



The orchidarium at the renovated Medellín Botanical Gardens, Colombia.  
(Photo by SLClaasen.)

## COLOMBIA

## Building Places for Peace to Grow

By James Gerardo Lamb

“Buildings can embody dignity.” In this simple statement, Sergio Fajardo, former mayor of Medellín and governor of Antioquia Province in Colombia, summed up a central tenant of his progressive vision of governance. It is this focus on dignity and hope, exemplified in what he described as “the most beautiful places for the most humble people,” that unifies Fajardo’s ideas on education, infrastructure, development, and the role of the state in supporting peace in Colombia.

Fajardo is best known for his investments in education, his support of public architecture, like the *parques educativos* (educational parks) and *parques bibliotecas* (library parks), and his involvement in the struggle against corruption and for transparency in government. At a CLAS event in March 2016, the Colombian leader shared his views on the integral connections between education, public investment, hope, and peace in his country.

For Fajardo, 50 years of armed conflict and 35 years of narco-trafficking — both of which Antioquia experienced in disproportionate measure — as well as four years of negotiations have left Colombia at a critical juncture. Fajardo called this moment “peace: now or never” because of the seriousness of the Colombian national government in securing an agreement as well as the fact that negotiations with the main rebel group, the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), have progressed further than ever before.

As Fajardo noted, “we have seen violence, we have lived under violence in many different moments of these last 50 years, and basically, every Colombian alive has suffered violence” in one way or another. In addition, he observed that many Colombians remember and were discouraged by the failure of the last major peace process attempt under former Colombian President Andrés Pastrana in the year 2000. Fajardo called this experience of failed peace negotiations “very painful.” In fact, Fajardo explained, negotiations have been going on in one form or another since 1982 without an end to the violence.

According to Fajardo, the major effects of this conflict for the people of Colombia have been a metastasizing culture of illegality and profound inequality in addition to violence.

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Photo courtesy of Gobernador de Antioquia.

Sergio Fajardo (center) helps break ground for a new university building in Antioquia.

Another crucial outcome of these experiences has been a pervasive fear throughout Colombian society. “We live in a society where fear has been a component of our lives,” explained Fajardo. This fear has bred social fragmentation and isolation, as well as feelings of impotence and distrust among much of the population.

Yet, Fajardo insisted, these experiences have forged a nation characterized by a resilience born of the struggle for survival under such dramatic and difficult circumstances.

A root cause of the inability to ameliorate these outcomes has been the unequal geographic distribution of state capacity within the Colombian territories. Fajardo noted that some parts of Colombia enjoy a modern, capable state, while other parts of the country suffer from a weak, very weak, or even non-existent state. Therefore, Fajardo insists that an indispensable part of “building for peace” will be rebuilding — or even introducing for the first time — state capacity and authority in many areas that have never known a secure and stable environment underwritten by a competent and impartial state. This enhanced state capacity is a necessary precondition for Fajardo’s broader approach to building a sustainable peace.

The key to this approach is a comprehensive strategy Fajardo summarized as “peace plus legality plus education equals opportunities.” Arguing that these factors should be scaled up even before a peace agreement is signed, Fajardo identified these necessary “preparations for peace” as the “movement from fear to hope.” To this end, as governor of Antioquia, Fajardo established a program called *Preparémonos para la paz* (Preparing for Peace) at the outset of the negotiations four years ago.

Fajardo’s strategy involves significant and effective public investments in areas that can provide shared, tangible, and rapid benefits to broad swaths of the population, thus creating a stake for many people in a new post-conflict Colombia.

He explained that many people in Colombia are skeptical of or opposed to permitting the FARC acceptance into mainstream society and politics and therefore needed to see real benefits from the peace process quickly in order to maintain support for it and avoid a return to violence. This attitude is not only inspired by the violence perpetrated by the FARC and other armed groups, but also by a recent decrease in violence that has distanced the conflict for many Colombians. “Because of the way we

have improved,” clarified Fajardo, “for most people today, we are living peacefully.”

“There is an agreement with FARC, there has been no combat for the last year,” Fajardo said of the most recent period of negotiations. Violence, he went on, “has definitely decreased. For most people, as I say, things are O.K.”

Many Colombians might thus perceive any accommodations to those who engaged in violence as a loss without a corresponding benefit. “The country right now is very polarized about what is happening,” said Fajardo of the peace process. “Many people don’t believe in what is happening.”

“If you only give benefits to ex-fighters and not others, it’s not fair,” explained Fajardo, who oversaw demobilization of right-wing paramilitary units in Medellín as mayor. “There will be violence. It is a very difficult issue to have the whole society in Colombia committed to peace.”

Fajardo was therefore emphatic that there need to be “a lot of programs, simultaneously,” with the implementation of a peace agreement that will swiftly impact the lives of ordinary citizens. “Everything has to be seen and quickly,” he insisted. For Fajardo, this shared experience of improvement and enhanced prosperity will underwrite a stable and long-lasting peace.

When a bomb damaged the statue on the left, Fernando Botero donated another to Medellín.



Photo by Randal Sheppard.

The implementation of Fajardo’s vision for peace involves multiple levels of society, from the individual to the whole Colombian nation.

Education is the central pillar of this vision, from programs that target individuals, such as *Jóvenes con Futuro* (Youth With a Future), to increased allocations for education spending by the national government. “Education is the engine of social transformation,” Fajardo argued, and as a political leader, he put this philosophy into practice. His major programs as mayor and governor were called, respectively, “Medellín: The Most Educated” and “Antioquia: The Most Educated.” These investments in the human capabilities of the population are intended to foster dignity and hope and to spur economic development, which will provide a stake for many more people in a new post-conflict Colombia.

Indeed, Fajardo has indicated that his theories of governance, development, and social progress are strongly influenced by the capability approach, an economic theory developed by Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen in the 1980s. This approach has since become a crucial paradigm in human development policy debate and inspired the creation of the United Nation’s Human Development Index, a metric Fajardo has spoken highly

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Photo by Mariana Gil/IBAROBrazil

One of the escalators built to serve poor hillside communities in Medellín.

of and which incorporates indicators of health, education, and income.

In addition to education, Fajardo emphasized the investments in public infrastructure that were an important part of his development strategy as governor. During his tenure, the state invested in infrastructure ranging from bicycle paths in small hamlets to new highways reaching previously isolated and violence-ridden rural communities. Amid the dramatic topography of Medellín, provincial capital and second-largest city in Colombia, Fajardo's administration built innovative public transit infrastructure, such as escalators, gondola lifts, and pedestrian bridges.

Not only are these projects integrated, like the educational parks and greenbelt areas being developed around Medellín, they are focused on creating jobs as well as beautiful buildings. Many of these employment opportunities go to those in the local areas where the projects are built, for example in the economically marginalized neighborhoods around the periphery of Medellín.

In Medellín, this program was characterized as "social urbanism" and involved the shifting of funds so that the lion's share of the municipal budget — some 85 percent of \$2.2 billion in 2014 — went to infrastructure and services concentrated in the city's most marginalized, historically violent, and impoverished areas. Projects like these provide the resource counterpart to the spiritual

and psychological uplift of hope and dignity. And the economic opportunities such investments could yield at a larger scale are central to Fajardo's vision of a more stable and prosperous post-conflict Colombia.

The other major pillar of this strategy is what Fajardo terms "legality." This component is a combination of the rule of law, transparency in public administration, and justice (rather than impunity) for state corruption.

As both mayor and governor, Fajardo's administrations gained wide acclaim for efforts towards dismantling clientelistic political networks and promoting transparency, for example, through the innovative use of "transparency fairs" at the municipal level and "The White Book," a report on public administration, as governor of Antioquia. Indeed, during his terms in office, the city and province won a bevy of awards for transparency and administration as well as innovation.

For Fajardo, building the citizenry's trust in the government was among his highest priorities. This objective has informed his stance towards the traditional political parties, locally and nationally. When he first won election as mayor of Medellín, he ran as an independent, backed by a civic movement called the *Alianza Social Indígena* (Indigenous Social Alliance) and without the support of the traditional parties and their patronage networks. Fajardo noted in his talk that "the least-trusted people are politicians and political parties," yet, "whether we like them or not, politicians make the most important

decisions in society." Therefore, fostering trust in the state is an essential ingredient in fostering hope for the future, an attitude that is crucial for sustainable progress. "We have built something that has no price," Fajardo explained, "which is trust."

In addition to the need to foster confidence in the government and encourage hope, Fajardo also stressed that policies against corruption have an immediate material benefit for citizens, especially the marginalized and impoverished. Corruption, he noted, is "the main tax that the poor pay." Moreover, the amount of money that was being lost to corruption and patronage arrangements drained already-limited resources from the municipality and province. When asked during audience questions where the funds had come from to undertake such impressive building projects, Fajardo emphasized that efforts to eliminate corruption were central to funding new investments.

Another major task at the national level is the issue of "transitional justice," or how perpetrators of human rights violations and violence will be dealt with in the context of a peace agreement. This challenging undertaking includes truth finding, accountability for perpetrators, and reparations for the victims. Fajardo commented that this task is among the most controversial aspects of the proposed pact. Many Colombians fear perpetrators will not be punished sufficiently or at all, while some international human rights institutions may disallow absolutions that are a politically necessary part of any deal. Public opinion polling has recently indicated low support for President Juan Manuel Santos, the crucial catalyst of negotiations on the government side, as well as skepticism about the negotiations, particularly these transitional justice aspects. As such, this issue remains one of the most significant possible vulnerabilities of the peace process.

Moreover, at the national level, the state must provide security for all the people in an impartial and professional manner, in many places for the first time.

At intermediate levels of community and regions, Fajardo identified key tasks as including integration and support of victims of violence and community empowerment through such institutions as participatory budgeting linked with public investment, community educational spaces, and beautiful architecture. An apt example is the striking *Remanso de Paz* (Oasis of Peace), a social and community center in Turbo municipality. Like many of the projects that Fajardo oversaw, this building was constructed in the poor shantytown of Pueblo Bello with the direct grassroots participation of a local community that has seen tragic levels of violence during decades of conflict.

Participation and responsibility are conjoined for Fajardo. Local communities and directly affected populations are invited to participate in the planning and oversight of projects, and many of these undertakings require the stakeholders to be proactive in their set up. So, new schools or library parks were often awarded through a competition or application process in which the community itself had to generate and propose ideas. When projects were awarded, Fajardo made great use of one of his signature policy tools: "civic pacts." These pacts are agreements between the administration and local communities. They incorporate public feedback, commit government officials to fund and execute the plan, and formalize the contribution of the community to the project. The aim was to increase transparency and generate "buy-in" from the community. The process itself also serves as an educational experience in civic participation.

Overall, Fajardo summed up the lessons for national peace that his team had learned from experience at the municipal and provincial level. "We have learned about dignity, capacities, respect, and recognition," he told the audience, "in order to build hope."

### Postscript

In the months since Fajardo's speech, many dramatic events have taken place surrounding the Colombian peace process.

On June 23, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos and FARC leader Timoleón "Timochoenko" Jiménez signed a ceasefire agreement in Havana, Cuba. This agreement was the final step before the signing of a comprehensive peace accord. It tackled the most sensitive remaining issues, including disarmament and demobilization of rebel fighters.

On July 18, the Colombian Constitutional Court approved a plebiscite to popularly ratify the deal.

On October 2, Colombian voters delivered a narrow and surprising rejection of the peace pact by 50.2 to 49.8 percent in a low-turnout event (less than 37.5 percent) characterized by an environment of social, political, and cultural polarization.

Senator Álvaro Uribe, a conservative former President (2002-2010) led the "No" campaign. The "No" vote also received important support from socially conservative religious leaders and organizations, a coalition of evangelical Christians and Catholics who used the vote in part to reject the government's socially liberal agenda.

The result threw the peace process into flux, while President Santos, the FARC leadership and the international participants remained firmly in support of the deal.

In the days following the referendum, students and other concerned citizens protested across Colombia in

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favor of peace, often drawing attention to the fact that those most directly affected by the conflict supported the accord in high numbers.

On October 7, President Juan Miguel Santos was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of his efforts to end the conflict in Colombia. The following week, he extended the ceasefire through the end of the year.

On November 12, the Colombian government and the FARC announced a “new final accord.” In an aim to revive the peace deal, this agreement incorporated proposals from the Uribe-led political opposition and religious leaders as well as suggestions from large rural landowners and agribusiness, among others.

The changes were significant, with the government proposing some 500 modifications, most of which the FARC accepted in marathon negotiating sessions. The most important of these adjustments relate to provisions of the transitional justice system and to crimes committed during the war. The new document also strengthens private property guarantees, reduces benefits promised to the FARC, and attempts to clarify gender issues that proved controversial. After the new text was released, former president Uribe initially claimed that the changes were not sufficient, while

FARC head Rodrigo Londoño continued to firmly support the accord.

On November 30, Colombia’s congress approved a revised peace agreement, bypassing a second referendum. Although the votes in both chambers, controlled by President Santos’s party, were overwhelmingly in favor of the accord, members of ex-President Uribe’s party abstained.

Sergio Fajardo remains a prominent supporter of the peace process.

*James Gerardo Lamb  
December 15, 2016*

Sergio Fajardo served as the governor of Antioquia (2012–2015) and the mayor of Medellín (2004–2007) and was a vice-presidential candidate for Colombia in 2010. He was a Tinker Visiting Professor at UC Berkeley in March 2016 through a program co-sponsored by the Center for Latin American Studies, UC Berkeley, and the Center for Latin American Studies, Stanford University. He spoke for CLAS on March 15, 2016.

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Medellín schoolchildren participate in an exercise program.



Photo courtesy of Secretaría de Movilidad de Medellín.