



## INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

AN INITIATIVE OF  
THE WOODROW WILSON SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS  
AND THE BOBST CENTER FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

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Series: Governance Traps

Interview no.: J 15

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Interviewee: Juan Carlos Vargas Morales

Interviewer: Matthew Devlin

Date of Interview: 14 October 2009

Location: Cartagena, Colombia

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DEVLIN: Today is October 14, 2009 and we are in Cartagena, Colombia, with Juan Carlos Vargas Morales. Juan Carlos is the civil coordinator of the Regional Coordination Center of CCAI (Centro de Coordinación de Acción Integral de la Presidencia de la República) here in Cartagena. Juan Carlos, thank you for joining us.

Perhaps we could begin by asking you to talk a little bit about your position here at the moment as civil coordinator and how you came to that position. Maybe you could talk briefly about your career before...

VARGAS: *Well, I worked in the Centro de Coordinación de Acción Integral from the very first day. I used to work as the delegate of the Ministry of the Interior and Law (Delegado del Ministerio del Interior y de Justicia) in the CCAI. Afterwards, after nine years in that position, I severed links with the Ministry and I began working with Acción Social (Agencia Presidencial para la Acción Social y la Cooperación Internacional), leading the process of consolidation in the Montes, in the region of Montes de María. That is what I've been working on since January of the current year.*

DEVLIN: I'm sorry, how many years were you with the Ministry of the Interior?

VARGAS: *Nine years*

DEVLIN: Nine years.

VARGAS: *And five years with the CCAI. Four long years as delegate of the Ministry of the Interior and Law. Four years initially with the Ministry of... with the Ministry. The last five years as delegate of the Ministry in the CCAI. And... I began in January.*

DEVLIN: Since you have this broad perspective all the way back to the beginning, could you tell us about when and how CCAI first became involved in Montes de María?

VARGAS: *Well, the region of Montes de María is made a priority in the CCAI in April 2007. Investments really began in the second semester of this year. To date, we can account for more than 16.000 million pesos invested in the region. And, let's say, the work has been recently strengthened after the model of the Centros de Coordinación Regional, after the launch of the Plan Nacional de Consolidación (Plan Nacional de Consolidación Territorial), beginning in March of the current year. It is basically a matter of strengthening the work team and the interventions and the way resources are focused in the region.*

DEVLIN: Why was Montes de María prioritized and who made the decision to prioritize it?

VARGAS: *Basically, because of its geo-strategic position in the area of Montes de María. If we look at a map of Colombia, Montes de María is a necessary transit point at the border with Venezuela, coming from the Catatumbo region, even from the south of Bolívar (Bolívar Department, Colombia) and from the sea shore. Even coming from the central part of the country, it is a necessary transit point. The closeness to the Caribbean Sea, well, it takes only an hour, an hour and a half to reach the Caribbean. It makes its, shall we say, its geo-strategic position an interesting one at the moment, not just for the government but also, at a certain point, for the guerrilla movements, and for the militaries, as a strategic mobility corridor for the whole Caribbean region.*

- DEVLIN: Who took the decision that Montes de María was to be a strategic site? Was it the Board of Directors of the CCAI?
- VARGAS: *Yes, the Managing Committee (Comité Directivo) of the CCAI, definitely. Obviously that decision is made with the blessing of the president of Colombia, right?*
- DEVLIN: And then, once Montes de María was selected, what type of planning process was there?
- VARGAS: *Well, initially, it was initially planned, not just for Montes de María, but in general for the whole intervention area, and... The basic principle of inter-agency coordination is to take all the state programs to some specific territories in a coordinated manner. In that sense, we can say that no... From the beginning, it manner of taking all the programs further, of taking all the investments of all the institutions to the region in a coordinated fashion. And, really, beginning with the Plan Nacional de Consolidación, when a regional plan of consolidation is determined... But in the end it is nothing more than strengthening the presence of the state at all levels... in the regions. The needs are the same, with or without a plan. The humanitarian situation, the needs of... of the population are the same. So the plan is focused on that.*
- DEVLIN: So, in that sense, you were waiting for a plan until 2008...
- VARGAS: *No, the state initiatives began in 2007. They took off. They carry with them the presence of the state. The thing is... Unfortunately, because of the violence, the presence was very minimum, and when I speak of the state I am referring also to the subject of the local and regional administrations, which were permeated... this has to be acknowledged, guerrilla groups and self-defense groups permeated them. In that sense, it did not necessarily translate into providing goods and services for the communities. Rather, they were simply used as political strongholds for their crimes.*
- DEVLIN: What were the immediate priorities in the beginning?
- VARGAS: *Well, they were all priorities, but basically, the matter of transportation. It was clear to us that... Working on transportation was vital for the reactivation and the arrival of all the state institutions. In that sense, the first thing that was given priority was the construction of the Transversal the los Montes de María road as the great mobilizing project of the region. And, in that sense... So we took off with the Transversal de los Montes de María and we have been working on the development of the road infrastructure as, well, as the main priority. But in any case the needs are plenty. Secondly, I would say the matter of the land. The problem of land ownership is very, very complex, because, let's say, this is a post-conflict area, we could say, one where the state does not have the necessary tools to tend to the demand evident in the region in terms of land ownership, in the region like in any other part of the country.*
- DEVLIN: At that moment, early in 2007, who was part of the CCAI staff?
- VARGAS: *We had a delegate from the CCAI who was designated as "padrino" or godfather of the region and we also had staff who were in charge of CCAI in terms of public force, in this case, the Colombia Naval Infantry (Infantería de Marina Colombiana).*

DEVLIN: So, is this Coronel Colón?

VARGAS: *Coronel Colón.*

DEVLIN: And so the “padrino” and the Coronel, they would be the two main people, the only two people coordinating this?

VARGAS: *They were the two people that were permanently coordinating all the state actions with, shall we say, more of a field work approach, obviously, and with Colonel Colón working with, let’s say, with the CCAI link, through the figure of the “padrino”.*

DEVLIN: You mentioned two priorities. What are those two priorities?

VARGAS: *Well, let’s just say those are not the only ones.*

DEVLIN: They were the most important ones. Can we talk about both of them? We understand the problem of roads and mobility. The geography of the area is very difficult to negotiate. What did you do about such a major problem? How...?

VARGAS: *Well, basically, the first great project was the construction of the Transversal de los Montes de María, which practically divides the region into two and allows for... for a very important level of mobility between the two transport corridors and all the municipalities that make up the region of Montes de María. After that, we have been strengthening some roads, some important tertiary roads where we have higher concentrations of people and... not just the subject of... of the populations, but also the matter of productivity, as well. In that sense, we have been working on the road between Carmen de Bolívar-el Salado-Ovejas-Chengue. We are already working on and have a contract on the corridor between Las Palmas (Salazar de las Palmas)-Bajo Grande. We are working on another corridor, Chengue-Macayepo, and we are waiting until next year to begin work on a corridor that connects María Lavaja-Lajones (Quebrada Lajones)-Santo Domingo de Mesa-Floral-Florarito -Macayepo. In that sense, if we manage to consolidate these... these important transport corridors, which are not the only needs of the region, we could say that we are opening up the great roads of the Montes de María region with a construction process that, even if they are not paved roads, we are, let’s say, breaking ground in the area with a model of construction based on “placa huella”, that is to say, not just the work on the land itself, but also the construction work on strategic sites along the road, which in the past were deteriorated in winter with construction work using concrete plaques, what we here refer to as “obras de arte,” (works of art) sewers, which allow for greater durability of the construction work and at some point we expect the territorial authorities to take over.*

DEVLIN: And how did you select roads as a priority? In some ways, it’s obvious from the outside, but was there community selection there?

VARGAS: *It’s the first thing that communities ask for. The first thing, because they... The Montes de María region, for instance, is a natural producer of avocado and they simply lose the crops, they do not have a way of commercializing them. So,*

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*when we first arrive, priorities are drawn up for the area and we establish contact with the communities. The first thing that they ask for, before anything else, are roads.*

DEVLIN: Once in the community, do you get in touch with established leaders or do you try to get the whole community involved or...?

VARGAS: *Initially, well, with existing leaders, but we have built an inclusive process that generates new kinds of leadership and... We try to make it as participative as possible with every community.*

DEVLIN: Once the roads were identified, was there a debate over where exactly they should go? Because I imagine that could be controversial.

VARGAS: *Let's just say that the needs are plenty and the communities ask for improvements on all their roads. What we actually do is a study on where the impact would be greater, by... a study in terms of what I was telling you, in terms of population, production. Since the resources are limited, we try to benefit the largest amount of people possible. That's why we speak of corridors where we are able to intervene the largest number of populated areas, the largest fraction of the population, so that it has greater productivity, because the needs are plenty and what they ask for is improvement of all the roads. There needs to be a great prioritization effort on our part, in agreement with the communities, obviously, but in such way that we generate a larger impact.*

DEVLIN: And in terms of that study, at that point, it's just the one "padrino" here. So who did the study or added support work like that?

VARGAS: *No, obviously that has to be discussed with the authorities in the territory and a study is conducted with the productive sectors, so that... with the association of avocado producers, for instance, the cacao producers, the chambers of commerce. So, we establish, shall we say, we inquire about what area would be the area with the largest impact, and, obviously, in a process of mapping, we establish what are... where the highest concentrations of people are.*

DEVLIN: So the issue of working with the present authorities, the local authorities. The mayors are obvious, but who do you go to at the department level? Do you need to go right to the governor or do need to go a little lower?

VARGAS: *The governor has delegates. Well, we used to be in constant communication with the last governor. He was just suspended. With the new one, we are waiting for a meeting with him, but in any case they always have their delegates. In the case of the government of the Department of Bolívar, it has always been the Secretary of Government (Secretario de Gobierno), Orlando Perriñán (Orlando Perriñán Florez), and the Secretary for Planning (Secretaria de Planeación), María Claudia Paez. In terms of the government of the Department of Sucre, the Secretary of Government, Viviana Ordosgoitia (Viviana Ordosgoitia Romero), and the Secretary for Planning, Máximo Bergara (Máximo Bergara Ruz), have been there. And obviously, the governor, right?*

DEVLIN: The matter of roads obviously affects the Departments of Bolívar and Sucre. Did you have joint meetings with, say, people from both departments or did you work separately with each of them?

- VARGAS: *Initially, we worked separately and later on we worked jointly on the Transversal Montes de María, which, shall we say, is the one road that involved both departments, and obviously the transport corridors that we are intervening generally pertain to one department only. Until now, we have one road that will benefit both departments, which is the Macayepo-Chengue corridor.*
- DEVLIN: Roads are expensive. Where does the money come to finance them?
- VARGAS: *The Transversal de Montes de María cost 11 million pesos. Those are resources from the national budget. The other roads, with resources from international aid, resources from the Fondo de Paz (Fondo de Inversión para la Paz), from the Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz and from Acción Social.*
- DEVLIN: And about the road that came out of the national budget, was that out of the Ministry of Transport?
- VARGAS: No.
- DEVLIN: Where did it come from, the...?
- VARGAS: *From Acción Social.*
- DEVLIN: Now, did you have to have any coordination with the Ministry of Transport on this issue?
- VARGAS: *There is some coordination, but unfortunately it has not been as effective. The Ministry of Transport only intervenes in tertiary roads, in roads that are included in an old inventory belonging to the Neighboring Roads Fund (Fondo Nacional de Caminos Vecinales), an inventory that does not include these roads, and that is simply a reality we have to work with. They do not have the resources to intervene in the area.*
- DEVLIN: And as far as we understand the contract for the Transversal was given to engineers from the army, right?
- VARGAS: Yes.
- DEVLIN: And there were three phases to it. Is that right?
- VARGAS: *It has... No, it is not that it has three phases. Rather, it has three segments, but really there are two phases. The phase... There was what was envisioned, obviously, due to budget levels, for the year 2008, executed in 2009, and what is envisioned for 2010. But there are three important segments. The road goes from Carmen de Bolívar to the other side, which is Chinulito, but in three parts. First, Carmen de Bolívar-Canzona, a road that was already there, but in very bad conditions. Second, Canzona-Macayepo, which did not exist and which is being opened. That's a new road. And third, Macayepo-Chinulito, which is a road that already exists. Forty-six kilometers in all.*
- DEVLIN: As I understand, the army engineers were assigned the first phase, but are continuing now...

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- VARGAS: *Yes, they are already working, and we are securing... no, we are waiting for them to reach Macayepo and from that point on we already have resources allocated for the segment between Chinulito and Macayepo.*
- DEVLIN: Is this a contract for the private sector or does it also involve the armed forces?
- VARGAS: *They have the... No, that will also involve engineers from the military.*
- DEVLIN: So, the biggest project is all a matter of engineers from the military, but the tertiary roads, who is building them?
- VARGAS: *Those... Well, what we do is that those roads, since there are segments that are 27, 22 kilometers long, 17 kilometers long, since it is more complicated for budget and judiciary management to come up with one budget and one executor, the way of working around this that we have found to be optimal is to quickly execute the resources, to divide the segments based on responsibilities. We divide one project into several parts, assigning tasks, and each one takes his contracted process to completion.*
- DEVLIN: And all those contracts, are they for third parties, for private companies?
- VARGAS: *Yes, private.*
- DEVLIN: And the only thing that changes is which government authority pays for it?
- VARGAS: *Which one pays for it.*
- DEVLIN: Building roads is never an easy task. What kind of challenges have you faced?
- VARGAS: *Changing the culture, because here, well, here, in the nation as a whole, I think people were used to, politically speaking, it used to be that what was done was something called "afirmado", putting down soil with a machine, to scratch the surface, and these were works that lasted two, three months during the winter. Winter would come and the road would be gone. At that point, with the new construction model based on "placa huella", on sewers, on "obras de arte"... It has not been... At that time, convincing the local authorities that this really was more sustainable was not a simple matter. Suddenly, the resources available were only enough for a smaller number of construction works because the works were more expensive, but more durable. I think that was really a cultural change in the region. But today you can begin to see communities asking for that kind of construction work.*
- DEVLIN: And the second big priority we talked about was land. Can you describe that issue for us?
- VARGAS: *Well, the problem in terms of land... Well, first, it is a structural problem in Colombia. We don't really have an efficient system to deal with the subject of land titles. Second, in the region of Montes de María there exists a culture of informality when it comes to land ownership. What does this mean? The communities that worked the land were not necessarily interested in being owners of that same land. There used to be big landowners, owners of large tracts of land, in some regions more than in others, who allowed many families to live there, but there was no, shall we say, no contract, nothing of that sort. It was simply a matter of verbal, informal agreements. When the period of violence*

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*arrived, a displacement started taking place that affected the people that lived on that land as well as the landowners, who, at that point, decided to sell the land, and the new owners obviously wanted to take away, or, let's say, to throw out the families that lived in these communities. That's one part of the problem. Another part of the problem is that an agrarian reform took place in the region of Montes de María in the 1970s, under the 70 percent-30 percent scheme. The state subsidized 70 percent and farmers had to pay the other 30 percent. Obviously, and as a consequence of the violence, when these people leave, they stop paying these debts. The state sold these debts to private companies, which, today, well, they are going after these debtors and generating, shall we say, a new generation of displaced people is created, not because of violence, because people are forced to pay these debts, and they have to leave the region. That's another problem. The thing is that, as I was telling you before, the nation is not ready, it does not have the tools to meet the demand for solutions to the problems with land, in a moment, let's say, of violence or after a conflict. Simply put, in a supply and demand scenario, once security is recovered, private investors come around and they begin to buy land at very low prices, they become owners of large tracts of land, but that is simply a matter of market forces. I'll say that to give you very general picture. Once you dig deep into the problems in more detail the matter is complicated.*

DEVLIN: Land is always the toughest issue, so I'm wondering, this very complicated problem, how did you...? How do you go at it? What are the things you are trying to do on that issue?

VARGAS: *Well, we are, shall we say, we divided the problem into three phases. The first phase consisted in what we here refer to as massive land purchases. In order to do that the organisms that impart justice have been moved so that they begin by investigating who bought land, where they came from, where the resources came from, if, say, the transactions took place under pressure or not. All of that is written down in the investigation, together with an inter-institutional team that was created at the central level. In the second phase, there is the matter of regularization of land, which is... Within that culture of informality, there are many processes that were left half done, either because communities were displaced, or simply because they did not know the steps to be completed, for a number of reasons. So, we are working towards normalizing land ownership. And, well, this, let's say, in this second part, we have three components. One, with the Programa de Protección de Tierras de Acción Social, which has an inventory of the whole problem and the lands that have been protected, looking after the rights of displaced communities, and the idea there is to reconstitute the rights to ownership. Secondly, Programa CONRET (Consultas en Recuperación de Tierras), and Programa RET (Programa de Regularización de Tierras) in the Ministry of Agriculture, and what they seek to do is, through an agreement with all the entities that have something to do with the problem of land, and well, the matter of... Well, in the Montes de María region there are no empty lots, but... but that.... Let's say, it's like an inter-institutional meeting place to normalize land titles, which does not move at the speed that we would like it to move. But, let's say, we're moving along. We just delivered, twenty days ago, 365 titles to small landowners. It is a very minimal step given the needs, but we have been making progress, speeding up the processes. And the third thing is the generalization of some platforms for discussion where the local institutions are already involved, the communities and private investors, and where they reach an agreement in terms of what is the vision for the region that they want, looking forward to the future. Obviously, along with... along with the matter of land, there is the matter*



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*of productivity. We are seeing people buying land who want to implement new models of, say, new agricultural models, more industrialized models, and what we want is to establish a conversation and those new investors in terms of what they want from the region and how they can incorporate the matter of social responsibility, the matter of linking communities with these new projects, whether labor re-training is needed, more technical labor, more qualified labor. And also, the fact that all of that is done in an open agreement between communities, investors, and the national and local institutions warrant and back up those agreements.*

DEVLIN: So, the first thing you mentioned in terms of land was the massive purchase of land. And the Ministry of Justice, is that the institution you work with to follow up on these things?

VARGAS: *No, no. No, basically, the investigation organisms are, first, the judicial police and the Office of the Attorney General of Colombia (Fiscalía General de la Nación de Colombia), the intelligence arm of the armed forces, the national police. And we are dealing with it... The investigative entity in Colombia is the Office of the Attorney General.*

DEVLIN: Has there been an outcome to this or is it still a process that's ongoing? Has any decision been made in certain cases?

VARGAS: *It's a process that takes time. We are gathering all the intelligence information and all the processes from the local prosecutors. I would also acknowledge something else, which is the high level of corruption that there exists at the local level, and this, at one moment, allowed for these massive land purchases to take place, because corruption was evident there. That is why the matter is handled at the central level, and with a certain degree of caution.*

DEVLIN: About the legalization and normalization of land. You mentioned that there are sessions where people can learn how go about this process of legalization. Who handles or who leads these sessions and where...?

VARGAS: *Well, it's what I was telling you about. At those sessions, three programs converge: Programa de Protección de Tierras de Acción Social, which is Acción Social, and the RET and CONRET programs, which is the Ministry of Agriculture. RET and CONRET are from the Ministry of Agriculture. These programs are agreements or are supported by inter-administration agreements that involve the Ministry of Agriculture, INCODER (Instituto Colombiano para el Desarrollo Rural), Superintendencia de Notariado y Registro, which, well, handles the notaries and the Oficinas de Registro de Instrumentos Públicos, the Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi (IGAC), the governments and the offices of the mayor, of the municipalities we work with. And the third element, which I had not mentioned and which is very important, is the pilot program that is being conducted in terms of restitution of patrimonial goods, led by the Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Conciliación (CNRR), which, really, what... The area were we overlap is the small town of Chengue in the Ovejas Municipality.*

DEVLIN: Can you tell us a bit more about this pilot program in the institution? What are its goals and what is the role of the Centro de Coordinación in the pilot program?

VARGAS: *From the Comisión Nacional de Reparación?*

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- DEVLIN: Yes, with the pilot program that, as I understand, is part of...
- VARGAS: *Well, it's really taking off just now. This pilot program follows a process of prioritization that started in the beginning of the year, a process where the boards for restitution were formed at the departmental level. They were created this past July, August, by the Ministry of the Interior and of Justice, and, as far as I know, the working plans are just being put together. But it is basically the same subject. It involves all the entities that have something to do with the problem of land. It focuses on those that, under the Comisión Nacional de Reparación, are deemed victims hailing from small towns. In this case, a study of their ownership titles is conducted, of the goods they possessed, whether they had possessions, whether they didn't. And the matter of restitution or normalization of these lands falls within the whole matter of administrative reparation, reparation, that is, of the state to these victims. But it is just getting off the ground. But it is important to mention it.*
- DEVLIN: So, we gather that CCAI had a very important structural change in Montes de María in 2009.
- VARGAS: *Yes, under the Plan Nacional de Consolidación. Let's just say that the work was strengthened.*
- DEVLIN: Can we talk a bit about the new structure?
- VARGAS: *Well, the Centro de Coordinación Regional is constituted by, well, by the coordinator of the Plan, which is me. There is also a military coordinator and a police coordinator, and they are the ones in charge of the matter of maintaining the level of security achieved until now, and of the transition that has to happen in terms of the national police arriving at new settlements. And we have a technical support team, someone from Acción Social, an official from Acción Social, experts in the matter of helping displaced populations and experts in the implementation of return processes, with the understanding that within the Plan Regional de Consolidación de los Montes de María, the mobilizing project has been the strengthening of the return processes of the whole region.*
- DEVLIN: What model was this new structure based on?
- VARGAS: *No, basically... And I think that the pioneer in this matter is La Macarena. La Macarena, well, is two years old and the model was, shall we say, taken up.*
- DEVLIN: So would it be fair to say that it was with this structural change that the issue of return was added to the preexisting issues of roads and local...
- VARGAS: *It gathered a lot of momentum. Yes. It was, let's say, really a time when the subject of the return of displaced populations was really evident in the Plan Nacional de Consolidación. It acquired, let's say, the importance that it now has.*
- DEVLIN: That's got to have all types of challenges. Can we talk about that in some detail? What is the...?
- VARGAS: *No, really, there were no challenges. No, because it is... it was a reality that could already be seen. People were returning, with or without company. The public works that had been promoted since 2007 were being done not under the notion of a return of displaced populations, but under the idea of a state*

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*presence, and it was simply a matter of revalidating a process that was already under way in the region.*

DEVLIN: Okay, so what were you doing in a new fashion or what were you starting for the first time in this reevaluation?

VARGAS: *I think that the work organization, in as much as, well, if, indeed, the returns are taking place in a generalized manner in the whole region of Montes de María, certain return processes were prioritized, not by the Centro de Coordinación, but by the departmental committees and the municipal committees. And, in that sense, the efforts that all the entities put into these processes were strengthened or prioritized, which is not to say that others were ignored, because in the end the responsibility of every institution is to help out in every return process. But yes, the efforts were, shall we say, focused on specific returns. We have, in San Jacinto (San Jacinto, Bolívar, Colombia), the Las Palmas-Bajo Grande corridor; in Carmen de Bolívar, the El Salado corridor and the Macayepo corridor; in Ovejas, the Chengue corridor; in San Onofre (San Onofre, Sucre, Colombia), the Cacique-Pelona corridor. And there is also a process that is not a return process but a case of a population that was not displaced, which is the Corregimiento Libertad (Corregimiento Libertad, Sucre, Colombia), but that was prioritized by the Comisión Nacional de Reparación, and it is a site where we are forwarding coordinated work by all the state agencies.*

DEVLIN: So what did these areas have in common? What work are you doing in all of them towards return?

VARGAS: *Investment in every sector. The matter, I repeat, the matter of roads, the matter of productivity, the matter of health, the matter of education, the matter of child care, attention to the adult population, the matter of food security: these, shall we say, are all normal components of the return process. It is... And wherever people are arriving, they once again inhabit those population centers.*

DEVLIN: So identifying return as a priority was really just a matter of fortifying processes already under way in specific areas...

VARGAS: *And focusing. Focusing resources has allowed us to have a more decisive impact in the eyes of the local institutions and of some communities. They have managed to understand the subject of focusing resources and of corridors, how that addresses other needs in other areas of the same region.*

DEVLIN: And Libertad, you said, is a special situation. Why is it grouped in with these others?

VARGAS: *Because it was also set aside by the Comisión Nacional de Reparación and because it was a place where a coordinated action on the part of the state was necessary. So, then, if we were already in the region it did not make sense to create another coordinating board for Libertad. That is to say, if we already here, let's prioritize it and we are the same entities.*

DEVLIN: So all those areas came from that preexisting system, the national level?

VARGAS: *No, no, no, only Libertad.*

DEVLIN: Then how were the other ones decided upon?

VARGAS: *We agreed on the... No, the other ones, I repeat, were chosen by the departmental committees and the municipal committees. That is something that is fundamental in the whole process of inter-agency cooperation, and the role of the coordination centers, and the thing is we are, in the region, nothing more than articulating agents and promoters of processes. We did not come to, and neither is it our intention to, replace the local authorities. Simply put, what we do is to connect the supply available at the national level with the demand at the local level, and we stimulate the processes that are taken place in the region. But we never impose any actions, nothing. Rather, what we do is to stimulate and promote in the region so that all the institutions do what they have to do and we direct efforts and investments.*

DEVLIN: So regarding promotion and...

VARGAS: *Articulation.*

DEVLIN: Articulation. When you need to articulate something at the national level, how is the message taken to the national level? Is it done through the CCAI sector in Bogotá?

VARGAS: *Exactly. I am a delegate of CCAI and I hold a seat in all the 14 entities that participate in CCAI. I am, shall we say, the interlocutor between the national and the local levels.*

DEVLIN: And then working with the more local level, what role does the department play in you strategy? Because it's not really clear that the department is crucial in the Plan. It seems like a lot of the weight is at the national and municipal level. Or is that not fair to say?

VARGAS: *The department is fundamental because, let's say, these municipalities that we are talking about are municipalities that are not certified in that sense. Basically, the responsibility in terms of health and education, which are the more pressing needs of the communities, hold a are handled much more competently at the departmental level. Obviously, the distribution and prioritization of resources, the resources from the department, are also important, in every component of the return processes and in all the investments towards strengthening governability, in the links that exist between the offices of the mayors and the departmental government. One of the two pillars of our action plan is strengthening the local forces, something we call Buen Gobierno Local. We need to strengthen all the local authorities, a task where the department is obviously very important for any process.*

DEVLIN: There may be, say, a challenge along the way, because mayors must be successful in bringing in that aid, but the governor has to work with the whole department. How do you, say, arrive at...?

VARGAS: *It's true. It's true. It is... It is not a simple task to tell them that something is for two municipalities within their department only, and it is more difficult to make them understand that are talking about a region, Montes de María, that involves 15 municipalities among these departments. Obviously, each departmental government pushes for its own interests. First, so that their territory is benefitted, and second, to question why only certain municipalities in the department will be benefitted, given that the same needs exist elsewhere in the department. But in*

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*the end they are interested in that aid and they end up aligning themselves. They constantly fight over the fact that we don't have resources for other areas and over the fact that we focus on other areas, but in the end they understand the needs. They cannot refuse to do so and they work.*

DEVLIN: Going back and thinking about that, sometimes there are things that, in retrospect, seem easy. There are things that can be done quickly or inexpensively, but that have had a great impact. In all your work, has there been anything like that, something that was achieved inexpensively and quickly and that had a large impact?

VARGAS: *I've always said that this work should not be measured in terms of investments or bricks or cement, but rather in terms of the trust that the communities have in the institutions, regardless of the level at which they function. For that reason, I... There are certain investments that are very, very inexpensive, but that have a very high impact in terms of building trust. I'll give you an example: the motorized pump. A motorized pump, in a community that has problems accessing running water and that may have a water well, it costs 3 million pesos and that, for them, gives more credibility to the state than building a school that might cost 100 million pesos, even if we happen to have the resources. So I would not venture to say that that is a quick investment and all of that, but rather, I would say that the key to inter-agency coordination work in a region is based on confidence and trust, first, on communities having confidence in themselves, on the communities trusting the institutions, and finally, on the institutions trusting each other, having confidence in teamwork. That, for me, is the key to everything.*

DEVLIN: How do you build that trust? Is it personal relationships? Is it always sticking to deadlines? Or what is it?

VARGAS: *When we speak about trust between institutions, with the communities and between the institutions themselves, we necessarily have to discuss the human factor. I am convinced that, beyond institutions, regardless of how much it is said that institutions must work in harmony, there is a human factor to the matter, in such way that personal and institutional egos must be removed. Personal and institutional envy must be removed. Weaknesses and strengths must be acknowledged and there must be a decisive will towards teamwork. So the work and... I have to admit something in relation to that: the work done by the High Advisor to the President (Alto Consejero Presidencial) Luis Alfonso Hoyos in countless activities geared towards building trust in teamwork. And I have to admit that that definitely stimulated the institutional responses.*

DEVLIN: What is the most damaging bottleneck? Is it...? What is the most dangerous point to meet opposition?

VARGAS: *The bottleneck...*

DEVLIN: Is it a lack of commitment from the national government? Is it the mayors?

VARGAS: *I think there are small bottlenecks everywhere. The ability of a coordinator and of a work team lies in knowing how to overcome them. But I think that if no bottlenecks existed, well, there would be no reason for the existence of the CCAI. I believe that bottlenecks are permanent things. They are constant, at every level. Coordination work is precisely the work of overcoming them. But that is part of the job.*

- DEVLIN: This whole process is evolving as we speak, but could you tell us if, in your experience, there have been any lessons learned?
- VARGAS: *In Montes de María or generally speaking?*
- DEVLIN: Montes de María first, and generally speaking afterwards.
- VARGAS: *Well, lessons learned. In the Montes de María region, a lesson is, definitely, departing from a reality principle. Well, in that case, that also applies generally, and that is to speak to, to keep a constant, sincere dialogue with the communities and the local authorities regarding what can and what cannot be done, in terms of what we are able to do and what we are not able to do. Second, in the Montes de María region, a lot of sensibility in terms of the matter of land, because from the state's point of view it is not easy to tend to so many requests and to be, shall we say, shielding itself using law restrictions or instruments that we have. So, then, a lot of sensibility so as to always be, shall we say, so as to always put one's self in the position of the other, and of the communities. And a lot of times we have to set aside our role as representatives of the state. And definitely managing teamwork, always being in permanent dialogue about all the activities and trying to make the decisions as consensus-based as possible. I think that that process has been very stimulating, and I think the other members of the Centro de Coordinación would agree on that. We try to keep a permanent and very fluid dialogue in terms of analysis and decision-making. And, generally speaking, as a lesson learned, there is the work with the communities and also with the local authorities. If we don't strengthen the local authorities, we could, of course, secure the best bricks, the best cement, the best construction work, but if we don't empower the authorities, we are doing nothing. In that case, we are doing the work of generating lower indexes of governability in the long run.*
- DEVLIN: And a final question. CCAI is ultimately part of Acción Social...
- VARGAS: *No. I don't agree with that.*
- DEVLIN: Okay.
- VARGAS: *But, well, it doesn't matter. Finish your question.*
- DEVLIN: Maybe we can actually avoid that. CCAI is within the office of the president.
- VARGAS: Yes.
- DEVLIN: And the office of the president changes when the president changes.
- VARGAS: Yes.
- DEVLIN: So maybe there is a sustainability issue here.
- VARGAS: *Yes. That's obvious. Until next August 7.*
- DEVLIN: What is the impact of that? How are you thinking about the work that you are doing? How is it developed?

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VARGAS: *Well, I've always said that the success of the CCAI must be such that one day it is no longer necessary. What does this mean? It means that the entities learn how to work in a coordinated manner without the need for an office that depends on the presidency. And that is why I was talking about the importance of strengthening capacities at the local level. On August 7, 2010 we can change the president. It is possible that the next president will say: "I will not continue with the Plan de Consolidación, I do not like it". Or that he ends it. But if we manage, on the one hand, from this point until then, to generate dynamics of commitment from the local institutions, and, on the other hand, if we manage to start some processes to stimulate citizen participation that really generates... that strengthens governability, we can say that we generated change in the region, independently of who the next president is. If we continue working, so be it, we continue working along the same lines, but the success of it will be there in the end. Thus my insistence on the matter of strengthening local capacities. That is what will generate change.*

DEVLIN: Juan Carlos, thank you very much for your time.

VARGAS: *Thank you.*