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# Sustainable livelihoods of internally displaced persons: case study of Soacha, Colombia

**Author: Benjamin Sjögren**

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**Examiner: Benny Carlson**

**Supervisor: Martin Andersson**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to describe the conditions in which the internally displaced persons of Soacha, Colombia, live and how these affect their possibilities of obtaining a sustainable livelihood. This is a qualitative study and the material was mainly gathered using semi-structured interviews on-site in the poverty-stricken neighborhoods of El Oasis and Los Robles in Cazucá, Soacha. Interviews with institutions dealing with the matter of displacement in Soacha were also made. The displaced people living in Soacha often suffer from a poor provision of services and goods while at the same time being marginalized to the point where the attainment of a sustainable livelihood is made tremendously difficult. By using the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework developed by the Department for International Development different assets of the displaced people and the contexts within which they find themselves is structured and analyzed. By doing so the situation of displaced people in Soacha is further qualified and shows the difficulties that displaced persons face coming from the countryside to an urban setting where their skills and background often is of little use.

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## Abbreviations

- CARE** - Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
- CODHES** - Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento - *Observatory on Human Rights and Displacement*
- DFID** - Department for International Development
- DNP** - Departamento Nacional de Planeación - *National Planning Department*
- DPS** - Departamento para la Prosperidad Social - *Department of Social Prosperity*
- FAO** - Food and Agriculture Organization
- IDMC** - Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
- MSF** - Médecines Sans Frontières
- OCHA** - Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
- SLA** - Sustainable Livelihood Approach
- SLF** - Sustainable Livelihood Framework
- SNAIPD** - Sistema Nacional de Atención Integral a la Población Desplazada - *National System of Integrated Attention to the Displaced Population*
- SURPD** - Sistema Único de Registro de la Población Desplazada
- UARIV** - Unidad para la Atención y Reparación Integral a las Víctimas
- UNDP** - United Nations Development Programme
- UNHCR** - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Purpose

The reason for wanting to do this research in the first place was how the idea of development is significantly challenged under the circumstances in which internally displaced persons (IDPs) – in Colombia and all around the world – find themselves. How does one cope when your possessions, your home, your means of making a living and many times family members are deprived of you? It is a reality faced by far too many human beings and it is a topic worth paying more attention to if we are to better understand and aid the people who are in such dire need of help. This study uses the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) to assess the opportunities and obstacles of IDPs living in Soacha, Colombia.

## 1.2. Research Question

The principal question that this study has dealt with is the factors that affect the possibilities of IDPs in Soacha, Colombia, to attain a sustainable livelihood. These will naturally vary from person to person but given a large enough interview group, main factors will be able to be culled out. Government assistance, social networks, cultural background, violence in host communities etc could be some of the factors. How and to what extent these factors affect their livelihood is another crucial aspect to the study. For example, are the government programs very helpful but the lack of integration in host communities impede them from achieving their livelihood strategies?

It is imperative to know to what degree an IDP has achieved a sustainable livelihood, in order to format the specific interview structure. Naturally, both IDPs who are currently having a sustainable livelihood and those who are not, are of interest to know what factors of attainment of sustainable livelihood are relevant. That said, given the level of sustainability of the respondent IDP, the study revolves around the following major research question:

*How do the SLF assets affect the IDPs' efforts to achieve sustainable livelihoods?*

### **1.3. History of Colombia**

Since its independence in the early 19th century the Republic of Colombia has experienced a violent history as different factions have struggled for power and riches that led to a large wave of internal displacement among people living mainly in the countryside. As the “era of violence” between 1946 and 1966 meant tremendous harm to the peasants a small portion of them created self-defense groups that would later evolve into today’s guerilla movements. Their raids and activities led to the wealthy landowners feeling forced to sow the seeds of what today has evolved into what we know as the paramilitary groups (Giugale et al :2002). Since then these two armed opposing groups have established themselves as violent actors mainly in the rural regions. In the decades that followed up to this day the Colombian countryside population has been the victim of brutal violence as they are caught in the crossfire. They are actively targeted by violence by both sides of the conflict as this helps the aggressor to expand control of the lands the peasants inhabit for strategic purposes but also for extraction of valuable resources and cultivation of cash crops such as coca. In this way their intimidation tactics also weaken the local population’s ability to collectively rise up against their oppressors. The consequences of this have been millions of people in Colombia fleeing the violence for safety in other areas of the country. They are internally displaced persons (IDMC:2009).

### **1.4. Internally displaced person vs refugee**

An internally displaced person differs from a refugee in several respects. Although the reason for flight might be similar (civil conflict, humanitarian disaster etc) IDPs have not, unlike refugees, crossed an international border for the sake of safety but have remained in their home country. Consequently, IDPs become tremendously vulnerable as they maintain their rights as citizens and protection of their government even though the government could have been involved in what caused the displacement in the first place. To add to their vulnerability is the fact that IDPs are not entitled to certain rights and protections that are bestowed upon those of the legal status of an international refugee. Being internally

displaced means that one is still under the jurisdiction of one's government and hence cannot claim rights beyond those of their fellow countrymen (Brun:2005).

Due to this the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) states that IDPs are "among the world's most vulnerable people" (UNHCR:2012). As of 2012, IDMC's estimated that the number of IDPs in the world were 28.8 million - the highest number ever recorded – and roughly twice the amount of refugees in the world (IDMC:2012). This amounts to about 0.4% of the world population or one in every 250 persons living today.

## **1.5. Internal displacement in Colombia**

Colombia is the country in the world that has the largest population of internally displaced persons at about 4.9-5.5 million, ca 17% of all IDPs of the world, according to Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre's (IDMC) latest report from 2012. The amount is roughly 10-12% of the entire Colombian population (IDMC:2012). In Colombia, according to law 387 of 1997, a person is considered displaced when said person has been forced to leave his or her residence and livelihood and migrate within national boundaries. The reasons for displacement are armed internal conflict, generalized violence and massive violations of human rights which lead to direct or indirect threats to human life and livelihood (SNAIPD:2009).

Reports of exact numbers vary as the government and CODHES, the leading NGO of monitoring displacement in Colombia, reach different conclusions. The reason for this is that the governmental agency in charge of registering IDPs, Sistema Único de Registro de la Población Desplazada (SURPD), only include those who have been officially recognized as such (DPS:2013). The latest report of CODHES released in May 2013 cite roughly 5,700,000 people as being displaced between 1985-2012 (CODHES:2013).

IDPs suffer from violence of different actors in different ways which makes their situation increasingly complex. Leftist guerilla groups like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) are against the state while it in turn

historically has fought back partly with the help of brutal paramilitary support. Over time this web of violence has become further complicated by the presence of powerful drug barons and latifundistas which have contracted armed groups in order to maintain and increase influence (IDMC:2009). The IDPs are directly affected by this as they mainly live in rural areas where the conflict takes place. They are often accused of being sympathizers of the opposing side and reports say that paramilitary forces have targeted IDPs and NGOs working with IDPs for this exact reason. Both sides are also reported to recruit soldiers among children of settlements of IDPs. Often it is just the case that they are forced out of their homes as their land is valuable in terms of resources and growing coca leaves (Holmes et al:2011). In recent years paramilitary groups have been demobilizing to a significant extent and from them *bacrim*s (short for *bandas criminales* – criminal gangs formed by former paramilitaries) have sprung up that deal heavily with drugs. However, not all displacement is due to violence but sometimes due to the side effects of the drug war waged by the government. The aerial fumigation of illegal crops often have detrimental effects on locals and their surroundings (Merteens:2012).

As the IDPs are forced to relocate they often turn to urban centers where there is less chance of suffering from armed violence and prospects of a better life. However, as most IDPs consist of the rural population they encounter problems as they enter the urban scene with little or no education and no land with which to support them. Thus, the IDPs find themselves in a chaotic process of relocating to a new town with often no family or friends to aid them. They are forced to get by on sparse means as marginalized citizens of Colombian society. Especially vulnerable are those groups who belong to the minority such as Afro-Colombians and indigenous people. Approximately one fourth of Colombian IDPs are either afro-Colombian or indigenous people despite only making up roughly 10% of the population (Global IDP:2004). Additionally, these are people that live in rural areas where most conflict takes place which results in these groups having the highest numbers of internal displacement (IDMC:2012). To this day, under the Santos presidency, the displacement in Colombia rages on (Sandvik et al:2013).



## **1.6. Institutional context**

The government of Colombia has in recent years increased its attention to the crisis of mass displacement and other victims of the widespread violence. In 2011 president Santos recognized that Colombia indeed did suffer from an armed conflict rather than a terrorist threat which had been the claim of the previous administration (The Guardian:2011). At the same time Santos put a law in place, La Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras (The Victims and Land Restitution Law), that intended to put a framework in place to tend to the needs of those affected by the armed conflict since 1985. They have the right to know the reasons for their displacement, symbolic reparation, guarantees of no repetition and the right to their land from which they were ousted (UNDP:2011a). Although this is an important step for IDPs the implementation of the law is lagging as it faces many obstacles along the way. As efforts gather pace resistance to the law is obvious as human rights advocates are murdered by the dozens. Furthermore, the budget for the rights of the victims, although enlarged, is still not enough to meet their needs and a large proportion of IDPs do not receive the humanitarian assistance they have a legal right to obtain (IDMC:2011).

When Santos implemented the law it meant a big step in terms of putting political focus on the victims of the ongoing civil conflict. The aim was to eradicate extreme poverty within 10 years and have in place a government sector that will be in charge of these socioeconomically important topics (UNDP:2011a). Some already existing governmental entities joined with newly created entities and Departamento para la Prosperidad Social (DPS) is now in charge of organizing state efforts in a unified manner to achieve more effective social services to all victims of the decades-long conflict (DPS:2013).

The focal point of the Nation Planning Department (DNP – Departamento Nacional de Planeación) with regards to IDPs is their socioeconomic stabilization; to become self-sufficient and to overcome their situation of displacement. Three alternatives are viewed as possible solutions: returning to their original home; resettlement in a place different from their initial location or permanently settling in the location to which they were first displaced (DNP:2005).

## 1.7. Research Site – Soacha, Colombia

Like previously mentioned the focus of this study is on the displaced persons living in a city called Soacha neighboring Bogotá in the department of Cundimarca. According to the latest census in 2005 Soacha has about 400.000 inhabitants (National Census:2005) but other sources believe these numbers to be erroneous and claim numbers of 700.000 or higher to be more likely (SJR:2012).



Soacha (bright red) and Bogotá (brown) in the department of Cundimarca and its location in Colombia

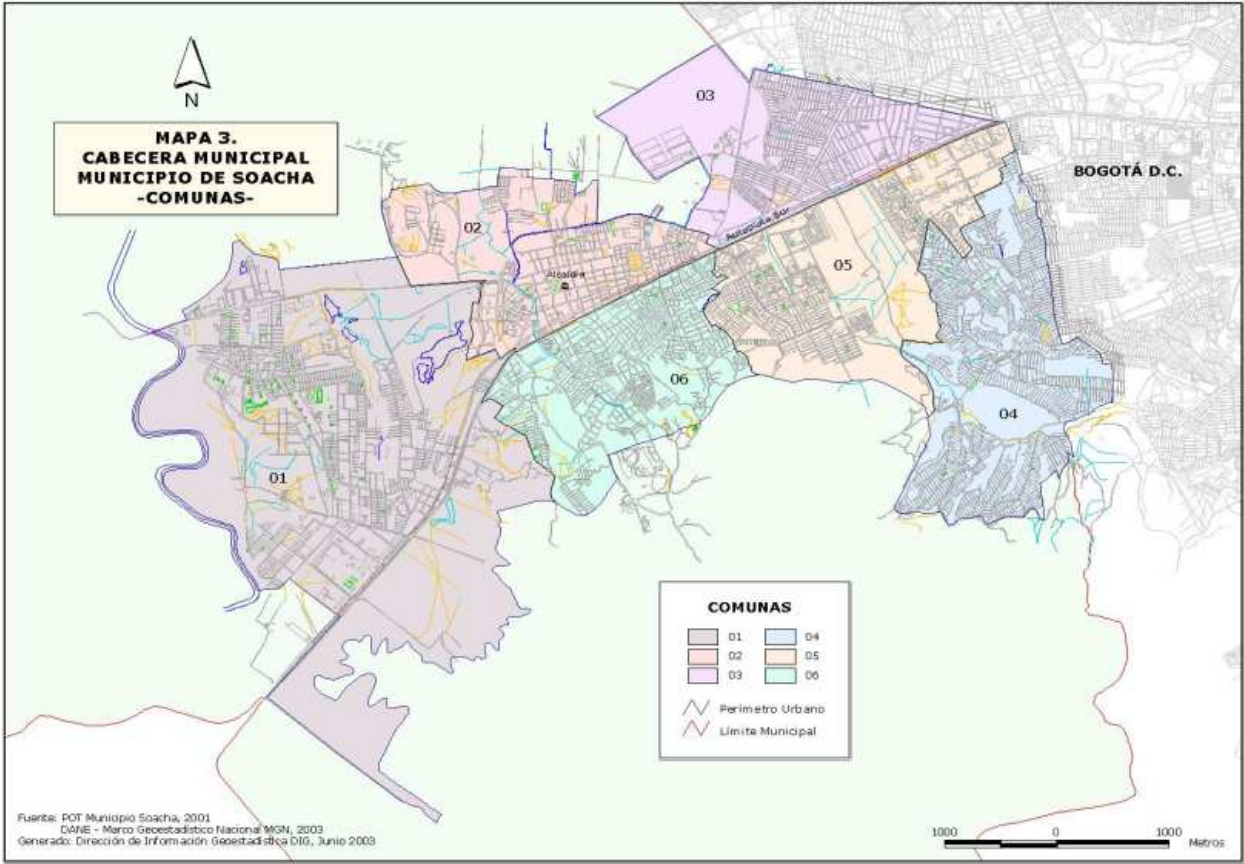
Although Soacha is administratively a different municipality from Bogotá it is geographically only a continuation of the capital. Soacha is one of the largest receiving communities of displaced people in all of Colombia and the municipality that receives most IDPs in Cundimarca (Médecines Sans Frontières:2004). Due to the condition of many people living in Soacha there is a high presence of Colombian and international development organizations. The UNDP has set out Millenium Development Goals specifically for Soacha to combat extreme poverty and improving living conditions (UNDP:2011b).

Soacha is divided into six *comunas* (communities) and the field work of this paper took place in community nr 4 – Cazucá – right on the border to Bogotá. In Cazucá lives about 44% of the displaced population of Soacha which amounts to about 8.000 IDPs (Municipality of Soacha:2008). Some visits were also made to respondents now living nearby in Ciudad Bolívar, Bogotá, due to them having spent many years living in Soacha and were considered

to be valuable for the purpose of this thesis. Most of the interviews took place in the administrative zone of Altos de Cazucá in its neighbourhoods *El Oasis* and *Los Robles*.

Altos de Cazucá is considered perhaps the most depressed zone of Soacha. It has a large percentage of displaced population and suffers from a precarious infrastructure and an insufficient provision of goods and services. The displaced people living there find themselves in a state of misery and marginalization (Médecines Sans Frontières:2004).

Map of the main communities of Soacha



Source: Municipality of Soacha, 2008

# 2. Theoretical Framework

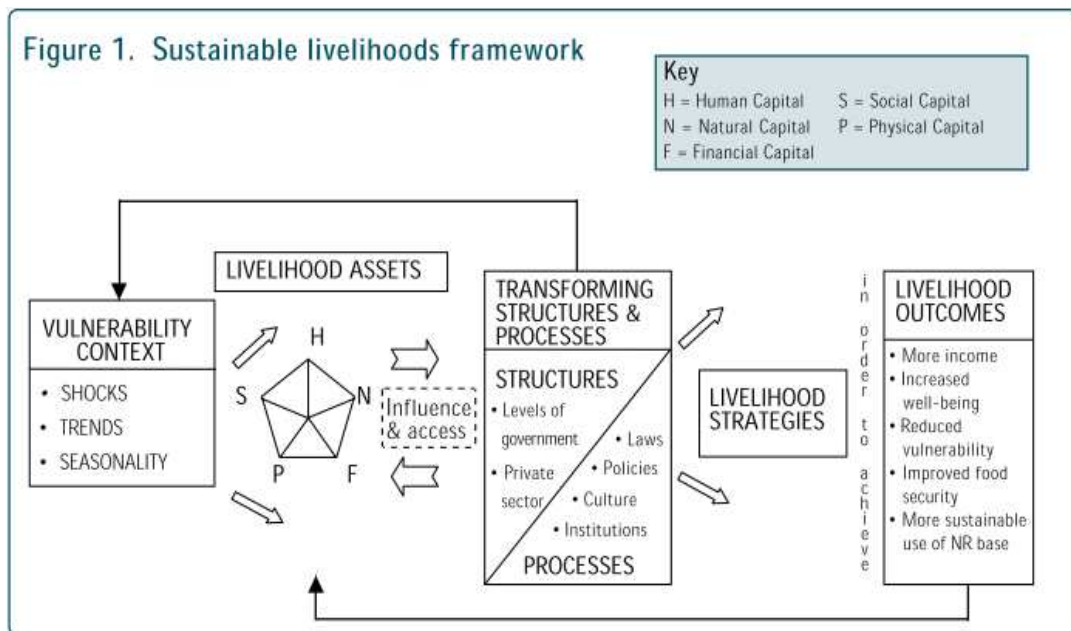
## 2.1. The Sustainable Livelihood Framework

This paper uses the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) developed by the Department for International Development (DFID) to approach the issue of sustainable livelihoods of afro-Colombian IDPs living in Soacha. The DFID is a government department of the United Kingdom and was officially formed in 1997. It focuses on eradicating world poverty and promoting sustainable development around the world.<sup>1</sup> The SLF is a people-centered framework with the objective to help eliminate poverty. It aims to get a coherent perspective of the relevant factors that affect livelihoods in order to improve planning and management. It does so by focusing on five assets: human, natural, financial, social and physical capital.

These assets are then viewed in the context of their vulnerability and of particular importance of this framework are the ways in which the different factors concerning livelihoods relate to one and other. However, the aim of this thesis is to make use of the SL approach in order to gain insight into the economic opportunities and obstacles that the IDPs face when determining their livelihood strategies. This will be done by further examining what DFID call the *transforming structures and processes* as seen in figure 1 below. It should be mentioned that this is normally an approach used by large-scale organizations in order to asses a livelihood situation and implement policies accordingly. This study does unfortunately not have the same resources as they do and can therefore not go to the same depth of the topics that normally would be the case when using this framework:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-international-development>



Source:(DFID:1999)

There are three sections of the DFID SLF upon which poverty-struck persons base their *livelihood strategies* in order to achieve their *livelihood outcomes*: *the vulnerability context*, their *livelihood assets* and *transforming structures and processes*. They will here be explained shortly according to DFID’s guidance sheet:

**2.1.1. Vulnerability context** – trends, shocks and seasonality. These are the different external events over which the poor people have no control. *Trends* are of a more predictable nature and concern such things as technology, resources, economy and governance. *Shocks* are sudden and are due to a variety of reasons. It can be a health disaster, economic shock or even a conflict situation in which assets might be destroyed or relocation is necessary. *Seasonality* causes shifts in prices, food or employment opportunities and is a constant reason for suffering among poor people.

**2.1.2. Livelihood assets** – the SLF includes five *assets*;

*Human capital* – skills, knowledge, ability to work, good health etc.

*Natural capital* – land, water, natural resources etc. Mainly for rural poverty analysis.

*Financial capital* – cash, bank deposits, pensions, state remittances etc.

*Social capital* – networks, membership in organizations, trust, informal safety nets etc.

*Physical capital* – transport, shelter, water, energy, sanitation, communication etc.

**2.1.3. Transforming structures and processes** – *institutions, organizations, policies and legislations that affect livelihoods*. The *structures* are the public sector, the private commercial sector and civil society. The *processes* are changes in policies, legislations, institutions and culture. These contexts are of tremendous importance as they operate on all levels, from the local to international stage and public to private sector. In so doing they determine what DFID considers to be three vital matters: access (to various types of capital and decision making bodies), terms of exchange between different capitals and returns that any given livelihood strategy will give. Four themes are useful to think of when analyzing this context: *roles* (which organizations and what they do), *responsibilities, rights* (what are they and the awareness thereof) and *relations* between different groups.

## **2.2. The history of sustainable livelihoods**

The history of modern livelihood studies originates largely in the work of Robert Chambers in the 1980s and was further developed by himself and Gordon Conway in the 1990s (UN:2009). To this day most literature today uses a variation of their definition of livelihood from their 1991 discussion paper for the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) titled *Sustainable rural livelihoods: practical concepts for the 21st century*:

*A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks* (Chambers et al:1991).

Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE), United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Oxfam were among the earlier organizations to adopt the sustainable livelihood methodologies. DFID embraced the concept in 1997 in their White Paper

*Eliminating World Poverty: A Challenge for the 21st Century* by promoting sustainable livelihood for poor people (DFID:1997). Consequently, when DFID invested heavily in its research in the late 1990s the approach gained even more recognition (UN:2009).

The sustainable livelihood approach (SLA) was a step away from the development perspective of the dependencia and neo-Marxist of the 1970s and 1980s. Although it affirmed that structural inequalities of power and assets indeed existed the SLA viewed underprivileged people as still in charge of their own future. The SLA put more focus on the individuals as drivers of change and more attention was given to the micro-world of families and community rather than just the structural macro-view of development (de Haan et al:2005).

However, although the focus is on micro-level outcomes for individuals or households the effect of context on poverty is still taken into account; e.g. how policies and institutional processes might affect poverty-stricken groups differently (Foresti et al:2007). In a sense the SLA attempts to combine the macro and micro aspects as a way to understand vulnerable people's behavior within different levels of dynamic contextual factors.

As a result focus on households gained increased attention as it was seen as a practical unit for the collection of data. The earlier household studies of the 1980s often reached pessimistic conclusions as they further established the exclusion and marginalization of poorer groups. However, with the new livelihood approach emphasis was now on poor households and their abilities to cope under difficult circumstances. Instead of viewing poverty-stricken groups as victims in need of relief aid the livelihood approach set out to analyze the complexity of livelihoods in poverty and make policies to aid in a sustainable manner where poor people are in charge of propelling themselves out of poverty. Thus, development practice had shifted from a resource-based outlook to meet people's needs to instead incorporate their abilities to attain and maintain constructive change (de Haan:2005).

SIDA has compared the three well known sustainable livelihood (SL) approaches by CARE,

UNDP and DFID. The reason for which this thesis has chosen to make use of the DFID approach is its holistic approach in which the SLF is a convenient central element for analytical structure to ease a systematic understanding of livelihood. The reasoning therefore is that the DFID approach is the most suited for analytical purposes concerning a minor field study like this one. Entry points for further analysis and policy-making is more easily obtained whilst the approaches of CARE and UNDP have a slightly different aim as they focus more on empowerment and technology enhancements respectively (SIDA:2001).

### **2.3. Rural vs urban livelihoods**

In applying a sustainable livelihood approach it is of the utmost importance to be aware of the differences between rural and urban contexts. Although differentiating rural from urban areas can sometimes be tricky it will not be required for this study as the place of interest – Soacha – is a large city with roughly 400,000 inhabitants. Soacha has the 12<sup>th</sup> largest population in Colombia according to the 2005 census (National Census:2005).

As Chambers and Conway discussed sustainable livelihood it was done in a rural context. Consequently, although the approach has been used in urban settings as well there are some considerations one has to keep in mind when doing so. When Farrington et al (2002) used the approach in urban settings in India they listed marked differences in obtaining livelihoods in an urban as opposed to rural context. These are some of the urban features listed:

- ✓ Livelihood is drawn from markets of non-agricultural production
- ✓ Access to land and housing is comparatively difficult; the land market is highly commercialized
- ✓ Closer connection to government and institutions
- ✓ Access to infrastructure and services very costly
- ✓ Greater reliance on cash as means for food, water, sanitation, employment etc. (Farrington et al:2002).



Due to these factors certain aspect of the SLF are not as relevant in an urban context. For example the vulnerability context has different components that affect different groups differently. The term vulnerability in this framework refers to external change furthest beyond people's control. Rural people are very vulnerable in the sense of seasonality due to their dependence upon agricultural activity; this does not affect urban people to the same extent (DFID:1999). However, IDPs in an urban setting suffer from vulnerabilities within their own unique circumstances. Displacement tends to cause social marginalization and stigmatization at the same time as often already existing vulnerabilities, such as economic burdens or racism, are intensified. Nor is the loss of children or a husband uncommon which further increases a household's abilities to obtain a sustainable livelihood.

## **2.4. Self-selected and forced migrants**

Studies have been made about different types of migrants and how they cope with resettling in a new community. Whether or not migrants are self-selected or not is vital to understanding the economic and social consequences they undergo. The more highly favorably self-selected the migrants are the better equipped they will be in adjusting to their new destination (Chiswick: 2000). Aysa-Lastra argues that IDPs and their low degree of integration is not due to the capabilities or will of the forced migrants but rather a consequence of their adverse selection into an urban migration stream. Thus, those who do not migrate for economic reasons but instead because of violence like the respondents of this case study will most likely be less successful in integrating into the labor market of their destination (Aysa-Lastra:2010). The considerations and decisions that self-selected migrants make before relocating reflect their own perception of their chances of obtaining a sustainable livelihood in the receiving destination (McGinnis: 2000).

Furthermore, the conditions that might normally drive rural-to-urban migration, such as favorable conditions in nearby urban labor markets, are not present in the case of IDPs but their displacement is oftentimes due to massacres of civilians, immanent threats or general

insecurity (Calderón et al: 2009). Consequently, there is a clear difference in the circumstances surrounding the forced migrants of this study as opposed to self-selected migrants.

## **2.5 Discussion**

What is appealing about this analytical framework is the holistic approach it undertakes. It takes the vital aspects into consideration when determining how to support livelihoods so they can be maintained in the long run. Not only is it seemingly a more accurate way to analyze livelihoods but it also puts the poverty-struck person at the center as an actor for positive change. Although it can seem daunting to make use of such a broad framework it is not necessary to go into full-depth on each topic of the framework. Instead, by using this approach but still maintaining focus on a particular topic therein it is possible to gain a greater understanding of the particular topic. Perhaps there are factors that affect said topic in ways that would not have been known in a more narrow analysis. On the other hand, for large organizations that wish to determine the best way to implement aid in a sustainable way the SLF can be a good way to go about this. As a researcher it is a convenient way of obtaining a manageable mental image of the situation and by so doing identify which factors are most vital to support.

SIDA makes a similar point in its assessment of the SL approach. SIDA points to the complexity of poverty as a good reason of using a multi-faceted approach. Many times it is not a single activity but rather a combined effort of a household that makes up its livelihood. Furthermore, there might be constraints on the poor at many levels from local to legislative. Due to this a sectoral approach might miss some vital aspects relevant to the poor and lead to a less comprehensive intervention (SIDA:2001). However, criticism can be leveled against these benefits of the approach. Even DFID admits that it can be difficult and time-consuming to detect the connections between the assets and structures of the approach and determine how they affect the poor (DFID:1999). Furthermore, when using their SL approach on two villages in Nigeria, Morse et al (2009) came up with some criticism. They claim that using

such a broad approach on one site will by default make it 'site specific' as it takes into consideration such a multitude of aspects and detail. In turn, this can lead to the study being but descriptive and not comparable to other studies. As a result, one might only be able to detect some almost meaningless generalizable patterns; "agriculture is an important component of livelihood in many places" (Morse et al, 2009:58). Farrington et al caution those who attempt to use the SL approach in an urban environment since the natural assets are of less importance and livelihoods tend to be more determined by income and financial capital. Having said that they do mention that the SL approach can be useful since poverty is more complex than just lack of income. They conclude: ... *[T]his review suggests that there is nothing inherent in urban settings to prevent their application there. Indeed, there is much to argue that the need for livelihoods approaches in urban settings is pressing, and that the returns to their implementation might be high* (Farrington et al:2002).

# 3. Methodology

## 3.1. Research Method

The research method chosen is a case study design as this is an effective way of exploring the topics considered by the IDPs to be the most important in the attainment of a sustainable livelihood. Qualitative interviews were used as the point of view of the respondent were of most interest rather than my own concerns as a researcher where quantitative interviews would have been more fitting (Bryman, 2012:470)

There is plenty of data on the subject of IDPs in Colombia which is certainly of value in getting an understanding of the context within which they find themselves. However, using a qualitative approach is a good method to get a deeper understanding of the workings of a specific case. As mentioned before, the framework of this study is the SLA which puts people at the center with the aim to encourage debate about factors affecting their livelihood.

## 3.2. Choice of site

The reason for doing the fieldwork in the two neighborhoods of Los Robles and El Oasis in Soacha was due to my contact organization – *Justicia y Vida*. Although I knew that there were many IDPs living in Bogotá and its surroundings I did not yet have an exact site for my field work. *Justicia y Vida* consisted of only one person and she recommended I talk to a long-term displaced afro-Colombian woman living in Ciudad Bolívar, Bogotá. We met in Bogotá and she agreed to be my contact person and to help me interview friends and acquaintances of hers. It turned out she had been living in El Oasis, Soacha, for many years and still spent a lot of time there as she ran a children’s song group and was a very active person in the area. In a sense I did not have the ability to choose the specific site to study but what I was suggested fit my criteria of researching internally displaced people in an impoverished area in the Bogotá metropolitan area.

### 3.3. Sampling

My hopes were to obtain a sample of heads of IDP households that had lived in Soacha for at least a year and preferably more. This means they would have settled in somewhat and gone past the state of emergency of the first couple of months. The households with which I was able to make contact were almost all headed by single women. Of the few households with two spouses the husband would be working when I was at the site which meant that all interviews were made with women.

I was told that the site in question was not a very safe environment to go alone for a foreigner which caused a struggle in the beginning. I was recommended not to go there alone but at the same time I did not have anyone who could accompany me to the site. Due to the remoteness and relative danger of the area researched, and the fact that I did not have an organization on the site that could aid me, snowball sampling was used. Bryman points to the usefulness of snowball sampling when probability sampling is not feasible due to hard-to-reach populations in areas with risks of violence from which to get a sample. The process is such that once contact is established with one respondent further contacts can be made through the connections and acquaintances of that respondent (Bryman 2012:424). Through the human rights organization *Justicia y Vida* contact was made with an afro-Colombian woman who would serve as a contact person for each field visits to Soacha. She would help me find respondents who in turn suggested other possible respondents in the area of question. Simultaneously, I managed to make contact with an on-site Christian humanitarian organization - *Mencoldes* - which helped me find additional suitable respondents during my last couple of weeks there. In total I made eighteen interviews; thirteen through my key informant and five through *Mencoldes*. Four of the interviews obtained by my key informant were not recorded as I did not have a recorder at my first interviewing session when three interviews were made and one was made as the respondent felt more comfortable that way. Four of eighteen interviews were made with respondents living in other nearby neighborhoods due to having received subsidized housing which enabled them to move out of the site of the study. Due to them having lived many years in El Oasis or Los Robles before being granted subsidized houses they are still deemed as being of

interest to the investigation. Six interviews made are disregarded as they were inconsistent with the themes of this thesis, i.e. too young to be of interest, not the head of the household or not displaced.

### **3.4. Interview – semi-structured**

The interviews performed were semi-structured and normally carried out in the homes of the individuals. An interview guide based on a review of relevant literature and key informants was used in order to cull out pertinent themes and topics about livelihood strategies. By doing so the interviewee has much freedom when responding which arguable gives a more accurate image of their perception of a sustainable livelihood. As Bryman points out: [in semi-or-un-structured interviews] the emphasis must be on how the interviewee frames and understands issues and events – that is, what the interviewee views as important in explaining and understanding events, patterns and forms of behavior (Bryman, 2012:471). Using an interview guide based on the SLF with emphasis on economic opportunities I would let the respondent embellish their response as she pleased while still maintaining a focus on what I deemed relevant. However, using this style for such a broad approach as the SLF makes it time-consuming both to interview and to later analyze the results. It can be difficult to stay on the relevant topics and keep things concise. Sometimes, depending on the respondent, an interview could take close to an hour while others would be more short at around fifteen minutes. Often it would be difficult to maintain focus on the selected topics as I would hear horrifying stories of the ways in which these women had suffered in life.

### **3.5. Observation**

In order to immerse myself as much as possible in the lives of the IDPs I took every chance I could to go out there and spend some time. I was lucky to be able to volunteer in a youth-center in a neighborhood close by where my case was. The organization is called Creciendo Juntos (Growing Together) and had many kids come by after school between the ages of one and eighteen years old. There I would participate in different workshops and at

the same time get a feel for what it is like living in such an impoverished neighborhood – not as a researcher but as a volunteer. It was a very humbling feeling and one occasion stands out more than others. I helped run a workshop on the dangers of heavy drugs with kids between the ages of maybe four and fifteen. One kid, maybe twelve years old, explained how he had tried marijuana already. This gave me a new perspective on drugs in those areas and the dangers it poses to children and their families.

Besides being a volunteer I also attended a music-and-dance event for the benefit of indigenous groups and afro-Colombians. At this event my key informant had her singing group perform songs of the pacific coast of Colombia. She does this for the people who wish to maintain some of the cultural heritage they had to leave behind as they were displaced.

Although it did not always pertain directly to my research it was still very important for me to be able to get a more vivid picture of the lives of the people living in these areas. Naturally I would gain a lot of information of their conditions on my days interviewing them as well, spending hours and hours walking around from one household to the other.

### **3.6. Interview with DNP and CODHES**

In order to gain further insight into the issue I deemed it important to talk to some of the more prominent institutions dealing with internally displaced persons in Colombia. Although it was quite cumbersome to make the appointment happen I did manage to sit down with the director of Departamento para la Prosperidad Social (DPS). Furthermore, I had close contact with an employee at perhaps the largest and most well-know NGO working with the monitoring of displaced people - La Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento (CODHES). She was a great asset that my work depended greatly on. Through her I got an interview with the person at CODHES responsible for their work in Soacha which naturally gave a lot of information and much insight to the situation of the case I was studying.

### **3.7. Ethical Considerations**

One quickly learns that an IDP is not wont to speak loudly of armed groups and the reasons for which they were displaced. This is due to persecution of those who have information about the illegal activities that have been performed. I even had two people decline to talk with me (although for what reason I am not sure) and as previously mentioned one person preferred not to be recorded. Hence, as a researcher in this context you learn to tread lightly around some topics. Luckily these details were not of relevance to my research. However, it is important to keep in mind the mindset of your respondents. Bryman gives some tips on how not to cause harm on participants and states that confidentiality is key (Bryman 2012:135). Due to some of the information I have gathered and recorded I give this top priority. Hence, this paper will not make use of any names nor will it include details of some of the things I recorded although they were willing to be recorded in the first place and were well aware of my intentions.

There is also the question of time that I take up from their lives. Due to this I gave them 10.000 pesos (roughly 4€) after the interview was done without letting them know in advance that there would be money involved in our interaction. However, for the interviews through Mencoldes I did not give money as Mencoldes did not think this was necessary as it was not common practice for them.

### **3.8. Discussion**

As it was difficult to make contact with respondents I tried to get as many as I could get. However, due to having to depend upon my contact person in the field for almost the entire time it was not easy to reach a high number of respondents. Not only was I heavily dependent of my contact who was working daytime but so were many of her acquaintances that I was hoping to interview. Further arduous was the fact that the neighborhood was two - two and a half hours away from where I was living in Bogotá. Adding to this was the fact that I was recommended not to be in the area by night. This basically meant that I had to hope that there would be days in which I could get an interview. Sometimes I would spend



four-five hours commuting only to be able to interview one person. Toward the end of my stay in Bogotá I was fortunate to make contact with MENCOLDES who had workshops for kids in the neighborhood every Saturday morning. This greatly facilitated the work although I only got to go there with them on two occasions and obtained five interviews.

Morse et al when using a SLA found an issue with truthfulness of the respondents (Morse et al 2009:60). Although I do not believe that my respondents lied or withheld information from me it was clear that they thought of me as a rich Westerner. Many jokes were made about me adopting their children, or buying them their rented house. At one point I was even approached by two women, probably assuming I was a doctor, for medical advice.

There is also the issue of the language. Spanish is my third language but I feel confident enough to use it for research purposes. However, as the respondents come from rural parts of Colombia I would sometimes have difficulties understanding their accents. My key informant was often present in the interviews and thus would help clear out any misunderstandings between me and the respondent. Sometimes she would even explain further what the respondent had said. By doing so the interview can be biased toward her understanding of the issue and it was important not to let this affect my research. Her presence I would assume still has less negative effects on my research than say using an interpreter would have been.

# 4. Results

## 4.1. Expert interviews

### 4.1.1. Departamento para la Prosperidad Social (DPS)

The director Jose Ricardo Rodríguez and his associate Orlando Mendoza of DPS (Department of Social Prosperity) were kind enough to let me visit and talk to them about the issues facing the IDPs of Soacha and in Colombia in general. We spoke for about 45 minutes in their Bogotá office.

They considered important the amount of changes that the government has performed for the benefit of not only IDPs displaced by violence but all victims of displacement including those of natural causes etc. This they claim is due to the stance of president Santos toward the conflict. Although Santos has a similar ideology as the former president Uribe they differ on the issue of the conflict: *'Uribe had a more belligerent position to the conflict. Santos, instead, saves some space to be able to have peace-dialogues'*.

They also note the extreme difficulties facing particularly communities 4 (the site of this case study) and 6 of Soacha. Some of the problems mentioned are violence associated with normal crime, intra-urban displacement with Soacha due to landslides and illegal housing, and the population increase that is too fast for Soacha to keep up with. Effects of these are gangs and crime which absorbs the children of the IDPs. That is where one state entity called Familias en Acción intervenes and enables these kids to go to school. There are several other institutions designed to aid displaced people arriving in Soacha to be more self-sufficient through workshops and resources given. There are many offers for the IDPs in Soacha but there is a problem of the aid not reaching its recipients. *"Many times the programs don't reach them because they are working or their child is sick. By concentrating our efforts under one umbrella we hope to reach out to more people. [...] In Soacha we have about 6,500-7,000 displaced families. It is very difficult to keep a constant watch on that many families."*

The differences between an IDP and a non-IDP are also an issue. The IDPs are extra vulnerable to poverty as they are not equipped for an urban economy. They have few resources and lack the competence for managing the economic circumstances of Soacha. In that sense they are limited when trying to integrate with the formal economy. There are huge investments being made into families but as these families are so poor they can easily fall back into extreme poverty because of landslides destroying their houses or other circumstances. When that happens we lose several years worth of effort. That adds to the complexity of the situation.

But they note that the main problem is that ... *[I]n terms of resources it falls short. With several millions of displaced persons in this country they can't all be covered by state assistance.* However, they point out that the goal is not to eradicate extreme poverty in one year but rather to be the initial stepping stone for future policies to aim at the same objectives and hopefully reach them by 2020-25. They also point to the significant achievements made in the last few years compared to the years 1970-90s where the poverty numbers barely moved an inch.

*"The world has entered a different dynamic setting. Human rights, NGOs, the issue of poverty. The issues were raised and the resources have followed. But unfortunately we are still in conflict. The advances made in one year can go backwards five years or more. [...] You can take 50 families out of extreme poverty but next year there are 10-20 new families. Until the conflict ends there won't be a point zero."*

#### **4.1.2. CODHES - Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento**

Marcos Oyaga is responsible of matters pertaining to Soacha within CODHES (The Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement) and he let me talk to him for over an hour about the viewpoint of CODHES on the displacement issue.

Mr. Oyaga has spent years going to Soacha and talking to representatives of the municipality

and collaborated with UNHCR and other humanitarian entities such as UNICEF, OCHA, UNDP and FAO who have or have had projects in Soacha.

He states that a large part of the problem that Soacha is going through is the fact that there has been a surge in population numbers in recent years due to displacement. These processes of urbanization have happened under chaotic terms without the necessary institutional help. *“It is a case of institutional debility where the necessary urban strategies haven’t been implemented. This has meant that a lot of the displaced people have had to settle in marginalized areas with little access to education, health and employment.”*

He disagrees with the state assessment of the presence of violence in Soacha and goes on to claim that one of the major problems for the population in the impoverished parts of Soacha is the violent surroundings. In fact, in my interview with DPS they referred to the violence as being “common delinquency”. Instead CODHES claims that there has been known presence of several different illegal armed groups in the area since the 1980s. Mr. Oyaga identifies this as a vital obstacle to sustainability in Soacha: *“This means that not only does the displaced population not have access to socio-economical stability but yet again they are surrounded by insecurity and violence. It is very difficult for them to satisfy their needs in a context where they are victimized yet again.”*

He does not hold back when criticizing the Soacha municipality in its treatment of the issue. *“The problem with the municipal office of Soacha is that on paper they say one thing and in reality they do another. There have been many programs to attend to the IDPs but when you go and talk to the people you find that there is no difference, it doesn’t work”*. He states that legalization of unauthorized high-risk homes (built on fragile land in great risk of landslides) could go a long way toward helping the people there but community leaders say that there is interest in mining for resources in the grounds upon which they stand. However, he does not know if this is certain.

He continues his critique of the municipality: *“There is a serious problem with political will in Soacha. It is an attitude in general that they have. The authorities have a discourse in which*

*they are not responsible for the displacement and are victims of the IDPs that arrive". "People will say things like: the IDPs are bleeding Soacha dry, all of our money goes them, Soacha for the Soachanos. It is a question of discrimination and a problem which is very disconcerting."*

The lack of political will in Soacha has other consequences for the IDPs. The information kept on the IDPs in Soacha is out-of-date which makes the implementation of good programs for the IDPs difficult to achieve. *"It is all about management. If you know how many IDPs there are and how they live of course you will be better equipped in implementing efficient policies. None of this has happened because they are not interested"*.

*"We, as a non-governmental organization, have the impression that in Soacha there is not the least bit of interest in issues concerning the IDPs."*

## **4.2. Data from interviews with IDPs**

This part of the thesis will begin by mapping out the respondents in aspects deemed relevant.

### **4.2.1. Description of the respondents**

All of the interviews were made either in the homes of the IDPs or one home would be used for a couple of interviews for neighbors living very close by. They live mainly in two neighborhoods in Soacha - Los Robles and El Oasis in the community of Altos de Cazucá. Some now live in an area close by, Ciudad de Bolívar in Bogotá, but have all lived several years in the same neighborhoods in Soacha.

The eighteen respondents are all women between 23 and 55 years old. Sixteen are afro-Colombian and two are mestizas (i.e. with Spanish heritage). Most women are from the departments of Chocó and Nariño and a few from other departments such as Antioquia and Caquetá. All but four are unmarried and thus live without a partner. Two of the married women are unemployed and their husbands work. They all have children and only two of the

mothers do not live with theirs. The amount of people living in each household range between one and six persons. In Soacha only two households owned their house while four respondents were granted subsidized housing in nearby areas. Most of the women have completed or almost completed basic, also known as secondary, education which means they have spent eleven years in school. This means none of them have higher education and a few of the older women have no education at all.

Four of the women have formal jobs at minimum wage. The others have informal jobs mainly in private homes in the domestic service, what is known as *casa de familia*. However, these types of jobs are normally on a day-by-day basis which means that it is not full-time employment and they can go many days without working at all. Only two of the women report still receiving financial aid from state assistance.

#### **4.2.2. The five livelihood assets**

As described above there are five assets considered in the SLF framework by DFID. These will separately be evaluated here. However, this is in no way a thorough study of their livelihoods but rather a descriptive study from the point of view of the IDPs themselves.

##### **Human capital – skills, knowledge, ability to work, good health etc.**

This is one of the more highlighted themes during my research. Considering their rural background each and every one of the respondents come without any skill or experience directly applicable to the urban context. Each and every one of the respondents has a background in agriculture for sustenance and often selling. None of this goes unnoticed by the respondents who realize this as a major obstacle when trying to enter the economic life of Soacha and Bogotá. Due to this they all hope that their kids will study. One woman who came displaced to Soacha with hopes of being able to study remarks:

*“One comes here with the basics. If you get a job it will be casa de familia (informal domestic service). –it would be better with an education. Now my son is studying for a job with greater aspiration than what I was able to do.”* Respondent 1

Another one says:

*"It is difficult to get a job without an education. You have to study in order to capacitate well in order to get a good pay so that you can support your home. We don't have higher education with which we can get a job worthwhile."* Respondent 2

When asked what their hopes for the future is all mothers mention that they wish for their sons and daughters to go to university and get out of the poverty that they are living in now. Luckily, all kids are given primary education for free close by although pens, books and clothes are further costs that put a strain on the household. Only one sends her kid to a private school which costs around 40.000 pesos (roughly 14€) per month.

Thus, the issue of human capital in terms of education is one theme that the women very often mention and they recognize it as a severe constraint on their livelihood outcomes. Although many of the women have finished or lack a year to finish the Colombian equivalent of high school they are eligible for studying at a higher level in Soacha or Bogotá. However, due to their financial restraints and the time consumption required by having kids to take care of none have been able to achieve their hopes of studying at a higher level to be qualified for more job opportunities.

**Natural capital** – *land, water, natural resources etc. Mainly for rural poverty analysis.*

Although this is probably the least relevant asset for an urban livelihood analysis it is important to note how much of an asset loss this has been for the displaced persons of this study. All of the respondents come from rural backgrounds and either through business or just private agriculture they depended tremendously upon natural capital for their livelihood before they were displaced. The freedom of getting food in abundance from nature in their birth-homes is nowhere to be seen here:

*"It [Chocó, her home province] is a blessed land. Our customs, the rivers, the beach. All these things you miss. Cutting bananas, going fishing fresh fish. Too many things."* Respondent 3

*"My parents and I would cultivate corn, rice, banana, cacao, yucca, oranges, and plums. [...] It [Nariño] was the most beautiful thing. To me it is the most wonderful thing to have happened to me. You didn't worry about the food. If you lacked something to eat you would trade food with your friends."* Respondent 2

Consequently it is a great adjustment that the IDPs have to go through from having access to such an abundance of natural capital. Now they live in small shacks with no land to grow anything or any access to natural resources.

**Financial capital** – cash, bank deposits, pensions, state remittances etc.

As only four of the respondents had formal jobs they were the only ones to pay pension and taxes. In three of the households the husband had a formal job. Two women are unemployed and depend on state remittances (according to one respondent 900.000 pesos, roughly 350€, every three months) which they receive every two or three months. Some receive small sums of aid (around 30.000 pesos – ca 11€) from Familias en Acción for the benefit of their children. A theme that often reoccurs is the distrust in the aid system for displaced people. Many complain about it being not adequate or not being true to their word. Even those who have gotten subsidized houses criticize the system:

*"There are things for which I have gone and asked reparation. They gave me an appointment and explained what I had to do in order to get reparation. I did them but they never came through."* Respondent 4

None of the respondents have received loans from banks. This seems to be partly because they don't want to but also because many of them are declined the opportunity to do so. As a displaced person you are not considered trustworthy.

*"If you say that you are a displaced person you encounter a lot of problems. They will tell you 'Soon you won't be working and then you will fail paying back the loan.'" Respondent 5*



However, four of the respondents who were granted subsidized housing managed to get loans through other organizations who focused on helping underprivileged people financially. Thus the state would pay 80-90% of a house and the recipient would have to cover the rest by borrowing money. Normally a house would be between 10-20 million pesos (roughly 4000-8000€). These were the respondents who lived in Soacha but moved out because of obtaining a house through the Ministry of Housing. This is a program of free housing made specifically for the displaced population (Ministeria de Vivienda:2012). This is a state remittance with great benefits to the IDP families as it means that they do not have to pay rent on their houses. The respondents who do pay rent reported paying 100.000-250.000 monthly. This equals about 40-100€ and means that those who received subsidized houses have that much less of a burden to carry monthly. Gas, water, electricity and above all groceries are still costs that they struggle with. However, most IDPs do naturally not get a house due to lack of state resources.

One woman interviewed acquired a loan from a humanitarian organization which enabled her to start up her own street-shop. For most of the respondents, however, financial capital and the help it can provide is strongly lacking according to most respondents.

**Social capital** – networks, membership in organizations, trust, informal safety nets etc.

The vulnerability of the respondents has clear effects on a majority of the respondents. The dangers of the area in which they live mean that the respondents do not feel safe in increasing their social connections with community members. Many certainly have friends and rely upon them for help with small loans and taking care of children while working. But these are small social circles. Although a couple of respondents mention large circles of friends most are careful not to be too friendly.

*“I have a very good relationships with my close neighbours. But it can mean trouble. I have friendships but to a certain limit.”* Respondent 6

*"My relations with others here are good. But not as friends. If a problematic person comes and asks you for a favor you know to stay away from him."* Respondent 1

*"There is violence. One has to try not to have many friends. For that reason even the kids don't have many friends because of the violence in El Oasis. A lot of violence and drugs. The fewer friends you have the more at peace you can live. You don't know what you can get yourself into. For example if I walk with a friend and someone wants to kill her then they will kill both of us."* Respondent 7

Many point to the necessity of friends and family as a way of obtaining information about social events and job opportunities. They have no computers or other ways with which to get information. This seems to fit with the findings of Lopez et al: *[D]isplaced families are largely disadvantaged due to their lack of social networks, their dependence on state assistance and their difficulty in accessing formal and informal labor markets* (Lopez et al 2011:3).

Above all social capital is important in learning how the community works and how to get aid as a recently arrived IDP. However, there are several organizations in which IDPs can volunteer, and several of them do. Mencoldes is one example of that. Organizations like Mencoldes and others will actively engage people in projects for kids, communal mess halls and such.

**Physical capital** – transport, shelter, water, energy, sanitation, communication etc.

The housing conditions of those living in the areas that I visited are sparse to say the least. Naturally, this does not come as a surprise as a high percentage of displaced people living in these neighborhoods live in extreme poverty. All of the respondents, though, did have access to water and electricity in their houses and bought gas containers separately.

Although rain-induced landslides cause the destruction of houses in these neighborhoods none of the respondents said to have experienced this.

A topic that constantly emerged was the issue of transport. Jobs were often at least 1 hour or

more away from home. In most cases, especially in the cases of those having informal domestic work, their jobs would be about 2-2,5 hours away by bus. Then not only do they spend many hours each day just getting to work and home but they have to pay 2 or 3 bus rides to get one way. Naturally, if you have a wage like most of the respondents of around 25.000-40.000 pesos (10-16€) per day and you must pay about 4.000-6000 pesos (2-3€) per day on bus fare you will suffer economic costs. The inaccessibility of these neighborhoods is thus a huge constraint on their livelihoods.

#### **4.2.3. Vulnerability – Shocks and trends**

This analysis of their vulnerability does not include the seasonality factor as this is mainly meant for rural communities. Plus, the weather in Bogotá is not heavily affected by seasonality. Many of these households are prone to illness as their living conditions are not very good with their houses leaking when raining, no isolation and so on. Many of the respondents tell stories of how their livelihood strategies change due to illness of themselves or more often their babies. Pneumonia was something that several of the children of the respondents had suffered from. However, the free health care that is promised the IDPs has been provided for them which naturally helps overcoming such a health shock. As mentioned before, landslides are natural shocks prevalent in this community but none of the households in this study had been affected by them.

The population trend that was mentioned before by the director of DPS is something that puts further strains on their vulnerability as more people fight for the same resources allocated by the government. Otherwise this thesis has not focused primarily on the vulnerability context.

#### **4.2.4. Transforming structures and processes**

*“If structures can be thought of as hardware, processes can be thought of as software”*

(DFID:1999).

In terms of structures we have learnt from the interview with DPS that there is a new trend with the current Santos administration that more resources and attention are being allocated the IDPs. According to them there is a lot of offers of assistance in the communities. However,

as this was a fairly new legislation the changes are yet to have a noticeable impact from the point of the view of the IDPs. So in a sense there is a positive transformation of structures as new departments and entities are created to aid victims of the conflict and to recognize and honor their history. IDMC did claim in late 2011 that the new discourse yet has to translate into action (IDMC:2011). However, for the arguments of this case study the time span is too short for the respondents to have not noticed a difference.

In general, the confidence in the Colombian state is very low among the respondents.

*"Of all the governments during my 45 years the one for which I have the least confidence is this one."* Respondent 7

*"You feel as if they [the government] didn't care but you just have to keep going. There must be some families that have received help and on time but others no."* Respondent 6

*"[Our rights] aren't met at all. People are tired of running around to different workshops only to not get anything back from the government."* Respondent 3

Being displaced means an extra burden as it carries a meaning of stigmatization. They state that even non-displaced afro-Colombians will treat the displaced afro-Colombians poorly and that the word 'displaced' is an insult.

*"Just for the reason of being displaced people won't give you a job. They say they don't know you and what depravity you might bring with you. As displaced people we have the worst reputation."* Respondent 4

There are other relevant processes in terms of power relations that often are mentioned. Almost every one of the sixteen afro-Colombians interviewed considers racism to be an issue on several levels, in terms of getting a job and also treatment in host communities. Many give the example of how, if they have a job opportunity and it is between them and a mestizo, the job will always go to the mestizo even though the afro-Colombian is better equipped for

the job.

*“We are rich poor people. They say there is plenty of help and money for the afros but none is being given. There’s nothing!”* Respondent 3

*“They [aid organizations] keep you at a distance. They put like a barrier between them and the displaced. And for being afro even more. They look at you like some kind of weird insect.”*

Respondent 8

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

This thesis describes the circumstances under which internally displaced people in Soacha find themselves by using the SLF as an approach to get a greater understanding of the relevant issues concerning their abilities to obtain a sustainable livelihood. However, due to the holistic nature of this approach and limited resources and time this paper could not go into the detail that each individual topic deserves. Instead this thesis can serve as a more detailed understanding of the point of view of the persons living life day to day in poverty which is the aim of the sustainable livelihoods approach.

It is clear that the respondents of this study do not consider themselves to have the means and opportunities necessary to be in control of their livelihoods and by extension their future. The assets they have are either too poor or are mismatched with the urban setting within which they now find themselves. Due to their marginalization and the violence surrounding them they are hindered in developing assets that could otherwise be utilized in attaining a sustainable livelihood. Due to lack of safety and armed violence the IDPs perceive a clear danger from developing social assets such as friends and informal safety nets. Lack of trust in the community is an obvious obstacle to the development of a sustainable environment for those living there. Racism is a factor that most afro-Colombians consider an impediment to their livelihoods and that it affects their living conditions as they are considered outcasts in their neighborhood. IDPs are unwelcome and being afro-Colombia seems to further marginalize them.

Nor can they depend on social networks for much financial help as they all live in severe poverty which makes it hard to go through crises and temporary hardships; the aid that some of them receive they claim to not be of much help as it comes irregularly and the money is not enough to cover their expenses for many days. Added to this is the fact that they cannot receive loans from banks as they are considered too untrustworthy. However, some have obtained loans from NGOs in the area.

As most of the women work in the informal sector in Bogotá they do not have fixed salaries or fixed hours. This makes them vulnerable at the hand of their employers as they have very little income security; they do not have any rights and cannot demand better conditions. Poor infrastructure means they have to commute several hours a day and pay many bus tickets which eat away a significantly large portion of their day wages.

Although their human capital suffers in an urban setting so different from their rural background many of the women do have a high school education. Still, they cannot pursue a higher education as the responsibilities of maintaining a family are too time-consuming and costly.

Although Colombia is praised for having the world's most effective framework for the aid of IDPs there are many problems still. In Soacha the municipality is criticized for their lack of political will when dealing with IDPs. This leaves the displaced people in a limbo where the aid they are promised is not being dealt out and insufficient attention is being given. As the displaced population keeps growing this becomes an increasingly difficult problem as responsible institutions do not keep up with their needs.

This work is a qualitative input in the adaptations made among forced migrants. Studies have shown that migrants are often better off and better equipped when self-selected rather than being displaced by violence. Although this study has not compared the different abilities and obstacles faced by IDPs and self-selected migrants it is clear that the respondents in this study are marginalized due to their status of being displaced. The circumstances and backgrounds from which they come also shows to a discrepancy between their rural skills and the skills needed in the urban setting in Soacha.

Although much more research is needed into the issue of IDPs in Colombia and their integration into host communities this case study hopes to shine some light on the situation of IDPs in Soacha and the difficulties they face when trying to attain a sustainable livelihood.

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