, 1998. p 85). "Within the very idea of freedom tend to occur an internal plurality" (Sen, 1998, p. 92).

It is considered two different elements in the idea of freedom: power and control, elements which must to be seeing in the evaluation of freedom.

The freedom of a person can be valued in terms of the will of each person to achieve the chosen goals: whether the person is free to achieve one or other goal, whether its elections are respected and corresponding things happen. This element of freedom that Sen call effective power doesn't refers to the mechanisms of control, the empowerment of a person to have the control of its process of election it what he calls "procedural control" or just "control" (Sen, 1998, pág. 93).

About capability Approach, Pedrajas (2005) mentions that Amartya Sen was based on Martha Nussbaum's work, introducing this concept in 1979 in the book "Equality of what?", to express the relationship between resources and people, and people and resources as a foundation of justice. From the contributions of Nussbaum, he relates the Greek word *dynamis*, used by Aristotle, which can translate as "that which a person may be able to be and to achieve" (Nussbaum & Sen, 1998), this was synthesized by them in the concept of capability.

*[...] we chose that expression to represent the alternative set of combinations what a person can do or be: the different ways of performances a person can develop. [...] When the capability approach is applied to the advantage of a person, what matters is to evaluate it in terms of real skill to achieve valuable performances as part of life (Nussbaum and Sen, 1998, p. 54).*

In the relationship between freedom and capacity, Nussbaum and Sen specify that freedom to carry different types of life is reflected in the set of capabilities of the person.

*The capability of a person depends on several factors, including personal characteristics and social arrangements. Of course, an overall explanation of the person's freedom must go beyond of capabilities of its personal life and pay attention to the other objectives of the person (example, social goals that are not directly related to his own life), but human capabilities are an important part of individual freedom (Sen, 1998, p life. 58).*

The contribution of Amartya Sen to human development perspective involve a wider sense the work of the governments and other institutions on their responsibility in providing opportunities and guarantee the freedoms for people to develop their capabilities.

This approach defines human development as the process of expanding the choices of people and improving human capabilities (the range of things that people can do or be in life), and also people's freedoms to have a long and healthy life; have access to education and the decent standard of living, participate in the life of their community and in the decisions that affect them.

Human being's freedom is the principal objective of development and, simultaneously, its primary means. The objective of development is related to the valuation of the real freedoms enjoyed by individuals. In this approach, instrumental freedom comprises several components that they are all linked together: economic facilities, political freedoms, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security. These interconnected freedoms must have the support of many institutions as democratic systems, the legal mechanisms, market structures, systems of education and health, communication systems, among others. The approach where ends and means of development are based on freedom, individuals must be seen as persons who are actively involved in shaping their own destiny, counting with opportunities protected by the State and society.

## 3. Methodology

In this section the methodological part of this research will be described. I find it important to present and argue for the choice of theory and data as it gives an overview of the structure of the paper.

### 3.1 Choice of theory

The choice of theory aims to create sufficient background to answer how the reintegration program for young ex-combatants in Colombia impacts the wellbeing of the teenagers in the sense of quality of life and freedom.

In order to answer this question, first of all, it is necessary to clearly understand the problematic about the children in Colombia. I use literature and authors to argue how this problem neither starts nor end with the war. It is a social issue that involves different and complex structures. Therefore this section gives an overview of the overall situation of children in Colombia, its change when they join the illegal armed group and finally, when they leave the guerrilla. Thereafter, I use Colombian and International research to understand the situation of the demobilized children in social inclusion programs in an international and national scale. I consider it important to show how helpful the program's approach and policies are for children to break those social conditions that are not allowing them to fulfill their needs and develop their capacities.

Children's joining the illegal armed groups is not just a mere recruitment problem. I agree with the perspective about locating causes of the conflict as well as the participation of the children in armed groups under Colombian social conditions. Based on this, I use the capability approach of Amartya Sen to evaluate the Colombian Program for rights restitution of children. Sen's approach considers that society should provide the conditions for individuals to practice their freedom in order to create the necessary capabilities and together with their agency to impact and interact with their environment in the best way possible. Amartya Sen describes five types of instrumental freedoms

which enhance the capability of individuals, but also complement and reinforce each other.

I use the five instrumental freedoms together with different theoretical concepts as analytical categories. These categories are related to the perception and the voices of teenagers to evaluate program's generation of 1) opportunities for teenagers to get their valuable goals, and 2) conditions of freedom that people will value when they stand up by their own act as agents. These analytical concepts include:

A) Participation (Sen, Hirschman and Munera & Sánchez) that explains how the process of participation contributes to teenagers' understanding about themselves, the others and the environment.

B) Homogenization and authoritarian structures (Foucault and Agamben) that show how the authoritarian structure in the program disables teenagers from creating capabilities and having agency that affects their environment in the positive way.

C) Traditional education (Freire) explains that traditional education doesn't make an impact on teenagers' current life, therefore the challenges of their daily life are staying unsolved due to the inability to use the knowledge generated through the traditional education.

D) Ecological systems theory of development (Härkönen) explains how development and socialization are influenced by the different characteristics of the environment with which a person is in active inter-relation.

E) Vulnerability (Bustelo) shows how the program is creating identities around the concept of vulnerability, making the teenagers stay in their situation of vulnerability.

In order to avoid the perpetuation of a reductionist perspective as well as the promotion of strategies that reinforce the action of "others" in the sense of speaking and deciding for children, I use the analysis mainly in reference to children's perception and ideas. Thereafter, I discuss two main issues that have been identified by the analysis of their perception:

A) Actions of the teenagers asking for recognition and participation are clear petitions to change the perception from passive victims to active members of the program. In order

to analyze this issue I used Honneth, Bustelo and Malkki to explain how the labels related to being underage, victims and ex-combatants are creating a negative repercussion in the teenagers 'life. I complemented this part of the discussion with the concepts of Molinié and Arguedas which define recognition as an action of knowledge, openness and diversity. Real coexistence and self-development is an outcome of the experience of getting closer to other's universes.

B) The conditions and dynamics the teenagers have been experiencing before and during their involvement in the armed illegal group are being replicated in their new environment. Therefore I chose to use Foucault and Bustelo to demonstrate how the social conflicts are rooted in social structures, and how their institutions are determined by a clear line of power and domination. The goal of the society is to establish and maintain control over people, using social institutions to internalize control patterns and codes of conduct among the citizens. Furthermore Sen's and Freire's theories clarify how equality based on capability and freedom of people breaks the oppressive system of power. With the practice of freedom people develop self-recognition as an autonomous being and realize their responsibility for their life choices.

### **3.2 Use of the Empirical Data**

Qualitative methodology based on narrative approach was used to collect data. This narrative approach allows tracking and analyzing transformations and changes in crucial moments of people's life. Moreover this approach enables covering wider experiences related to trauma and psychological aftermath, based on the voices and narratives of the interviewees.

People's oral or written narratives are perceived as chronological, lively and representative. A personal narrative based on the experience, could be also a life story (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008). In these specific cases a short life story was used due to the fact that the interviewees only partially told their life stories. Information was gathered through different semi-structure interviews which explored the reintegration experience of 10 teenagers who are part of a social inclusion program in Bogota named "Care program for demobilized young people from illegal armed group".

Taking in consideration the complexity of the reintegration experience of this population, a research instrument (Annex A) was created by using the three series interview of Dolbeare & Schumann as a model (Shumann 1982 in Seidman, 2006). This model, recommended by the researcher Irving Seidman (2006), is considered by him as an “ideal” methodology to rebuilt details of experiences in the context where it happens.

The interviews are structured in three parts, as an adaptation of the interview series of Seidman (2006). The first part contextualizes the experience of the teenagers. Teenager is asked to tell as much as possible about him or herself in relation to the reintegration process. They answer questions regarding their involvement with the program. Thus this section is aimed to gather as much information as possible on the history and background of each teenager in relation to the program (Seidman, 2006).

In the second part teenagers answered questions regarding their motivations, perceptions, difficulties and opportunities provided by the program. They were asked to reconstruct the history by using the details of their experience. In the third part, the teenagers delved on the meaning of their experience. This provides with highlights of the connections between the teenagers’ life and their new environment. They construct meaning from the factors discussed in the two previous sections (Seidman, 2006). The interviews were audio-recorded for further analysis.

The designed research instruments focus on collecting information about the reintegration process as well as on different perceptions that these teenagers built in relation with their experiences and their continuity in the process. I chose not to go in depth about the activities they carried out by the time they were in the illegal armed group; I rather focus on the research question previously mentioned. Therefore, it is a study about these “new confrontations” they are dealing with in the civilian life, and not about this they have experienced in the armed organizations.

Due to the special characteristics of the population such as, vulnerability, security risks, and emotional and psychological distress, the research instruments were evaluated and approved by the staff in charge of the program (Program Coordinator and two



psychologists). The research instruments did not have any negative comments and the evaluators did not consider the questions could have put the interviewees under security or psychological risk.

Once the research instruments were reviewed and approved, the trial interviews were conducted with two participants of the program. All questions of the interview guide were tested. It was ratified that the questions were understandable and covered all the necessary topics. The necessary modifications were done.

### **Sample**

10 young demobilized teenagers from the program were interviewed; 5 females and 5 males. Eight (8) out of 10 come from the rural areas. The participants were in the age range from 15 to 18 years old (6 of them were 16 years old).

Taking into consideration that perception of the participants may vary depending on the time they have spent in the program, 3 of the participants with less than 3 months in the process were chosen. The other 7 were for more than 6 months in the program, and all of them lived with the foster families. The interviews were audio-recorded and the description of them is provided in Annex B.

This research avoids having any direct contact with the families of the participants, therefore only the teenagers were interviewed. It is important to acknowledge that studying this kind of population in Colombia, as in other countries that still have internal armed conflict, can be risky since leaving the armed groups can be a way for being targeted by the illegal groups. According to the National Reparation and Reconciliation Commission (2010), the demobilized population has been affected as well as their families from violent actions including killings, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, displacement and illegal recruitment.

Prior to the interviews, each of the interviewees was provided with the objective of the research, and the characteristics of the semi-structured interviews. Everyone had the

opportunity to refuse participation in the study before or while the interview. It was clear for them that all collected data is confidential and no information that can disclose them would be shared. At the same time due to the fact that the interviews took place at the Organization's facilities it was necessary to explain them that the study was not connected or supported by the organization. Therefore the organization was not going to have access to the private information provided by them. It was proven through the feedback from the people interviewed that they did not feel stress during the conversation and that they felt comfortable with the possibility to express themselves about their experience.

### **Categories analysis**

Amartya Sen (2000) identifies five 'instrumental freedoms' that "tend to contribute to the general capability of a person to live more freely." This research is going to use them as categories in order to attain the general objective previously mentioned:

1. Political freedoms: will be analyzed through the teenagers' possibility to participate and affect the decision in their foster families as well as in the organization.
2. Economic facilities: will be analyzed through the possibility to have access to the material resources that the teenagers think are valuable for them.
3. Social opportunities: will be analyzed through the possibility of having health care, education, and equal access in society.
4. Transparency guarantees: will be analyzed through the possibility of teenagers to interact with others based on trust. In the sense of feeling free to open themselves to others, at the same time that they let the others come to them.
5. Protective security: will be analyzed through the social protection teenagers are receiving for being in a vulnerable situation.

The method of observation was also used for qualitative data collection. During two workshops, I observed the interaction among the participants and their families, as well as the professional staff and other social agents.

Although the Life Stories method is effective for understanding the process of life transition after leaving the armed group, however there were identified the following limitations. The teenagers found it difficult to participate in the interviews due to their studies and/or work. Additionally, all the participants live far away from the institution. For this reason the set of three interviews was conducted in one day. Moreover, since there exists a possibility of interviewees to modify their experience, it is important to clarify that for the purposes of the current research is not to find the "truth"; the most significant goal is to assess their perceptions and opinions.

The analysis has been based on the information obtained in the primary data through the interviews and observations. The framework was used for the construction of the categories as well as to support the analysis and discussion.

## 4. Data analysis

Sen (1998) considers inappropriate to minimize the value of welfare to the mental stage of pleasure, happiness or satisfaction. From his perspective, the goods are valuable as a means to achieve other goals. In other words, having a job, a family or pursuing education are among others the means for achieving security, comfort, participation. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to think about the program, which is based on restitution of the rights, defining the rights as goods. The idea about providing new families, schools and the communities to teenagers raises a lot of questions about how these environments are promoting people's wellbeing. In this context, I would like to raise the following question: How the different dynamics that they are experiencing in the new systems are helping them to promote their freedom, participation and capacities?

As it was mentioned in the framework, according to Sen (1998) there are two aspects of freedom in which institutions should test the benefits of their impact: 1) The generation of opportunities for people's achievement of their valuable goals, and 2) the aspects of freedom in the situation of people's possibility to impact, influence and take decisions in their environment without the influence of others.

This research analyzes these two aspects of freedom through the application of the five categories mentioned in the methodology and described in the framework.

It is relevant to emphasize that these categories were separated out of consideration for more structured analysis, although in practice they complement and interrelate among each other.

### 4.1 Political freedoms:

**Will be analyzed through the teenagers' possibility to participate and affect the decision in their foster families as well as in the organization.**

*-If they give them a change- to shape their own destiny, not just as simple recipients of the fruits from ingenious program of development. The state and the society have an important role to accomplish in the promotion and safeguarding of the human capacities. Their role is to help not to give something that is already finished (Sen, 2000, p. 75).*

The teenagers being the external element of the system that is already setup<sup>4</sup>, creates an atmosphere where they feel left a side, without a chance to embrace their personalities and affect their environment.

Political freedom is the agency of people to be involved in the decisions that can affect their life (Sen, 1998). Having an authoritarian structure makes them resistant to what the environment is providing them, even though resistance can be perceived as a trigger for change (Freire, 1993). In this case, it reinforces a hopeless attitude among teenagers and makes them unmotivated to incorporating external influences and in bringing changes to the negative situations they are going through. Therefore it is challenging for them to join a family when the dynamics and the rules are already set up. *“Is really hard that a person (foster family) that is not related to you at all tells you what you need to do; I know that a family opens a door for you without knowing what is going to happen with this boy, but at the same time, it is not easy to obey them”* (interviewee 5; 40:46).

According to teenagers, it makes a huge difference when the family is open and involve them as part of the group; having the possibility to affect the decisions inside the family as well as to join different activities that the family is involved in. In these cases the teenagers are feeling more integrated with the family and overly happy with the program; extrapolating these feelings and attitudes outside of the foster families.

The feeling of integration or exclusion in decision making regarding their life, is also applicable to their experience in the organization. *“I would like that they (Organization) listen more to us, in the same way that we HAVE TO accept what they say, then they should talk more with us, and get to an agreement, because they have their own meetings and they decided what we should do... this is going to be like that, and what can we do? .... We just have to follow orders. Then, for me, they should pay more attention and have a dialogue in that sense with us”* (interviewee 10; 30:56). For them, the feeling of

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<sup>4</sup>They are coming to a new family where the dynamics and the rules are already established, to an institution and to a program which main goal is to provide but not to integrate.

freedom is not just related to the possibility of doing or having, it is also related to the possibility of expression and participation. Teenagers' expression shows that they acknowledge that the program is about their life, therefore, they express that they have the knowledge and the will to work together with the staff to create the options that are more suitable for them and for everybody.

The equality and the wellbeing of a person cannot be evaluated by the means of reaching that stage, it needs to be evaluated through the freedom that the person has in order to achieve what he/she considers valuable (Schwartz & Sen, 1995). From this perspective, we should not think that teenagers are free because they are not any more under the guerrilla's rule or because they have the possibility to go to school, if they still do not have the possibility to express themselves and be active members in the community they are interacting with.

Equality is not about equal achievements, but rather about people's possibility of being in a free environment where ones can achieve and share something important or valuable for them. Issues for addressing this problematic are generated because the policies are based on the conception that a child is in an "irregular situation", similar to a disability, and therefore he/she needs protection. There is a gap between the policies focused on the restitution of rights of the children/ teenagers, and the situations they face when demobilized. These situations are usually characterized by the restriction of their freedom. In many cases, children are conceived as another "disabled group" (Bucheli, 2006).

On the other hand, the approach based on the integral care, highlights the importance of recognizing the children/teenagers as individuals with legitimate fundamental rights. From this perspective, the government is the responsible for providing all what is needed to validate their rights. According to the capability approach theory, people have chance to explore and improve their capacities through freedom. It is not just by providing them a family, school or organization that their rights of participation are going to have restituted, it is about assuring that they are involved in the family, social and institutional

dynamics, where they can express, participate and create together with the other members a common benefits. Furthermore, the only way for them to be an active part of the society is being an active part of the foster family and of the program in general. We cannot expect that when they finish the program (or during the program) they are not going to be manipulated by other people, when they have never had an opportunity to explore their individual capacity of decision making and to standing up for their beliefs. *“I could teach the program that we are not kids anymore, that we can be more independent... they take from us so many things... I mean, when you finish this program you are going to be scared out there”* (interviewee 9; 44:41).

For most of them they would like to be involved in activities where they can help somebody or feel that they are contributing to their community. *“I would like to talk to CRAN to take me to those rehabilitation centers, so that I could help them, I think I would be good for that”* (interviewee 5; 23:10). In the current status, teenagers do not have access to those kinds of activities. The program is built for the teenagers to receive knowledge so they can find a job in the future and “contribute to the society”. Additionally, the program is not made for the teenagers to express and build knowledge and experience with others and to participate in activities where they feel more integrated with their communities.

They look at some behaviors of the organization’s staff as a sign of disrespect. The teenagers feel disrespected for what they are and what they can offer. *“I felt that I was becoming a part of the organization when I could lead one activity, I felt like a leader at that moment, I would like that it occurs more often, if there is one workshop that we can be in charge of one activity and not just the intern doing it”* (interviewee 5; 50:25). They mention that they would like to contribute more to the decision making and to the creation of different activities; they feel that they have a lot of potential but it is not taken into consideration. Participation is an effective tool to generate cooperation, motivation and useful capability of solving complex problems (Hirschman, 1984). And this is what the teenagers are missing for being involved in closed systems. The participation is a phenomenon that is being practiced in both ways; from inside to outside and vice-versa.

It is an activity that allows the person to impregnate the environment with his/her knowledge and capacities, and at the same time it allows the person to have an understanding about what he/she receives from outside (Múnera & Sánchez, 2008). It is a continuous dynamic where the person is shaping and developing its capacities according to what is received from the environment to create a better interaction.

After analyzing this category, it is possible to see that the program does not provide the right environment for teenagers to participate and affect the decision-making in their foster families and in the Organization itself. Even though, according to some interviewees they have the chance of experiencing the acceptances, involvement and care from some people from the program. However, this way of treatment is not the result of the program's guidelines or policies. Furthermore, this instability in the way they are treated makes them feel that the option of involvement, participation and expression is not something that they have a right to. On the contrary, it is something that they are just lucky to have, and therefore, they feel they do not have the authority to ask for this right.

#### **4.2 Economic facilities:**

**Will be analyzed through the possibility to have access to the material resources that the teenagers think are valuable.**

The level of freedom they are feeling in the program, changes according to the level of support and possibility of expression they are getting from their foster families and from the organization in charge of the program.

There is an overall negative feeling among teenagers because they cannot have access to simple things such as a cellphone, to be in touch with their families and friends, going out or visiting their family more often. These situations are creating an environment of discomfort and an "illegal" atmosphere because the teenagers are getting the cellphone and sneak out to see their friends or their families, and this is defined as something bad or "illegal" by the program. In other words, what is generally considered as a normal behavior for teenagers, here it is perceived as something negative for the teenagers in the



program, being punished for those actions. *“Supposedly you say: uh I came to the freedom, but the truth is, here there are too many rules... then, you are going to feel like in the jail”* (Interviewee 2; 11:26). *“No, I don’t feel free... freedom is when you want to go to a place, and you go... we cannot go even to our friends’ house to watch a movie... freedom is to be normal, like my foster mother’s children or like any other children”* (interview 8; 28:22).

At the end, what are they learning from this structure of power? Is this structure of power teaching them to impact positively their society? Or, on the other hand, is the program teaching them that they do not have any influence on their society and on the way the rules are made. Additionally, because of this lack of influence are they learning that the law can just be broken instead of being modified?

Why is the power conceived in such a restricted way? Why is the power conceived as a rule or prohibition? (Foucault, 1993) One of the problems of this conception is that the norms and rules start to be perceived as something above the person, as something that the person does not have the power over or the possibility to change. As we could see in those cases, even though most of the teenagers think that some of the rules are affecting them negatively, they are not doing any actions to change that situation. Agamben (1998) in his book *“Homo sacer: Sovereign power and bare life”*, call this the politicization of life, where the personal life of people, their individuality start to be controlled by the policies, governments or institutions, and this extraction of the individuality is what makes possible the homogenization of people. Above the multiplicity of people there is just one rule, one vigilant that is going to make sure that everybody will behave the same (Foucault, 1993). The shift from the homogenization to the personalization is going to change the conceptualization of the norm/rule. The rule is not going to be created or used to assure one specific behavior, is going to be constructed to fulfill the needs and the characteristics of a particular group. By means of our differences it is how we can conceive a real equality (Schwartz & Sen, 1995), and only by means of our individualities it is how we can conceive a real community.

The security and establishment of some order could never be an excuse for taking away the rights and freedom of people. A negative action does not matter if it supports a positive intention as the only thing it is going to produce is a negative reaction. According to Sen (1998), this specific type of freedom is not about the material stuff itself, it is about the possibility to have access to the things they think is valuable. Denying the people's possibility to have access to their valuable things is also denying the possibility to create the capabilities and agency to have a full life.

### 4.3 Social opportunities:

**Will be analyzed through the possibility of having health care, education, and equal access in society.**

The general perception the teenagers have, is that the studies and the different courses that they are taking, are a great opportunity for them; they feel that those courses are going to help them in their future and their family's wellbeing. But because the courses are based on the program decision and not on their interest, they also feel that they could help or do different things but the program does not prompt them to take part of these decisions.

The studies for them are something that they gain in comparison with their previous life, *"I think is really good, because if today I was in the farm, I was not a technician, I would not have finished my high school, if I was in the farm I would not have anything of this"* (interviewee 5; 30:34). Even though in some cases they are unhappy with their current situation (foster family, the program or the city), they see the studies as the way for them to get a better future; they have the idea that after all everything is going to be better. *"I am studying because I know I need it for my future, if not I would have left the program a long time ago. I feel that we have a lot of opportunities here, but I miss my family"* (interviewee 10: 02:36).

For the teenagers education is a hope. It is perceived as a hope because most of them cannot use the acquired skills to affect their present or daily life, but they hope those skills will take them to a better place one day. The freedom of knowledge acquiring means nothing without the agency to use that knowledge to affect ones' life. In this case, having the option to go to school does not mean that they have the actual freedom because what they are learning cannot be used to make their present better.

A study run by Patricia Bruininks and Bertram Malle (2005) about hope, describes it as an *“emotion that occurs when an individual is focused on an important positive future outcome. Often the individual perceives little personal control over the situation. The individual may see a positive outcome as somewhat unlikely and yet still expect it to occur. Thus, being hopeful enables people to maintain an approach-related state despite their present inability to reach the desired outcome”*.

From this perspective hope makes people to accept the negative aspects of their present passively hoping that someday things are going to be different. Even though Freire (1993) conceptualizes the hope as something in motion, making the people move and change the external influence that keep them down, he also believes that hope is nothing without empowerment and the action of people. Here the control is in hands of the person and not externally influenced. The education based on the freedom needs to enable people to create their own skills and capabilities to affect their present. It cannot be conceived as a stake in the future, where they need to hold their life until the moment they do something with the education they have received.

The courses that they are taking are not chosen out of the interests the teenagers have, but it was decided by the program. When those courses do not match their interests, they feel isolated having unmet needs. *“I would like to take different courses, but I am not telling them (staff members of the program), once, I talked to them, and they didn't pay attention to me. Then, why am I going to tell them if at the end you have to do whatever they want?”* (interviewee 9; 23:15). This is what Sen (1998) criticizes about the traditional development program's approach, where there is given the same means to different kind of people hopping that they are going to fulfill their own different needs.

The formal education and knowledge imparted in school are not touching the reality and people's daily life. In school, the reality is static and not interrelated. Therefore it is separated from the existential experience of people (Freire, 1973). The knowledge provided by traditional education is not related to peoples' actual life and values. Four times four is sixteen; Lima is the capital of Peru, those things are taught and repeated by the students without perceiving what really means four times four; what Lima really means, what means Lima to Peru or what means Peru to Latin America (Freire, 1973). Therefore, how do the teenagers can use four times four equal sixteen in order to create a solution for the abusive dynamics they are receiving at home?

How can people use their knowledge acquired through the applicable education to affect their lives? Paulo Freire (1967) says that the applicable or truly education is the people's praxis, reflection and action on the world to transform it. The education for freedom is the place where people have the possibility to discover and conquer themselves as actors of their own history. And here the education goes beyond the school borders. It is a freedom to transform, understand, influence, interact and permeate the families, institutions and communities in general.

For most of the interviewees living in Bogota is associated with improvement of their life conditions, especially in their projection of their future. *"The positive thing about living in Bogota is that you change your mentality; here you think of the future, you do not think of the future when you are in the countryside. For example, over there you are going to school just for the sake of fulfillment but not for your future"*. (interviewee 10; 09:07) This feeling of gaining something new helps them to see this step as a positive one for their life.

However, they also think that in Bogota there is no security and it is too chaotic. Few of interviewees mentioned that they or some of the foster family members have been robbed or sexually molested. The city itself is having an impact on how they perceive the program. And it is related to the level of their exposure to positive or negative experiences. Every city and every environment have positive and negative things, but just through the freedom of exploring and having different experiences, the person can create

the knowledge and the capacities to react in the most appropriate way to the different situations that may occur. In the program teenagers' experiences have framed mainly by the experience that they have at school, home or organization, leaving out the major part that they will need to approach themselves externally. According to Sen (1998), having only one set of capabilities will neither affect the same way, nor it will bring the same positive outcome to the different scenarios the person has to face.

#### **4.4 Transparency guarantees:**

**Will be analyzed through the possibility of teenagers to interact with others based on trust. In the sense of feeling free to open themselves to others, at the same time that they let the others come to them.**

Some of teenagers have experienced a high number of rotations through different families. In some cases this has given them a possibility to go from one family they did not feel comfortable with, to another one that they liked more and felt happy with. However, on the other hand, there were occasions when they were changing from one family in which they felt totally accepted to another one they did not feel included. In such cases it can be assumed that these teenagers have lost their trust in the program; not showing any interest in what the program offers them, they are just waiting for the moment to finish it, so that they can do what they think is the best for them.

The teenagers' negative perception of foster family is caused by their belief that some of the family members distrust them, make them feel relegated and make them obey. *"...because sometimes they discriminate us for where we are coming from, without knowing why we left (home) and why we are here"* (interviewee 2; 27:07). This is creating in them a sense resistance in the meaning of determination not to share their opinions and challenge the authority and negative environment by doing their will without having in consideration the other ones. On the other hand, the teenagers who feel integrated in their foster families were open and for them it was much easier to express their opinion when they thought that something was not right.

According to Honnet, human individuation is a process of an individual building its identity by recognition of others - *every individual is dependent on the possibility of constant reassurance by the Other; the experience of disrespect poses the risk of an injury that can cause the identity of the entire person to collapse*- (Honneth A. , 1992) Even though I agree with the positive or negative influence that others have on the way a person builds its identity. It is not through the validation by Others how the person builds its individuality. Especially when the validation is one of the instruments of control which society has to regulate, control and dominate over people (Foucault, 1993).The necessity of others' validation doesn't go along with the agency and the freedom of people. The trust that teenagers are asking for cannot be seen as the mere act of approval, it needs to be seen as the base where the teenagers are going to create experiences, knowledge, identities with the others and NOT because of the others.

The trust is a key factor for the person to open itself to the environment, and without this, person will not be able to develop its capacities and to have the right skills to affect its surroundings. Taking in consideration that most of teenagers had a negative experience with their primary family, having a positive experience with the foster family helps them to feel better with themselves and to change their behaviors in a positive way. *"She is a beautiful person (foster mother), she treats me better than... I don't know, but I never felt that good like I feel with her"* (interviewee 7; 03:20). According to the ecological systems, *Theory of development*, development and socialization are influenced by the different characteristics of the environment with which person is in active inter-relation. This includes three significant assumptions: 1) person plays an active role, affecting and being affected by its environment, 2) environment influences the person's development through its conditions and restrictions, and 3) environment is understood as consistant of different size entities that are placed one inside another, of their reciprocal relationships (Härkönen, 2007). In this particular case when a teenager had have possibility to interact with its environment as active member, it produces a positive emotional, psychological and intellectual impact on his/her life. At the same time other members, as well as the system itself, are being positively affected by the teenager's contributions.

Another aspect that makes their integration in their new environment to be difficult, is the burden of their past. Teenagers feel that some of the families that they were/are do not trust them, and as it was observed in one of the workshops some of the staff members were more open and gave more possibility of participation and leadership to teenagers from a different school than to the teenagers from the program. In those cases it is shown that the trust that they are receiving from those particular people is not coming from what teenagers are, but it is coming from how they have been labeled. The label becomes the filter of how people interact with the deviants. The deviants' response to the specific situation is going to be seen as a direct expression of his/her condition, and then, both condition and response are seen as part of their nature. Therefore, the way they are being treated is justified (Goffman, 1963). Furthermore, "If you treat people as deviant, and cut off their opportunities to be anything other than deviant, you increase the chances that they actually become deviant" (McIntyre, 2011, pág. 189).

In general, teenagers see the organization as a place where they can go to, find support, and be heard about their problems. However, this perception is not something that they allocate to the whole Organization; they divide people in the organization in two different groups: those that they can talk with and the ones they cannot.

The difference that they feel in the way they are treated by the organization's staff makes them feel abandoned and complicates the process of adaptation to a new staff member when one person they trusted leaves the program. *"I disagree that they are changing interns every time ...you get used to them, you trust them, and maybe the new ones are not that open"* (interviewee 5; 11:15). This situation is a risk factor for their stability in the program because the majority of them do not have a fix sense of security, and therefore they lose their motivation for the program.

Development depends on the free agency of people. Increasing the level of freedom makes better the capacity of individuals to help themselves and to influence the world (Sen, 2000). Free people always promote freedom, oppressed people always promote oppression.

## 4.5 Protective security:

**Will be analyzed through the social protection teenagers are receiving for being in a vulnerable situation.**

Even though teenagers are receiving social help, it is important to clarify the concept of vulnerability. This aims to analyze if the support that they are receiving is helping them to overcome their particular situation or, on contrary, it is making them stay in their vulnerable situation. The theoretical discussion on the concept of vulnerability is full of arguments that create unsupportive action models that do not enable people to overcome that specific vulnerability situation. In our society there are powerful ideological devices that legitimize the particular situation of dominance through concealment of the primary social relationship that produces it. In this case, the vulnerability discourse is focusing on the analysis of people that are affected by the problematic and not by the situation of domination that produces it (Bustelo, 2005). When we locate the problematic on people and not on social conditions, we are creating labels; the person becomes vulnerable and the social influences are not considered as the ones that create situations of vulnerability. Therefore, the attention is focused on the body, leaving the social condition untouched, creating an industry of “victims”. The social conditions are going to keep producing people in need and the social help is going to keep feeding the bodies without touching the social dynamics as well as power structures that would disable a development of sustainable solutions for that particular situation.

As it was discussed before, the program is seeing teenagers as vulnerable population and the help that they are being offered is neither made to overcome their negative situation nor to promote their best possible development. It is about trying to keep teenagers away from harming the society through “criminal activities” (Rethmann, 2010). This is why most of the courses or studies options involve courses that are not going to take too much time to learn. Therefore, it could be easier for them to find a job after they finish the program. In this sense, the interest of the Colombian government takes over the right of teenagers for development.



From the program's perspective the stigmatization is considered as natural and inevitable side effect and not as result of the social practice that program is creating. Therefore, by ignoring the real causes of the conflict, teenagers' actions can be only perceived from the victim and exploitation lenses (Rethmann, 2010). From a reality that is being hidden, the voices and perceptions of the teenagers are being raised to question the reductionist and stigmatizing perspectives about their reality. This means, that they are breaking their labels acting through their agency to influence their life.

## 5. Discussion

The discussion is based on the data obtained from the voices of teenagers, the theory of election and the observations that were performed during the field work. This discussion is oriented by the research question: **How does the reintegration program for young ex-combatants in Colombia impact the wellbeing of teenagers in the sense of quality of life and freedom?**

As it was explained in the methodology, I used the five instrumental freedoms of the Capability Approach to evaluate the program in relation to promotion of the teenagers' wellbeing. Through the analysis of those five freedoms, I identified two main issues that are preventing the program to generate the right conditions for teenagers to achieve a self-satisfaction and quality of life. Those main issues are 1) Actions of the teenagers asking for recognition and participation, are clear petitions to change the perception from passive victims to active members of the program; 2) The conditions and dynamics the teenagers experienced before and during their involvement in the armed illegal group are being replicated in their new environment.

### 5.1 ReCognition

Before analyzing the teenagers' act of raising their voice and asking for recognition, there is one question to solve. If recognition is the positive evaluation of one's own personal or other people qualities and capacities (Honneth A. , 1996), and if this positive evaluation is influenced by the social representation<sup>5</sup>, then what are the social representations people have about teenagers that are making them feel unrecognized?

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<sup>5</sup>The concept of social representations is understand from Moscovici (1979) who explains it as “a system of values, ideas and practices”, that serve (a) to establish a social order that enables individuals to orientate themselves and master the material and social world they live in, and (b) to enable communication among members of a community through a shared code for social exchange and for naming and classifying various aspects of the social world including their individual and group history.

The teenagers in the program have to deal with a serial of labels that prevent them from being seen as active members in the program, autonomous and with a full equipment of skills that can have a positive effect in their present. The repercussions of the labels (a. Being under age, b. Being victims, c. Ex-combats) are explained as follows:

a. Being under age

Childhood is conceived as a process where a human being goes from zero to adulthood. Since the last is considered as the stage where a person has a capacity to think, decide and to interact properly with his/her society and environment; before that, the children and teenagers “should be” under the supervision and guidelines from those adults. This is taking children away from the possibility to have an active role in their own life and placing the power and possibility of decision to those “taking care” of them. It is there where those practices of dominance are legitimized (Bustelo, 2005), therefore the children have to accept them as a part of their process of education.

This social representation of the childhood; where the underage is conceptualized as something not finished and therefore with a lack of knowledge for making right decisions, is preventing that teenagers from the program cannot use their freedom. Instead of being considered as equals, they are treated as someone who needs to follow a behavior manual that teaches them how to live. Not without a reason they dislike to be considered as children. *“I could teach the program that we are not kids anymore, that we can be more independent...”* (interviewee 9; 44:41). In this response there is not just a demand that asks for recognition of the interviewee’s abilities, there is also a complete negation of oneself. Recognition can make a person see oneself as autonomous and individuated being, identifying oneself with his/her goals and desires (Honneth A. , 1996). But non-recognition, can also bring the person to see him/herself incomplete and unable to live a fulfilled present life. As it was shown by the previous quotes, the interviewee denies one’s condition of being under-aged, because one had already internalized that being a “kid” does not allow one to wholly express oneself.

b. Being victims

As it was mentioned in the category of political freedom, some policies of the program are based on the conception that a child is in an “irregular situation”, which is similar to a disability, and therefore he/she needs protection. When a person or a group of people are conceived through the label of victims they are stopped being perceived as specific people. They generally become pure victims: universal man, universal woman, universal child, and combining the three bring as a result, a universal family (Barthes in Malkki 1996). Consequently, they start to be seen as anonymous bodies (Malkki, 1996). This process of framing is important in regard to their rights, because they are only recognized as a homogeneous group, and thereby, their rights as individuals are hindered.

c. Ex-combats

The social representation about ex-combatants is linked to guerrilla. Guerrilla is linked to illegality, terrorism, and criminality, in other words something negative. Therefore, the teenagers are seen as someone who needs to be “reformed”, where their skills, participation and interactions as trustful citizens are put on hold until they are “fixed”.

Based on the description of the previous labels, it can be concluded that teenagers are under a big umbrella of stigmatization: their condition of being under-age makes them to be perceived as incapable, their condition of being victims implies losing their individuality and their condition of being ex-combatant makes them being perceived as not trustworthy.

The aim of this research is to analyze the impact of the program on the teenagers’ wellbeing. If we understand the concept of wellbeing as the people’s freedom for development and enhancement of their capacities and the agency to interact and affect their environment in their best interest (Sen, 1998); how would the teenagers’ wellbeing be possible if the perception and recognition of them undermines their potentiality?

The concept of recognition has been studied by various authors, among others Honneth, Fornet-Bétancourt and Panikkar. The discourse on interculturality highly emphasizes on the importance of the recognition of the others. At Looking at the etymology of the term

“recognition” it means to know again; ‘re’ –again and ‘cognition’ – knowledge. Therefore recognition is the act of knowing what you already know. From this perspective the others become the reflection of my own knowledge about an idea, perception or conception that I had about a person or a thing (Molinié, 2007). When I recognize something in the other person I am recognizing something that is valuable for me, something that I have or I want to have. I am recognizing something that makes us equal.

However, recognizing the similarities of the other person neither allows me to recognize ones differences, nor ones unique personality. Therefore I am not unable to recognize ones existence independent of my beliefs and of my world. Recognition does not help me to identify what makes the others to be different from me. Recognizing the others doesn’t allow me get to know them, it is rather leads to recognition of myself in the others. The others become a mirror, where my approval or disapproval about one person is connected with how much I can reflect myself in him/her.

In order to admit that I cannot totally recognize the others, gives me the possibility to admit that there are things that I do not know and the others do (Molinié, 2007), that we are built from different knowledge and different experiences. To recognize the others, I first need to *know* them. Therefore, recognition is not an action of giving value or approval; recognition is an action of knowledge.

José María Arguedas is a Peruvian anthropologist who wrote a poem called “Llamado a alguno doctores” (Called to some doctors), where he is inviting those “educated people”, owners of the institutional and official knowledge, those who are holding the power to go to “undeveloped” communities affecting their dynamics, to get close to them. He is inviting them to get to know them, to know where they come from, to experience the experiences which made them who they are.

*“Not run away from me, doctor, get closer. Look at me, recognize me. How long I need to wait for you? Get close to me; Take me to your helicopter pod. I will invite you the liquor of thousands of different lifeblood”* (Arguedas, 1992).

It is an invitation to the knowledge based on experience, where I am not constructing ideas about the world and the others; I am constructing intimate relationships with them. This is the freedom that Amartya Sen talks about; where the promotion of the individuality is the real recognition of the others and ourselves. Just through development of our unique personalities we can talk about equality, wellbeing and community.

When we eliminate the “Re” in Cognition we are also eliminating the preconceptions, the labels, the stigmas, and we are opening ourselves to the real others and the real self. In the same way the teenagers’ existence is reduced to fit some labels, the “doctor’s” existence is also reduced to fit their own labels. They need to be psychologists, guardians, coordinators; they cannot be just human beings. Do not be afraid, the poet says, do not be afraid to get closer to the world of the others and do not be afraid to show your own world to those others. Getting to know the others is the possibility and the condition of recognizing him/her. If the recognition is presented as fundamental value to create an “intercultural dialogue” (Martinez, 1996), it needs to take into account that the others recognition goes through the knowledge about him/her (Molinié, 2007), and not through the possibility of subjection and domination. From this perspective the recognition is used to create behavioral models that would fit the person into a specific social, institutional or governmental interest; the good housewife, the heroic soldier (Honneth A., 2007) and in this particular case the good teenager.

All these bring us to the question: What kind of identity the teenagers are creating through the program? An identity based on the label of victim? In which the others are the ones who need to provide what they need. An identity based on the label of underage? In which the others are who have the agency to affect the teenagers’ destiny. Or an identity based on the label of ex-combatant? In which their world is based on violence and illegality.

To step aside from those types of subjections and dominations in the recognition, Fornet-Bétancourt (2000) suggests opening the philosophy to the symbolic universe, memories, rituals and imaginaries of the different communities; not as study objects but as individuals living word, with whom we are going to build a common study and knowledge. Such opening allows common knowledge about oneself and the others, the coexistence of different kind of knowledge, the recognition of the others through the knowledge that has been built in the society where they live, the mutual recognition between oneself and the others, by the knowledge about the knowledge of both. Then, the project should be based on the knowledge of “living together” (Molinié, 2007). Therefore, the teenagers ‘role in the program of right restitutions cannot be different from the one of being copartners, where the individuality and the freedom of each person involved in the program (teenagers, foster families members, the program staff, etc.) are going to be “living together” in order to create and support the life choices of each member.

## **5.2 Perpetuating the conflict beyond war**

The second issue that is preventing the program from generation the right conditions for the teenagers to achieve a self-satisfying and quality of life, is the environment itself.

Even though the teenagers have changed the place of origin and got involved in different social institutions, the dynamics inside of these new institutions (foster family, organization, school) are still the same as the ones they experienced inside their own families or communities. The problematic of the children who were involved in the armed conflict, does not start or end in the moment they join the guerrilla group. The root of this issue goes deeper inside the situations they had to face in their primary families and regions. For most of them, when they made the decision to join the guerrilla it did not associate with destruction, problems or having their rights violated. In some cases, that decision represented the opportunity to escape from physically and emotionally abusive situations, a lack of opportunities or in some cases escaping from an environment where they were not getting any recognition (Hinestroza-Arenas, 2004).

Analyzing the interviews, it can be concluded that teenagers ‘complain about the lack of recognition, respect and opportunities when they were living with their families, are equal to the ones they are having now in the program. Then, if the problematic cannot just be located in a particular place, person or family, what is producing this negative influence and lack of freedom in the teenagers’ life?

According to Foucault (1991), social structures and their institutions are affected by the power and domination. The goal of the society is to establish and maintain control over people using social institutions to internalize control patterns and codes of conduct among the citizens. This is the reason why different institutions have the same structure and functioning. They have the same actor as those to whom the power was given (father, doctor, priest, president, teacher, boss, etc.). The relations inside the institutions are vertical and the interest or wellbeing of the members never prevail the interest or wellbeing of the institutions.

The children and teenagers case is more complex, because if it is something natural that they are conceived as “the ones who do not have power” (Bustelo, 2005), they are framed in a normativity of “must be”, they must be something, they must follow, they must obey. This is a “must” that they need to accept in every social institution. This “must” is what replaces their possibility of being, is what replaces their freedom of existence. When they raise their voices and ask for recognitions, they are not asking a particular person to recognize them; they are not asking a mother, a teacher, the person in charge of the organization. They are raising their voices against the whole structure of power; the structure of power that did not allow them to freely build their personalities when they were with their families and the same structure of power that is not allowing them to promote and develop themselves freely in the program.

As it was mentioned in the protective security category, there are powerful ideological devices in the biopolitics that legitimizing a particular situation of dominance through concealment of the primary social relationships that produces them (Bustelo, 2005). The Colombian government conceals its responsibility as well as its social influence in the



causes of the armed conflict by placing it on the person itself. The conception of the reintegration program is reducing the social problematic of the violence in Colombia to ex-combatant pathology (Rethmann, 2010). This pathologization of the violence and its location on the people's body legitimizes the State intervention in the form of a depoliticized reintegration process. The Colombian State as a protector instance enhances a similar attitude as the authoritarian parent/child relationship. Where the government disciplines the ex-combatants in the way that organizes their life, their finances, their future expectations and their behaviors according to the pre-established rules (Cárdenas, 2005). The teenagers' agency and freedom are hidden under the labels of children, victims and ex-criminals.

In this case the standardization process of the reintegration program can be defined as a specific way to maintain the status quo and to guarantee the domination (Rethmann, 2010). The anthropologist Kimberly Theidon considers the protection model as a mechanism that brings more to the marginalization than to the reintegration of the ex-combatants:

*The shelter model reproduces their marginality without thinking of how best to assist these former combatants and the communities that receive them in developing a coexistence not subject to mutual fear tainted by the impunity that until now has characterized the process of "reconciliation" as dictated by the state.*  
(Theidon, 2006)

If the problematic doesn't rest on the social bodies it is absurd to conceptualize the children's right restitution as a simple mathematical procedure (no family equals new family, no school equals new school); where different aspects of the teenagers' life are replaced without considering the dynamics inside those structures, and how those dynamics are promoting oppressive practices instead of practices based on freedom, agency and participation.

When we conceptualize the equality as the mere distribution of utilities, we are prioritizing the utility over the person and over one's life, interests and choices (Sen A. , 1980). When the social problems are reduced to the simple action of having access to

stuff it is not essential how far or static the person (in this case the teenagers) can be in the social structures. This person will continue to reproduce the conflict among its close ones and among its new environments. One is going to be oppressed by someone or is going to oppress somebody else (Freire P. , 1973). Therefore it doesn't matter how rich or poor the teenager will become or what level of education will pursuit, in that moment the structure of power is going to be part of them. (Foucault, 1993) And they will become the authoritarian mother/father, the professional who put labels on the other people or the one who sacrifices the life and the freedom of others to be able to have access to the stuff.

The equality based on the capability and the freedom of people breaks from the roots of the oppressive system of power. Through the freedom the person starts to recognize itself as autonomous and the only responsible for the things that it wants to create and receive in its life. (Sen, 1998) At the same time, the others are not perceived as competitors, enemies or providers. They are perceived as equals in the journey of personal development. The freedom is the most important right that needs to be restituted, and not only for teenagers. The Freedom needs to be restituted for all people working in the program.

## 6. Conclusion

Throughout this research, I analyze how the reintegration program for young ex-combatants in Colombia impacts their wellbeing in the sense of quality of life and freedom. It can be observed that even though the program has been created to reconstitute the children's rights, as well as to help them with their inclusion process, the program is based in policies that: a.) Understand the wellbeing just as part of the economic growth, b.) Perpetuate structure of power that establish and maintain control over people, and c.) Displace the causes of the conflict from the social conditions to an "ex-combatant pathology".

Therefore, the idea about reconstituting the rights of the children ends up with creating a negative influence in the quality of life, freedom, as well as in the development process of the teenagers. One of the biggest problems Development Programs have is that even though they are completely ingenious and almost perfect on the paper, those do not take in consideration the history, participation and interests of the actors the programs are aimed to affect.

Furthermore, the programs as well as the investigations in this field of study, are addressing the problematic from a structural perspective, ignoring the different dynamics, interactions and influences that can affect the process itself. Some studies have highlighted the importance of the political participation in teenagers, others, have put out the importance of the psychological or emotional attention, and others have claimed the need to create specialized program for girls. Just a few of the studies have implemented a holistic approach where teenagers' life has been engaged in context, and not sectorized or apart from the social reality.

This research puts in evidence that the way this program has been designed, is replicating oppressive structures of power which are adversely affecting the aspects of the teenagers' freedom. The closed systems that teenagers are experienced in their foster families and organization are reinforcing a hopeless attitude among them and make them to feel

demotivated to generate positive changes in their life and environment. The restricted structure of power is preventing teenagers to have any influence on their society; they are learning that the law can just be broken instead of being modified. The formal education is not touching the reality and teenagers' daily life. Therefore, the problems teenagers have, are being perceived as barriers, but not as challenges they are capable to face. It was found that the trust teenagers are receiving from people working with them, is not coming from what they are, but it is coming from how they have been labeled.

The analysis of the negative influence in the aspects of freedom mentioned above has been condensed in two main points:

1) The teenagers are under a big umbrella of stigmatization: their condition of being under-age makes them to be perceived as incapable, their condition of being victims implies losing their individuality, and their condition of being ex-combatant makes them to be perceived as not trustworthy. The teenagers' wellbeing has been affected because the perception and how they have been recognized, underestimate who they are and their potentiality. Therefore, I make an invitation to internalize the recognition as an action of knowledge where preconceptions, labels, and stigmas, should be eliminated. Furthermore, we should open ourselves to the real others and the real self. The teenagers' role in the program of right restitution cannot be different from the one of being copartners, where the individuality and the freedom of each person involved in the program (teenagers, foster family members, the program staff, etc.) is meant to be "living together" in order to create and support the life choices of each member.

2) Even though the teenagers have changed the place of origin and have got involved in different social institutions, the dynamics inside of these (foster family, organization, school) are still the same as the ones they experienced inside their own families or communities. This is happening because the society in general, is having an authoritarian power structure, replicating the same coercive dynamics among all social institutions and actors as well. Teenagers are internalizing this power structure, making them to perpetuate the conflict in their life beyond war.

Due to those authoritarian and coercive structures are affecting also the different actors of the program, an equality approach based on capability and freedom of the people was proposed along the research for breaking from the roots the oppressive system of power. This approach will allow the people to start to recognize themselves as autonomous and responsible for things they want to receive and create for their life. All the members of the program, including teenagers, would be working together from an equality status, instead of interacting with the others as competitors or authority figures. In this sense, the goals of the program would fulfill the needs and the interests of each actor involved in the program.

Despite the government efforts in developing programs for rights restitution, this research highlights and argues why freedom is the most important right that needs to be restituted, not only for teenagers but for all the actors involved in the program. In addition to what I just mentioned above, when performing research and projects to create more functional and effective programs, it is necessary to eliminate the duality of researcher/subject of study, provider/receiver, and to reevaluate the way the policies have been designed. Likewise, there is a big need for proposing investigations with methodologies based on participatory action research by involving all the actors and understanding their needs, desires, and values.

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## 8. Appendix

### 8.1 Appendix A

#### **Research instrument: three series interview**

##### Interview 1: Life story in context

1. How was your life before joining the armed group?
2. Why did you decide to join the group?
3. What positive and negative things can you highlight from your experience in the armed group?
4. What was your motivation to leave the group?
5. How has been your experience in the program?
6. How has been the coexistence with your Foster family?
7. How has been the relationship with CRAN organization?
8. How have you felt in the school and in the community in general?
9. Who you think has been your support during this new process of your live?

##### Interview 2: Teenager's experience related to the program

1. What kind of activities are you doing besides your school? How do you like them?
2. About the reintegration process of the children are said that their life project is really important. What do you understand for life project? Which was your life project before to join the program? Which is your life project now?
3. Which skills or vocations do you think you have? How do you think those are being promoted or supported by the program?

4. What positive and negative things do you find in the relationship with your foster family?
5. What positive and negative things do you find in the relationship with CRAN?
6. What positive and negative things have you found in your community?
7. What is your opinion about your process in the program?
8. Do you think the program is getting you closer or further from your personal goals?
9. Has it happened that you have disagreed with some decision taken by CRAN or your Foster family? What have you done about it?
10. Do you feel that your opinions about what you think or what you want have been taken in consideration by CRAN or by your Foster family?

Interview 3: Meaning of their reintegration process.

1. Could you describe who are you right now? Have you changed with comparison to who you were before?
2. What has been the more difficult thing about leaving the armed group?
3. The perception about the reintegration process has changed since you joined the program?
4. Which have been the difficulties you have found during your process of reintegration?
5. What kind of efforts have you done to be able to adapt to your new live?
6. What kind of opportunities have you had in your reintegration process?
7. Have you ever felt tempted to leave the program? No/ yes why?

8. What is your motivation to continue in the program?
9. What have you learned through this current experience?
10. If you can teach or show something to CRAN or to your Foster family in order to be able to improve the program, what could it be?
11. What does it mean for you to be part of a group or an organization?
12. Do you feel that you are active part of your foster family?
13. Do you feel that you are active part of the program?
14. What do you envision for your future?
15. Are you interested in creating actions that affect in a positive way your community? Which could be those actions?

All the interviews took place in a private room in the organization; all the interviews were individually done.

## 8.2 Appendix B

### **First interview:**

Woman 16 years old, she was very calm and with good attitude along the whole interview, she looks very positive and happy person. She used to live in Caqueta, she was working from an early age, preparing and serving food to the farmer around her village. She used to live with her mom, stepfather and two sisters. She was 13 years old when she join the illegal armed group, she expend 6 months with the guerrilla and have two years in the program. Nowadays she lives in a foster family with 11 people; 2 girls from the program and 9 members of the foster family (3 different generations). Her big motivation to continuous in the program is her studies, and her support is her foster mother. She is very happy in the program and her reason is because she thinks that she has people who listen to her when she have a problem or when she wants to express something.

### **Second interview:**

Woman, 16 years old, she is from Cali, She was open and calm during the whole interview, she used to live with her mother, stepfather, and siblings, even though she was living with different members of her family and she was changing from different schools, before to join the guerrillas she was studying in a boarding school. She had a bad relationship with her family “I never counted with my family” she said. She took the decision to join the armed group with 5 more school friends. She says that in the guerrilla she founds the support and she felt that she was making part of a group. She lasted for a year in the armed group, and now she has two years in the program. She has move through three different foster families during this period, but just in the last one she feels accepted and happy. Her behavior and perception about what she wants for her have changed positively since she is with this new foster family.

### **Third interview:**

Man, 16 years old, he is from Caqueta, According with him, he is working since he was 6 years old, he joined the guerrillas when he was fourteen, and he lasted one year and three months with them, currently he has one month in the program. He is not happy with the program; he feels that he doesn't have the freedom to do what he wants to do. He says that he always has been working and buying the staff that he wants, and now he can't do it. He wants to leave the program to be able to work. The possibility to be heard, supported and recognized is very important to him, and the lack of those feelings, according to him is what is thanking him to leave the program

**Fourth interview:**

Man, 17 years old, he come from Huila, he used to leave with his grandparents in a farm, her mother was killed by the paramilitary, he lasted 2 years in the armed group, he has 2 years and half in the program, he says that when he start in the program he had really bad behavior, but he says that now he change a lot, "he is thinking in his future". He has moved through fourth different foster families. He give a lot of importance that the people in the program can trust him, at the same time that have a respect and support him in what he needs, in a lot of situation he is not feeling that neither from the member of the foster family or people from the organization, making him put distance between them.

**Fifth interview:**

17 years old man, he is from Caqueta, he is in the program for 2 years and 6 months, he left his home at the age of 7 years old, and he start to work as a farmer at that age. After his parents got divorced he took the decision to leave his house. He wanted to be independent, have his own money, and in this way his stepparents will not tell him what to do. At the age of 12 he was kidnaped for the guerrillas, he lasted 3 months in the illegal group. He believes that everybody is equal and that is the reason that he thinks that he doesn't need to hide what he thinks o believe. He has moved through 3 different foster families. He thinks that the program has helped him to express his self, to be more open.

He wants to be involved in activities to help people, and at the same time he believes that the teenagers from the program should have the opportunity to create and lead activities and this responsibility cannot be only for the professional or interns of the program.

**Sixth interview:**

16 years old woman, she is from Cauca, she is in the program during 6 months. She is in the interview with her son (3 months old), she was leaving with her grandmother, but they didn't have a good relationship, when she was 15 years old after being beaten by her grandmother she took the decision to go to live with the guerrillas, but she says that since the age of 11 she was working with them as a civilian, she lasted one year and half with them. Her biggest motivation to continue in the program is her son, she thinks that because her son she wants to study and be a better person to be able to give him a good life. So far she feels good in the program but she thinks that even though the foster family is good with her they make her feels like she doesn't belong.

**Seventh interview:**

Man, 16 years old, he has one month in the program. He is from Caqueta, he was leaving with her mother, and his father was abused him. He was 15 years old when he joined the illegal group; he lasted for 1 year and 6 months. He joined the group looking for a job. He says that he is really happy in the program, so far he found the attention, support, love and freedom that he did have in neither his family nor the guerrilla group. He thinks that the people who doesn't feel free in the program is because they are looking to do bad things (drink, party, etc.) and that is the reason why they leave.

**Eighth interview:**

Woman, 15 years old, she has 9 months in the program. She is from Putumayo. She used to live with her parents; she was at the school before to join the guerrillas. She decided to join them because she falls in love with a guy; she was 12 years old and lasted for one year and a half in the group. She says that before to come to the program she didn't have any vision for her future, but now she has, she wants to keep studying and go to the



university. She feels good in the program, she says that the program has a lot of opportunities but she says that she doesn't feel free, that she feels different from the other persons, like her class mates or her foster mother's children.

**Ninth interview:**

Woman, 16 years old. she used to live with her parents in village in Bolivar, she mentions she couldn't continue her studies after primary school because there is not a school after that, the most of the man start to work in the cocaine fields and woman stay at home at help in the house, and the other option for them is the guerrilla. For being sexual abused for some members of her family and physical and emotional abused for her aunt she took the decision to join the guerrilla group at the age of 11. She has being 2 years in the program, she has moved through 3 different foster families. She had a great experience with the first foster mother she lived with, but in the other two according with her she has felt rejected. She thinks that the people in the program don't listen to her. Therefore, she stops to say what she wants and things that happen to her. Her motivation to continue in the program is her fist foster mother and her studies.

**Tenth interview:**

Man, 17 years old, he used to live with his mother and brothers, he suffered physical and emotional abused from one of his brothers that was his motivation to join the illegal group. His perception about his experience in the illegal group is complete negative. He is being in the program for year and a half, and he has moved through four different foster families, there is one that he like so much, and he is thinking to move back with them when he finish the program, but he doesn't like at all the one he is now, he doesn't feel included. Hi thinks that being in the program is a great opportunity for him, but he also perceive that he doesn't have the freedom he wants and the foster and organization members don't recognize and support as they should the teenagers in the program.