



2007

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## Digital Commons Citation

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# Diaspora Philanthropy: The Colombia Experience

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May 2007

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*Prepared for*

The Philanthropic Initiative, Inc.  
and  
The Global Equity Initiative, Harvard University

*Supported by*

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

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## I. Introduction

This study is part of a series on diaspora philanthropy commissioned by The Philanthropic Initiative, Inc. and the Global Equity Initiative at Harvard University and supported by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The principal aims of this paper are to document and analyze diaspora giving from the United States to Colombia and to provide recommendations to enhance diaspora giving to this country.

Diaspora philanthropy has emerged as an area of increased interest and study in the past several years (Sidel 2005, Johnson 2004, Werbner 2002, Levitt 2005). Yet despite the growing interest, existing literature concentrates on only a limited number of countries. In Latin America, philanthropic giving to several Central American and Caribbean countries -- including Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador -- has been documented (Orozco 2003, Goldring 2004, Portes et. al. 2005), but diaspora giving to most countries in the region remains largely unexplored. However, there is growing interest in the topic because researchers, international organizations and governments are increasingly realizing that labor migration from underdeveloped areas to the United States and Europe will reach a limit (Delgado-Wise and Guarnizo 2007) and labor remittances are expected to decline in the next decades. However, while labor remittances reach a peak and later decline, collective remittances -- one important element of diaspora philanthropy -- are more stable over time. Therefore, understanding diaspora giving, providing incentives to engage diaspora populations with their homeland development, and establishing trustworthy and effective conduits for this giving are all essential to ensure reliable and continuous flow of resources to the countries of origin and to promote the creation of social capital among each national group.

The number of persons born in Colombia or of Colombian ancestry living in the United States has increased dramatically in the last ten years, and approximately 8% of the Colombian population now lives outside of the country. Due to the growing importance of Colombian international migration, particularly since 1998, the Colombian government, international aid agencies and researchers have produced a number of articles analyzing the characteristics of the Colombian population living abroad and the effects of the migration process on the families left behind and communities of origin (Guarnizo 1999, Portes et. al. 2005, Aysa 2006 and Guarnizo 2007). One of the most significant consequences of Colombian international migration is the flow of labor remittances from those living outside of the country back to their relatives in Colombia. While the greatest impact is undoubtedly on the families' economies, a small but potentially significant portion of these international flows has a more "public good" or philanthropic purpose and impact.

The New Economics of Labor Migration (Stark 1991) postulates that migration and remittances are part of a household risk diversification strategy to ensure a stable flow of household income overtime and to overcome the uncertainties in economies with incomplete markets. The migrants are selected as a family strategy with the expectation that they continue to care for their family members left behind. As family needs are alleviated over time and the migrant's ties wane, the individual remittances also diminish. This would imply that over time the giving of collective remittances are likely more permanent than individual remittances.

There are also other incentives that encourage sustained diaspora giving, most notably the rise in transnationalism. Transmigrants are defined as “persons who maintain or establish familial, economic, religious, political or social relationships in the state from which they moved even as they forge such relationships in a new state or states.” (Glick-Schiller 1999: 96). Some of the incentives which explain why people continue to send remittances to their communities and other communities in their country of origin may include the migrant’s desire to be socially recognized in their community of origin and/or destination, and their intention to return or retire in their home country. This growing number of transnational migrants continues to be involved in a number of relationships in their country of origin, and therefore are connected to and interested in the well being of their country of origin.

In this paper, I explore the scope of the philanthropy of Colombians living in the United States, and target both the causes of such giving and the challenges of the Colombian case. This study adds to earlier assessments of Colombian diaspora philanthropy that compare Colombian giving to other Latin American groups (Portes, et al. 2005 and Brennan 2006). This study aims to contribute to the literature and understanding of this phenomenon and to provide specific recommendations and guidelines to stimulate the giving of Colombians abroad. Although the Colombian migration flow was well established in the United States before 1998, the increased rates of migration and the large presence of recent Colombian communities in an increasing number of cities across the United States suggests that Colombians in the United States may be poised and ready to develop the necessary social networks to promote Diaspora giving.

## **II. The Colombian Diaspora**

### **Migration and Demographic Profile**

The flow of migrants from Latin America to the United States increased rapidly during the 1980s and 1990s. The emigration of Colombians to the United States is not an isolated phenomenon but part of the broader dynamics of the region. Overall, the migration from Latin America to the United States intensified dramatically during this period; in 1980 there were 4.4 million Latin America immigrants in the United States, by 1990 there were 8.4 million, and by 2000 approximately 16.1 million (Migration Policy Institute 2007).

An accurate estimate of the number of any immigrant group in the United States is difficult to make due to the unknown number of undocumented immigrants. Calculations of the Colombian population in the United States are no different, and estimates vary quite widely. In 2005, Colombian Census Bureau asked Colombian households about the number and location of family members living abroad. Based on survey results, the Census Bureau estimated that approximately 4.1 million Colombians were living abroad, and of those, two million, or one of every two Colombians living abroad, were living in the United States. In contrast, the 2000 U.S. Census registered a far lower foreign-born Colombian immigrant population of about 510,000 persons. For this study, and using a broader criterion<sup>1</sup> I estimated the Colombian population in

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<sup>1</sup> I consider as Colombian those who were born in Colombia, those who identified themselves as Colombian and

the United States for the year 2005 as 1.1 million persons. The large variation of the estimates would make any absolute conclusions regarding this population size difficult and dubious. But there is certainly agreement that immigration rates have increased significantly, that the Colombian population in the United States is growing fast, and that it very likely will continue to do so.

While the Colombian migration flow registers a continuous growth, the growth rate is not uniform. Analyzing data from the U.S. 2000 Census, the Colombian 2005 Census and Colombian entry and exit statistics, the immigration pattern seems to follow Colombia's political environment and changes in government administration. In 1999, the Colombian population emigrating to the United States grew about 250% (DAS 2003). The most recent wave of Colombian migration to the United States has been fueled by three main factors: economic crisis, political violence and violence related to the traffic of illegal substances. In 1998, for the first time in a century, Colombia registered a negative growth rate of the gross domestic product of about 7%. The unemployment rates in 1999 and 2000 were between 18% and 22%. In addition to the economic downturn, the confrontations between the paramilitaries and the guerillas increased in number and intensity, and started to cover larger territories. As a consequence, a great number of Colombians were displaced from their usual places of residence. Some of them went to live in medium and large urban centers such as Medellin and Bogota, and those with the resources migrated to other countries. The massive out migration from Colombia is reflected in other statistics, such as the level of remittances sent back to the country and a dramatic increase in the number of minutes of long distance calling from the United States to Colombia. This recent wave of Colombian immigrants changed the overall demographic profile of the U.S. Colombian population in many ways.

The early studies of the international migration of Colombians, in the 1960s and 1970s, described Colombian migrants as entrepreneurs and professionals traveling with their families (Diaz 2006). As in many other cases and according to the positive selectivity of migrants, pioneer migrants have a relative higher accumulation of human capital and resources to migrate and high levels of success in their destination (Chiswick 1999). According to the cumulative causation theory (Massey 2005) the existing migrant social networks facilitate the migration of other members of the community. Therefore, as the migration flow continues and the social migrant networks continue to grow and expand, the cost of migration and the selectivity of the migrants diminish. Consequently, although the human capital of the migrants is still higher than the rest of the population at the origin, the educational level of more recent migrants is expected to be lower than that of the pioneers.

Using data from the 2000 Colombia Census I divided the Colombian population into three cohorts based on arrival: those who arrived in the United States before 1989, those who arrived between 1990 and 1994 and those who arrived between 1995 and 2000. The data show that the recent migrants, or those who arrived after 1994, are on average less educated than those who arrived earlier. This change in the education profile of migrants will have many effects on the experiences and interests of Colombian migrants in the United States.

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those who reported having a Colombian ancestor.

Another important change in the profile of Colombian migrants is the increase of undocumented migrants. For example, using the data from the Alianza Pais study (Baca et al. 2005) I estimated that more than 80% of the migrant population from the metropolitan area of Pereira in 2004, located in the coffee region, were undocumented migrants. The data show that women were more likely to travel without documentation than men and that the population who traveled to the United States after 1990 were more likely to be without documentation than those who arrived before 1990. These new migrants are from a wider variety of socio-economic classes and have experienced firsthand many of the current challenges facing their home country. It is vital for any effective diaspora giving strategy to recognize these changes and incorporate this large, more diverse base of migrants.

The participation of women in Colombian migration has been important since its beginning in the 1960s. For the year 2000 I estimated that 53% of the Colombian population in the US was female.<sup>2</sup> Colombian women migrate regardless of their civil status; single women, married women or female heads of household were as likely to migrate as their male counterparts. The large presence of women in the Colombian migration is an important issue for diaspora philanthropy because women often have different philanthropic priorities and approaches than men, and effective strategies will recognize and incorporate the interests of both genders.

The literature on migration suggests that it is very difficult to delimit the underlying causes of migration and distinguish between economic migrants and forced migrants in countries where both economic crisis and armed conflicts have taken place. The Colombian case is not an exception. A large number of migrants travel abroad because of the lack of income generating activities in their regions of origin, while others travel due to persecution or fear given their political affiliation. In 2003, there were 11,600 Colombian asylum seekers in the United States (UNHCR 2004). More recent statistics show that in 2006 there were 60,415 Colombian refugees and 19,754 asylum seekers worldwide (UNHCR 2007). The presence of forced migrants creates a special circumstance for diaspora giving. Forced migrants are likely to avoid supporting programs directly connected with the government that failed to protect them in the country of origin. In addition, some of the transnational practices common to traditional migrants are less common in forced migrant populations which may diminish the potential for giving in this group.

To understand the Colombian migrant population in the United States and their patterns of association, it is important to understand that Colombia is a country of many contrasts. The geographic conditions of territory and the diversity of climates have encouraged each region to develop independently and consequently they maintain distinct traditions and social networks. Colombian migrants maintain these regional traditions and identities in their new residences. In addition to regional diversification, Colombian society is divided by social class, which has also been observed in the Colombian diaspora as hindering the integration of the migrant community

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<sup>2</sup> I used the US Census 2000 IPUMs 5% sample.

in the United States (Guarnizo 1999). These divisions will need to be addressed in the creation of an overall strategy to encourage diaspora giving.

Finally, the degree of social cohesion among Colombian migrants is another important consideration for those wishing to encourage diaspora giving. Seventy three percent of Colombia is considered urban (UN 2006) and the majority of Colombian migrants in the United States come from large urban centers. Social cohesion in urban areas tends to be weaker than in small towns. Research on Colombian social networks suggests that the networks are predominantly small and closed. This is attributed to the mistrust among Colombians caused both by the history of internal violence in Colombia and the stigma associated with the narcotics trade abroad. As a result, the social networks that do exist are mainly composed of close family members and friends. Traditionally, these characteristics have made it difficult for Colombian migrants to create the wider formal or informal associations that can facilitate collective diaspora giving.

As is the case with all other Latin American immigrant populations in the United States, the Colombian population is beginning to settle throughout the country. The two traditional main destinations for Colombians in the United States were the New York-New Jersey area and Central-South Florida. Colombians are increasingly settling in many other areas, including Los Angeles, San Francisco, Atlanta, Chicago, Houston and Boston. This has clear implications for costs of identifying and incorporating Colombian migrant communities into giving programs.

### **Integration into the United States**

Colombian migrants in the United States have tools to integrate themselves into the U.S. labor market. A large percentage of the population is proficient in English, relatively more educated than other Latin American migrants, and with a high participation in income generating activities. The integration of Colombian immigrants to the United States can be more clearly understood by looking more closely at migrants' English proficiency, labor force participation and the proportion of the Colombian population who are U.S. citizens.

Data from the 2000 U.S. Census shows that 92% of Colombians in the United States speak English. Estimations of the labor force participation of the Colombian migrant population in the United States for the same year indicate that 64% of those older than 16 years were employed or looking for a job, although the incorporation of the Colombian population in the U.S. labor market is more favorable for males than for females with similar levels of education. The data show that 77% was employed in for-profit private companies, 5% was employed in the nonprofit sector, 8% in the local, state or federal governments and about 9% was self-employed. Occupational sectors are not only an element of economic and social integration, but also a key factor for the social mobility of this group.

According to U.S. Census data, 30% of the Colombian population considered in this analysis (those born in Colombia and those of Colombian descent) were born in the United States or are children of U.S. citizens, 30% reported being a U.S. citizen by naturalization, and 40% are not U.S. citizens. However, the rates of citizenship are likely to rise in the near future.

Data indicate that citizenship increases greatly with the length of residence in the United States; the analysis of the data reveal that 88% of those who were born in Colombia and of non-U.S. parents and who have lived in the US for more than 11 years are now U.S. citizens.

### **Remittances to Colombia**

As a consequence of the increased flow of international migrants to the United States and Spain, among other countries, the flow of migrant labor remittances has also increased dramatically. In 1990, \$US488 million were sent to Colombia from labor migrants living abroad. In 2004 the Colombia Central Bank registered labor remittances of US\$3.1 billion. After adjusting for inflation, the annual real of growth of remittances between 1990 and 2004 was 25% (Mejia 2006). Using data from the Alianza Pais Remittance Survey conducted in 2004, monthly remittances from the United States were approximately US\$354 per household.

There are two types of remittances. Individual remittances, which are those sent by migrant workers to their families or other close relatives and friends, and collective remittances, defined as resources sent by organized groups of persons in the country of destination to finance and support specific projects to benefit a known community in the country of origin. These groups of migrants are often affiliated with community or church groups, or with hometown associations (HTAs) (Sorensen 2004). The recommendations of the last UN Expert Meeting on Migration and Development (2005) regarding collective remittances state that “organized international migrants can be a new strategic partner to promote regional and local development.”

Collective remittances show temporal and geographic patterns that differ from the individual remittances (Anderson 2005). Individual remittances are sent as soon as the migrant is established and employed. However, a migrant usually participates in a collective effort once he/she becomes part of a social network of migrants, and after the migrant has spent a sufficient time in the destination to cover his/her basic needs and the needs of his/her family in the country of origin. For the case of Colombia, I would argue that collective remittances can be divided in two large groups, those that are sent sporadically and those who are channeled more systematically by professional nonprofit organizations.

It has been observed that individual labor remittances are cyclical. Migrants tend to increase the frequency and the amount of resources they send in times of economic downturn, so that the families in the country of origin can maintain stable flows of income and levels of consumption. There are no studies -- to my knowledge -- about the cyclical patterns of collective remittances. However, they are likely to increase during the last quarter of the year during the celebrations of the Christian traditions in countries such as Colombia where Christian religions predominate, and after natural disasters or extreme weather when a great many people are in need.

According to a survey by Bendixen (2004), 21% of Latin American migrants contributed to a collective remittance. The percentage of persons who contributed in South America was 16%. There is no estimation for the percentage of Colombian migrants that send collective

remittances. The data showed that 50% of Latin American migrants who participate in collective remittance contributed less than \$25 dollars. Again, there is no figure for the amounts contributed by Colombian migrants.

As in many other Latin American countries, in Colombia there are communities with a high prevalence of migration that have a large proportion of their international migrants located in a particular city in the country of destination. For example a large proportion of migrants from Montenegro, a town in the coffee growing region of Colombia, live in Morristown, New Jersey; many migrants from Don Matias live in East Boston, Massachusetts; and migrants from Santuario live in Englewood, New Jersey. High concentrations of individuals from one community can facilitate social cohesion and will likely increase the chances of collective remittances.

### **III. Colombian Diaspora Philanthropy: Patterns and Practices of Giving**

The Colombian community around the world is becoming more organized and thus better prepared to give back to their country of origin. The Colombian Foreign Ministry has identified 440 Colombian associations around the world (Colombia Nos Une 2007). These organizations are diverse in their membership, interests and activities. They respond to the needs of various constituents from newly arrived immigrants to students to professional groups. Many provide opportunities for social and/or professional networking and many host cultural events. Some are involved in philanthropic activities, and many others may be poised to become more involved in the social and economic advancement of Colombia.

Portes, Escobar and Radford (2005) studied the profile of Colombian migrants in the United States who participated in social projects in support of Colombian communities. They found that philanthropic activities were conducted either individually or through civil or religious organizations. They found that Colombian migrants who participate in philanthropy activities through organizations were more educated than the average Colombian migrant population, had legal status, had lived in the United States for a substantial length of time, and came from an urban area in Colombia. This study describes projects such as education scholarships, direct assistance to the poor, assistance to victims of natural disasters, childcare, mobile health clinics and other forms of community projects. The motivation to organize such philanthropic activities often emerges in response to emergency situations or to the extreme poverty in identified communities. This same perception was shared among Colombians I interviewed for this research.

The organization and giving habits of the Colombian diaspora can be classified in seven major categories: (1) individual direct contributions to support a cause in a community or neighborhood of origin; and contributions through organizations in the United States including (2) web-based nonprofit organizations; (3) hometown associations; (4) civic and philanthropic organizations; (5) religious institutions; (6) professional nonprofit organizations with the specific mission of promoting diaspora philanthropy and engaging Colombians in the United

States with the needs of Colombia; and (7) transnational enterprises engaged in social projects in Colombia.

### **Individual Direct Contributions**

There is no way to quantify the extent of philanthropic contributions that migrants make directly and informally to needy residents and communities in Colombia, though it is likely to be significant. For example, during interviews in the city of Pereira, an industrial city in the country's coffee region with a high prevalence of emigration, leaders of Neighborhood Advisory Boards noted the efforts of community members who were currently living in the United States to assist families in need and to contribute to the celebration of community festivities such as novenas during Christmas or the annual celebration of the patron saint. Although these individual migrant contributions were sporadic, they were recognized as important by the community.

Another type of individual philanthropy is the charitable contributions made by those who return to the community after living abroad. There are examples of some migrants who return with relative wealth and establish philanthropic foundations. For example, in Pereira, one returning migrant implemented a program called *jornada alterna* through the Dabukuri Foundation. The program works with children between five and fourteen years old who suffer from extreme poverty, malnutrition, and/or domestic violence, to keep them from becoming street children (Fundacion Dubukuri 2007). While currently a small percentage of total migrants, returning migrants represent a group that will likely grow in the future and may become important participants in diaspora philanthropy.

### **Web-Based Nonprofit Organizations**

Conexion Colombia (2007) is an excellent example of the potential of web-based initiatives to promote diaspora giving and channel resources to social development. The Conexion Colombia web page contains current information about Colombia, encourages and accepts monetary or in-kind donations through its website and offers information about their projects' impact. Conexion Colombia reports that they have received US\$3 million since its creation in 2003 and funded projects that have benefited more than a million people (Conexion Colombia 2007). Some of the projects funded through Conexion Colombia have aided victims from natural disasters or from the consequences of extreme weather conditions. Other contributions address the needs of vulnerable children. Conexion Colombia is highly organized and uses a series of targeted campaigns along with its website to raise awareness and donations from Colombians living abroad.

### **Hometown Associations**

Hometown associations (HTAs) are an important vehicle for diaspora philanthropy to many Latin American countries, but appear to play a far smaller role as a conduit for charitable giving to Colombia. HTAs are civic organizations whose members are migrants from a single community who gather to develop support systems in the country of destination and to fund

social projects for the people of the community in the country of origin. The strong regional identities in Colombia would seemingly be conducive to the establishment of HTAs in the United States. However, the majority of Colombians emigrate from urban centers that have weaker social networks than more rural towns, and this appears to limit the formation and strength of hometown associations in the United States.

It is interesting to note the origins of the most well-known Colombian hometown associations in the United States. They each were formed by migrants from the Department of Quindio in the coffee region of Colombia. On January 25<sup>th</sup> 1999, an earthquake with the epicenter in the departments of Quindio and Risaralda destroyed more than 70% of the infrastructure of the zone and killed dozens of persons. The Colombian community organized campaigns to gather contributions for those affected by the earthquake. Those organizations, and particularly those from the effected region, remain and continue to support social projects.

### **Civic and Philanthropic Organizations**

As noted earlier, Colombian migrants are on average more educated than other migrants from Latin America, and have urban origins. Many of these migrants tend to conduct their philanthropic activities through secular organizations such as Lions, Rotary and Kiwanis clubs. Leaders of these organizations travel to Colombia to look for local charities or counterpart clubs with whom they can establish formal agreements (Portes 2005). The majority of programs appear to focus on the education and nutritional needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged children and support such projects as day care centers in poor neighborhoods, orphanages, aid for pregnant adolescents, clinics for handicapped children, vocational training for displaced populations and rehabilitation for drug addicts. While many civic organizations have been successful in organizing the philanthropic activity of the growing Colombian community in the United States, they require additional training and support to learn effective strategies to raise funds from the diaspora and implement projects in Colombia.

The Long Island Colombian Association is an example of a civic organization that is successfully raising funds from the Colombia diaspora and channeling these contributions to social programs in Colombia. The Association was created in 1999 to aid the victims of the aforementioned earthquake. They have continued and expanded their activities, and now raise money to implement housing projects for the poor in urban areas in Colombia. They have successfully collaborated and coordinated their work with nonprofit organizations in Colombia (e.g., Minuto de Dios), for-profit corporations (e.g., the airline company, ACES), and the Colombian government (e.g., through FOREC, a governmental emergency fund for the rehabilitation of the area affected by the earthquake) (Long Island Colombian Association 2007). This association raises money through raffles, marathons, dances and other activities and solicitations.

There are also a large number of Colombian students associations (e.g. those at MIT, Georgetown University, University of Florida, Florida International University, University of Miami, University of Oklahoma, University of Illinois, Stanford University, Texas Agriculture and Machinery University, Cornell University, and Kansas State University) with philanthropic

activities. These associations send monetary and in-kind donations, such as toys at Christmas time back to Colombia. These organizations are important not so much as a channel of significant charitable contributions but as a tool to educate the next generation of Colombian-American youth about the needs in their home country and the benefits of giving back, a vital step to perpetuate diaspora giving.

### **Religious Institutions**

Over 80% of Colombians are Catholic, and throughout the history of the country the Catholic Church has played a central role in managing charitable contributions and programs for those in need. The church is an established and highly trusted avenue for Colombians in the United States to support their country of origin.

In addition to funds contributed directly through the Catholic Church, there are other religious groups that facilitate diaspora giving. For example, the Minuto de Dios Corporation, one of the most well-known religious groups in Colombia, has a counterpart in the United States known as the Minuto de Dios Corporation that raises funds from the Colombian community throughout the United States. This faith-based organization has successfully created a network of programs, funded by charitable donations, to address housing issues, vulnerable populations, microcredit and training needs of many of the most marginalized communities in Colombia. This organization raises diaspora contributions through its website and organized events. The website offer social bonds of about US\$45 to finance the creation of communities of affordable housing. It also encourages the giving of certificates of condolences, as a way to commemorate the death of a loved one, to fund education and cultural activities for youth in marginalized areas. In the United States, the Minuto de Dios Corporation organizes an annual banquet called the “Million Banquet” to raise funds for its program. In 2007 the Colombian communities residing in Tampa, Atlanta, West Palm Beach, Miami, New York, Washington DC, and Houston will host the fourth Million Banquet.

### **Professional Nonprofit Organizations**

A new genre of professional non-profit organizations is poised to play an important role in promoting, facilitating, and strengthening Colombian diaspora giving. These organizations have been established for the principal and exclusive purpose of bringing more philanthropic resources to bear on the challenges facing Colombia.

The most prominent such organization is Give to Colombia. Its mission is “to increase the flow of international donations, resources, talents and technologies to provide enduring and scalable solutions.” Give to Colombia provides donors and potential donors objective information on Colombia and its social needs, offers a portfolio of high impact, professional NGOs and promising projects in which to invest in Colombia, develops tailor-made projects that generate scalable and sustainable results, offers a tax deduction for contributions, and provides information on the impact of a donation and grantees’ performance. Give to Colombia focuses its projects on the three strategic areas of education, health and nutrition, and social and

economic development, which benefit the displaced, disabled and demobilized populations (Give to Colombia 2007).

Give to Colombia works almost exclusively with individual high net worth Colombian migrants and with large corporations. The organization has developed several strategies to encourage the culture of giving among the Colombian population in the United States. The first experience was called “*Compromiso Manhattan*.” Give to Colombia recruited 100 successful Colombians who lived in Manhattan, presented to them the needs for those in need in Colombia and two projects to be financed with their donations. The projects were a Medical Center in a poor neighborhood in Cartagena and a day care center in Bello, Antioquia. Colombians were asked to donate US\$100 each month for a year. While some of the participants withdrew, others continued to make donations even after the year ended. In 2006, Give to Colombia organized a two-day conference on strategic social investment for members of the Colombia diaspora. It featured in-depth sessions on strategic giving practices, the country’s social needs, and promising practices.

Give to Colombia works closely with Compartamos con Colombia. This nonprofit organization defines itself as a “network among professional service providers to support, promote, strengthen and carry out high impact projects that contribute to the development of the country” (Compartamos con Colombia 2007). This partnership appears to be particularly effective in helping to connect diaspora philanthropists with promising projects.

Another group promoting diaspora philanthropy to Colombia is the Genesis Foundation, based in South Florida. The Foundation was created in 1998 through an endowment and registered in 2003 (Genesis Foundation 2007). The members of the Foundation are Colombian and American businesspeople and they focus their giving on education and health care services. The majority of the fundraising for this organization is internal, via donations of the founding members and the board of directors. The Foundation works directly with other nonprofit organizations in Colombia, South Florida, the New York area and Washington D.C. to aid the Colombian population in need.

### **Transnational Enterprises Engaged in Social Projects**

In addition to these direct diaspora philanthropic contributions, the Colombian population in the United States plays an important role in bringing other philanthropic resources to bear on Colombia. Colombian migrants working in transnational enterprises have often been successful in encouraging and developing corporate social contributions from these corporations. Through organizations like the Colombian American Chamber of Commerce, many transnational enterprises such as Pfizer, Citibank, Chevron, Dupont, Avantel have been persuaded to carry out social projects in Colombia through Colombian nonprofit organizations, cooperatives and local and central governments. Partners have included Colombia Emprendedora, Fundacion Junior Achievement in Colombia, Artesanias de Colombia Funwayuu, and Fundacion Bima, among others. The social projects have benefited a wide variety of disadvantaged populations, including displaced children, children with special needs, poor youngsters living in marginalized neighborhoods, and indigenous populations (Colombian

American Chamber of Commerce 2006). Engaging Colombian migrants to incorporate the transnational private sector into partnerships that develop social projects is an important component of diaspora giving.

#### **IV. Going Forward: Considerations, Issues, and Challenges**

##### **The Colombian Non-Profit Sector**

To understand Colombian diaspora philanthropy, its development in the last decade, and its potential going forward, it is important to understand – at least in broad strokes -- the organization and history of the nonprofit sector in Colombia.

As in many Latin American countries the origin of the nonprofit sector and philanthropy in Colombia is linked to the Spanish Crown and the Catholic Church. The Spanish Crown assigned to the Catholic Church the administration of education, the provision of health care services, and the establishment of facilities to aid those in need. The Catholic Church historically received resources from both government and private donors to support these activities. However, the private contributions likely were motivated in large part from a sense of religious obligation and a charitable instinct to alleviate immediate suffering, rather than from a desire to contribute to any kind of permanent social change.

In addition to the Catholic Church, “brotherhoods” -- united around a saint -- were created by groups of neighbors with a shared ethnic or social origin. These groups similarly provided aid and services to those in need, often to their own community members. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, non-religious associations such as democratic societies, mutual aid societies, and freemason lodges appeared. These, too, were focused primarily on the needs and priorities of their membership

In the mid-19th Century, with the creation of a Colombian liberal state, the provision of education and health care was secularized. In this Liberal Period, some foundations and privately run social service institutions were established. A century later, and following a period of civil war, the establishment of *Juntas de Acción Comunal* (Community Advisory Boards) were encouraged by the government. These groups maintained close ties to political parties. Today, almost every urban neighborhood has a constituted and registered community advisory board. These groups may represent an underutilized partner in the development of diaspora giving programs.

The contemporary non-profit sector has its origins in the 1960s, when popular and grassroots movements proliferated, and has continued to grow over the last five decades. As described by Villar (1998), the nonprofit sector in Colombia is difficult to map because the concept of the nonprofit organization as a unifying category is new and not clearly delimited. The Colombian nonprofit sector includes a wide range of organizational types, including community advisory boards, sector-based organizations ethnic organizations, and cooperatives and intermediaries (Brennan 2006). There are 2800 registered nonprofits in Colombia (CIDESAL 1990, cited in Brennan 1990) and many of them are quite young. Many would benefit from

training and education in order to become more effective partners for diaspora and all other kinds of private philanthropic activities.

The current political and civil conflict in Colombia has significantly shaped the nonprofit sector, much of it through the influence of outside actors. International government agencies and multilateral agencies, as well as government contracts, have become a principal source of revenue for the sector, and little private fundraising is conducted. Therefore, despite the growth of the nonprofit sector, there is still little tradition of Colombians supporting NGOs with either money or volunteer time (Coe and Aguirre 2000). The Colombian diaspora, consequently, has not been exposed to a culture of giving similar to that which exists in the United States.

In addition, the attitudes of the Colombian population towards the nonprofit sector indicate that although the sector is respected for the work they do, there is also suspicion around the sources of the money they receive, and the way they spend these resources. Some believe that nonprofit organizations are a way to avoid taxes, a means to carry out political objectives or are vehicles for money laundry. These attitudes further limit private philanthropic giving to the sector. Far greater transparency and accountability will be necessary to increase the public's trust in the non-profit sector, both within Colombia and in the diaspora.

### **The Role of Government**

Government policies and programs can greatly influence the growth and impact of diaspora philanthropy. The Government of Colombia has recently instituted several policies to encourage and facilitate such giving, but additional incentives may be needed to encourage substantial increases in diaspora contributions.

The Government of Colombia has actively sought to establish networks of Colombians living abroad as part of the *Colombia Nos Une* (Colombia Unites Us) program. This program was established in 2003 and is carried out through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its main aim is “to strengthen the links between the Colombian Diaspora, to recognize the Colombian Diaspora as a vital part of the nation and to plan public policies in their benefit.” (Colombia Nos Une 2007). President Uribe and his administration has publicly encouraged this program; in 2004, he met with the Colombia community in New York and the Minister of Foreign Affairs regularly meet with the Colombian community in the eight Colombian consular offices in the United States (Embassy of Colombia 2007).

Other policies further encourage members of the Colombia diaspora to remain engaged with the country. Since 1961 Colombians living abroad had the right to vote in presidential elections. In 1991 the new Colombian constitution recognized the right of Colombians residing abroad to have representation in the National Congress through a representative in the House. Since 1997 Colombians living abroad also have the right to vote in parliamentary elections and to hold office (Guarnizo 2007). Since 1990 Colombians have the right to dual citizenship.

Additional programs have aimed to engage the Colombian diaspora directly with the economic and social development of the country. As early as 1970, Colombia promoted the

return of persons with high levels of human capital through the *Programa de repatriacion de Cerebros Fugados*. In 1996, the Government implemented *Colombia for All*; in 1998 the *Program for the Colombian Communities Abroad*; and in 2003 the *Colombia Nos Une* program. The Social Safety Net within the Office of the President facilitates gifts from abroad. This agency has developed a detailed guide containing procedures for both monetary and in-kind donations.

## **Social Capital**

As mentioned previously, social networking among the Colombia diaspora has been historically weak, and is likely a principal factor limiting more widespread migrant giving. Optimistically, this picture may be changing. There are three main agents promoting the generation of social capital among Colombian migrants in the United States. First, the Colombian government is working to unite the Colombian community and build social capital through the *Colombia Nos Une* program. Second, an increasing number of Colombian civil society organizations celebrate and preserve the Colombian culture and identity. These organizations arrange events to celebrate national and regional holidays. Third, organized Colombian and Colombian-American entrepreneurs and associations are building social capital. The main objective of these organizations is to “promote the economic growth of Colombia through the enhancement of economic, industrial and cultural relations with the United States and other countries of the western hemisphere” (Colombian American Chamber of Commerce 2007).

The Colombian community in the United States is still young. The majority of Colombians immigrants have arrived in the last ten years. Efforts to engage these individuals and create networks and social capital is essential to promote a culture of giving among the Colombian community in the United States and create the conditions for Colombian and American-Colombians to engage in philanthropic initiatives.

## **V. Summary and Recommendations**

### **Summary**

In summary, Colombian immigrants in the United States are relatively well-educated with opportunities to participate successfully in the United States labor market and thus gain relative wealth compared to many who remain in Colombia. Most Colombian immigrants have arrived in the last ten years and come from urban areas and do not have the extended social networks that facilitate collective remittances among other Latin American populations. At the same time, Colombians in the United States appear to maintain strong ties to a small network of family and community members; these bonds are likely attributed to mistrust of the larger community and to traditional regional, class and racial barriers that are perpetuated in the United States. In addition, a large portion of the Colombian population in the United States tends to disperse throughout the country, further inhibiting the formation of broader social networks.

There are a variety of organizations in the United States facilitating giving from Colombian migrants back to Colombia. However, most of these organizations have been established in the last ten years; many are small and run by volunteers. There are only a handful of professional nonprofit organizations working to increase awareness of the need for donations to carry out social projects in Colombia.

There is a great need to nurture a culture of giving among the Colombian community in the United States and to establish and strengthen trustworthy nonprofit organizations that can facilitate giving, provide tax benefits to donors, and demonstrate real impact. The Colombian Government, private foundations, and members of the diaspóra can all play important roles in reaching achieving these goals.

### **Recommendations for Increasing Diaspora Giving**

This research shows that current diaspora giving is predominantly undertaken by wealthy Colombians. These highly successful immigrants give individually, and are also the founders of foundations and non-profit organizations that encourage others -- primarily similarly wealthy Colombian Americans -- to give as well. However, the changing profile of the most recent wave of Colombian immigrants suggests that effective long term strategies to establish sustainable Colombian diaspora philanthropy will need to incorporate the large numbers of less wealthy Colombian migrants in the United States who can give smaller contributions.

Due to the urban origins of many Colombian migrants, the hometown associations that have effectively increased giving to other countries are likely not the most promising approach. Rather, organizations will need to provide opportunities and mechanisms that respond to the migrants' interests, associations, and priorities. The success of Conexión Colombia's web-based fundraising serves as an example of the potential of the Internet to facilitate transnational giving.

Efforts to promote diaspora philanthropy must also focus on obstacles to giving in the broader context in which it takes place. In particular, concurrent initiatives should support efforts to build social capital in Colombian migrant communities and should help nonprofit organizations develop more transparency and accountability to counter the donors' distrust and lack of confidence in the sector. And perhaps most importantly, strategic initiatives are needed to help create and promote a true "culture of giving" among Colombian migrants.

Colombia's social and economic problems are formidable. The needs of the poor, displaced, disarmed, disabled, elderly and young Colombian population are countless. More than 40 years of internal conflict in Colombia have created new difficulties and compounded existing challenges. Colombians, both those within the country and those that have migrated, must actively engage in the recovery of the 40 years of war and move the country forward to a more peaceful, equitable, and profitable era. Diaspora giving is a vital and promising component of building this future.

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