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REPORT OF A SURVEY OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN COLOMBIA

Of the three countries visited, there is no question that Colombia has done some of the most advanced thinking in terms of a national urban development strategy. This may be, in part, a function of Colombia's highly urbanized state and of its natural regionalized configuration. Nearly 60% of the population resides in urban centers of greater than 10,000 population and it was estimated that in 1970 at least 35% of the total population lived in Colombia's 16 cities of greater than 100,000 population. The four major cities, Barranquilla, Cali, Medellin and Bogota range in size from 700,000 to 2,540,000 and except for Barranquilla (4.4%) are growing at a rate of greater than 6.5% per year. Each of these cities is the growth pole of a major region, the Atlantic Coast, the South-West, the North-West and Central, respectively. Each region is relatively self-contained geographically due to the pattern of the Andes mountain range.

Given this situation and the fact that much of Colombia's urbanization has taken place in recent years -- Colombia was only 31% urban in 1938 -- it is not surprising to find Colombia engaged in a variety of activities aimed at improving its pattern of urban development. Currently, a comprehensive urban reform law and investment program are being enacted in an attempt to promote development of intermediate cities and divert some migration flow away from the four major urban centers. However, despite these activities, Colombian and foreign professionals working in the urban development field in Colombia identified a number of problems in this area that should be addressed. These are indicated below, followed by brief discussions of the recommended role for outside technical assistance and of resources and approaches being applied.

PROBLEMS

1. The most serious urban development problem is the rapid rate of urban population growth. It has been a phenomenon which was not anticipated, was not planned for, and has far outpaced the capacity of the cities to provide basic urban services. Nonetheless, the trend is regarded as inevitable and a part of the modernization process. Desire for change is more with respect to pattern than to magnitude of urbanization.

- 2. Coping with urban development problems in Colombia is confounded by political instability, especially at the local level. Political leaders at this level change frequently, often resulting in a new total change in professional, technical and administrative personnel as well. This frequent "changing of the guard" makes local government administration a key urban development bottleneck, one which is political and cultural, rather than technical in nature. It interferes with program continuity, professional development, institutional competence and serious in-depth probing of problems over time.

3. The construction industry represents another bottleneck in Colombian urban development. Its response to market demand tends to be inflationary rather than expansionary. The problem, again, is largely political and cultural. The industry is tied up by a small number of firms who prefer to raise prices in response to demand rather than expanding services and capital investment. This is also partially a reflection of the rather precipitous nature of demand, although peaking and troughing tend to be characteristic of demand in the construction industry in other countries, such as the U.S., as well. The situation is similar in the building supply industry.

Another problem cited in the construction industry is the persistence of outmoded construction systems due to a combination of labor union intransigence and obsolete building codes. Nonetheless, any change in the status quo should be looked at carefully in terms of its effect on employment.

4. Urban unemployment is widely recognized as a major problem in Colombia. Employment is the key variable in terms of a migrant's ability or inability to ascend in the urban social order. It is the key variable in terms of the absorption of a squatter community into the community at large; that is, the physical transition or development of the squatter settlement. Success or failure in working with squatter communities depends upon the ability of the residents to find employment.

Unemployment is running high in the cities (e.g. 18% in Cali); the very young age structure of the cities points to an even greater unemployment problem in the future, even without further migration.

5. Financing of urban development is a bottleneck problem. Valorization has proven to be an effective technique, but only where the areas in which improvements are being rendered are sufficiently affluent to bear the burden. The poor socio-economic condition of large segments of the population of a city like Cali renders this technique relatively ineffectual in terms of achieving a balance in the distribution of urban services -- a major problem in itself. In Cali, 70% of the urban services are enjoyed by 30% of the population and city management is hard pressed to come up with a means of improving this imbalance. An approach under consideration is to tax the more affluent quarters of the city in order to provide basic services to the poorer quarters where valorization can't be applied effectively. Such approaches should be considered with great caution, however, lest the affluent residents of the city be tempted to escape increased costs by moving beyond the city limits. Such an approach could be self-defeating.

Another problem in the area of urban finance in Colombia is the built-in political and bureaucratic resistance to the formation of any form of savings and loan associations for mobilization of capital. For example, there is considerable resistance on the part of the Central Mortgage Bank (BCH), allegedly on political grounds.

6. There is a serious shortage of trained personnel in the social sciences with an urban orientation. Only a few institutions are considering or operating programs in the area, but these activities are nascent. There is a need for urban sociologists, urban economists, lawyers specializing in urban law, urban community development workers, etc. The urban development field has been heavily dominated in the past by architects and physical planners.

7. Related to this, there is a need to use a multidisciplinary approach in urban planning and development. This approach had its beginnings in Colombia in the Cali General Development Plan which was undertaken with the participation of A.I.D. contractors. It is also being applied to some of the base studies being done in connection with the urban sector program in which A.I.D. is heavily involved. At one point it was suggested that a major problem was one of educating local politicians on the merits of the multi-disciplinary cross-sectoral approach to planning and on the need for regional and national urban development strategies. It was recommended that this might be approached by getting politicians away from their constituents and into an atmosphere conducive to serious and educational sessions on these issues.

8. Impeding the cross-sectoral approach is the fact that city departments tend to work separately. Public works, valorization, parks, water, recreation, etc. all work separately on their own programs and often in different directions. Overcoming this counterproductive practice is anticipated as one of the challenges in the implementation of the Cali General Development Plan.

9. It has been found in Colombia that urban phenomena are constantly changing; e.g., patterns of migration and migrant behavior. Yet there is far too little research into the dynamics of urbanization. This will be essential for the development and enactment of urban reform legislation that conforms with the socio-economic realities of urban life in Colombia. Another area of research that was stressed is the costs and benefits of urbanization. There is a need to get at this in a definitional sense.

10. Urban development policies in Colombia are, on the whole, quite progressive in nature. However, progress will be constrained by the fact that there is no clearly defined focal point for urban development in the government. This is particularly important in the highly centralized form of government found in Colombia. Technically, the National Housing Institute (ICT) in the Ministry of Development has a responsibility for both housing and urban development, but, as is so often the case where these two functions coexist, housing concerns are dominant in that agency. The National Planning Department has been instrumental in the development of much of the substance of Colombia's urban development strategy, but it is not officially the governmental focal point for urban development matters. This problem will have to be resolved.

11. Squatter settlements are no longer viewed as cancers on urban society and their developmental assets have been largely recognized. However, it was cautioned that they should not be looked upon as a panacea either. This view can be as uninformed and dangerous as the "bulldozer" approach. Squatter settlements must be kept in perspective.

THE ROLE FOR OUTSIDE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Despite the fact that Colombian professionals have reached a considerable level of sophistication in many fields, areas were suggested in which outside technical assistance and cooperation could make a contribution to progress in urban development. Given the limited scope of the survey these suggestions should be taken as illustrative and not comprehensive.

1. There are only two courses in urban economics and urban sociology presently in all of Colombia and there is none in urban political science. Scholarships in these disciplines could be offered for study abroad. Concurrently, qualified foreign scholars could teach these courses and begin to build them more solidly into college curricula at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

2. Experienced advisors at the level of local government administration and management could be used. Such individuals would have to be highly qualified, broad gauged and sympathetic to operating within a Latin American system.

As one high official in Cali uncharitably and candidly put it, "We are not interested in retired highway engineers." For example, the Municipal Planning Department of Cali articulated a need for a highly skilled urban development specialist with overseas experience to assist in the implementation of the recently completed Cali General Development Plan. Such an advisor would be needed for one year initially. If such a high-level person were not available on this basis, a broad gauged middle-level professional would be suitable provided that the services of a more highly qualified individual could be called upon from time to time during the year. Areas in which there is the most substantial need for outside professional assistance in implementation are: urban economics; public administration; and general urban development.

3. The multi-disciplinary U.S.A.I.D.-financed team that helped to develop the Cali General Development Plan was cited as a very useful employment of outside assistance. It helped make possible a unique approach to general urban planning in Colombia.

4. A proposal exists for the development of an Inter-Institutional Service for the Study of Urbanization in Colombia. The function of the service would be coordination, communication and information flow among Colombia's academic, private and governmental institutions with specific urban development interests. The service would also promote, sponsor and facilitate research in important areas of the problem. The goal or objective of the organization would be to foster the development of a coherent theory of urbanization and the patterns of urban development in Colombia and to suggest policy alternatives in this field. It would also help to create a pool of technical resources. It was suggested that

such an organization could become a reality with outside financial and professional assistance.

5. Research into policy-oriented questions and issues is vital at this point in Colombia's urbanization because the government is pursuing national strategies in this area. This is an activity in which outside assistance can make a contribution. USAID now has a multidisciplinary research team helping to explore certain aspects of the pattern and the costs and benefits of urbanization. This is just a beginning, but a useful activity. Other priority areas of research are: the range of city sizes which can best sustain employment-generating activities; the dynamics (changing patterns) of urbanization; realistic socio-economic legislation for Colombia; and development of a Latin American model of urbanization (rather than adaptation or wholesale importation of North American or European models as is currently the case). However, the difficulties in keeping bureaucratic jealousies and petty politics at bay in such endeavors should be kept in focus. To work with government in such areas is a very useful but delicate operation.

6. An annual Latin American Seminar for Latin American urban development specialists was recommended as an activity of considerable potential benefit for the building of competence and development of innovative approaches in this area. Such a forum for exchange and stimulation could be catalyzed by outside assistance.

7. Advice for both Colombian Government and outside agencies working with squatter settlements ran as follows:

- a. Make the residents partners in the operation.
- b. Teach people to use their own and available resources.
- c. Avoid paternalism. Don't give money or services.
- d. Harness the popular initiative within the community.
- e. Create enterprises within the community.
- f. Remember that employment is the key to vertical socio-economic integration.

RESOURCES, APPROACHES AND OBSERVED PATTERNS

The purpose of this section is to indicate briefly those institutions, programs, policies and significant research findings encountered during the course of the survey that would have actual or potential relevance as international resources in the urban development field. There are a number of innovations and insights in Colombia that would seem to meet this criterion.

1. As mentioned earlier, the Colombian regionalization policy and concurrent urban reform law represent an innovative effort at urban development in a national context. U.S.A.I.D.'s urban sector loan is an important component of the program and is a "first" for A.I.D. in this area. All aspects of this multi-faceted program merit serious observation, analysis and evaluation in terms of its theoretical and practical implications for the urban development field.

2. The Cali General Development Plan is also something of a breakthrough in Colombia and could be regarded as a pilot program. Moreover, it represents a well considered application of outside technical assistance, in that the outside advisors served not only as advisors but also as functional members of the plan team. This was apparently a productive and compatible arrangement. The breakthrough aspects of the plan are:

- a. It is a multidisciplinary, cross-sectoral effort engaging the methodology of the social sciences as well as physical planning.
- b. The plan has a regional base and includes in its scope the nearby cities of Jamundi and Jumbo and the functional interactions among the three cities. Origin and destination studies of the three-city area were applied as well as information from the regional plan of the province (Department).
- c. The plan reflects a degree of civic participation. Sample surveys were conducted in all of the barrios of the three cities to determine the residents' perceptions of local problems and needs. This information was used in development of the plan.

3. The proposed Urban Center of Living Program in Cali is a rather forward looking effort of top university resources nationwide to address local problems of urban development more effectively. It is a scheme for direct cooperation and mutual support between the University of the Valley and the Cali Municipal Planning Office. The University would develop urban development services in the four areas of research, teaching, technical assistance and information. The program would involve the fields of sociology, physical planning and architecture, economics, public administration, and political science. It would be addressed to the intermediate, professional and managerial levels of city government.

The university doesn't have urban development specialists at this stage and would draw on other universities in Colombia and on foreign scholars to meet this deficiency. The objective would be to build a multidisciplinary urban development capability within the university. Specializations would be created where none now exists by using national and international resources to train students and professors of the University of the Valley in these areas.

The program is now in advanced stages of planning. However, due to the temporary closing of the University, it has not yet been initiated. Should it succeed, it would be an excellent example of local initiative in the development of the skills for a multidisciplinary approach to urban and regional development.

4. A similar program, but with a national orientation, was described in another section (see "The Role for Outside Technical Assistance," No. 4.). This Inter-Institutional Service for Study of Urbanization in Colombia, proposed by the Division of Population Studies of the Colombian Association of Medical Faculties, is a program that borders on the ideal if it can be implemented. Its implications for progress in urban development in Colombia are significant and it would present a very useful example for other nations to follow. Urban development linkages between countries would be quite practical if an international system of such organizations existed.

5. The City of Medellin is evidently somewhat of a phenomenon in terms of municipal management and development. It is a rapidly growing industrial city of over one million population but allegedly very clean and prosperous looking and virtually without squatters. The factors involved in this apparent success story would be of great interest elsewhere in Latin America and beyond.

6. Las Calinos (Two Hills) is a squatter settlement in which some very systematic improvements have been made with the assistance of an Argentinian consultant from Bouwcentrum in Holland. The settlement is badly positioned on the slopes of two hills but is in the process of being rationalized in terms of house and lot location, introduction of physical infrastructure and community functions. House design is such that improvements and additional living space can be added as the residents can afford them. The community is being organized along lines that are geared to promote the most rapid integration with and absorption by the surrounding community. It is a project that has been a mixture of successes and failures and has had the assistance of the same advisor since its inception in 1967. As such, there are a number of valuable lessons that could be learned, both with respect to how a technician, foreign or otherwise, can play a meaningful role, and with respect to the self-help, creative forces within a squatter community. Interestingly, to the extent there have been failures in the project, they were attributed to the poor economic conditions of individual families (inability to obtain satisfactory employment) and to the inability to obtain financial support because either land or physical structure or both were not bankable.

The remaining items are brief descriptions of specific research findings on patterns of urbanization in Colombia. The findings are based on limited data and are subject to question and can be thought of more in terms of hypotheses. Nonetheless, they indicate the need for more research into these issues. These, too, can be thought of as resources in the broad sense of the term. They begin to get at some of the many unknowns in this field and serve less as a reservoir of knowledge than as an indication of the important information that can be obtained through selected research into the dynamics of urbanization.

7. Bogota has been growing at a rate of about 6.5% per year recently. However, the growth rate within the poorer regions ringing the center city has been closer to 12.5%. At the same time, the physical dimensions of the city have been expanding much slower than either of these rates. The result is considerable increase in density of living (doubling up, etc.), especially in the poorer regions. Much of this is beyond the perception of the residents of the more affluent sections of the city in which population has been more stable. In a word, the leadership of the community at large is relatively oblivious to the dynamics of the poorer zones of the city.

8. Migrants to Bogota formerly tended to follow a pattern of coming to live (often with relatives or friends) first in the center city, going through a period of urban apprenticeships there and finally moving out towards the margins of the city. This latter move was frequently as part of an "invasion" or squatter group.

Now this pattern appears to be changing. As the number of migrants (squatters, etc.) builds up in the outer city, the trend is for migrants to go directly there from rural areas or smaller towns. This really is not surprising given the increase in rural-urban linkages consistent with the build-up of migrants in the outer city. It would not be surprising if this trend is a universal phenomenon; at least, in Latin America.

9. A recent survey of migrant sons in Bogota and their fathers in the small towns and rural areas revealed a cultural gap estimated at between 200 and 300 years. This is evidence of the considerable power of the city as a diffusion agent. It is also an indication of the capacity of rural youth to assimilate themselves into the modern sector.

10. A study by Professor Simmons of York University in Canada suggested that, of rural migrants to Bogota, 20% return home. However, he found that the reason for return was not usually failure in the city. Rather, it was to local situations. The stay in the city was regarded as a tooling up process. This may be in part a function of the fact that the migrants to the city tend to be higher than average in terms of motivation and ability.

11. This pattern (above) also may be changing. Fifteen to twenty years ago, above average rural migrants could come to the city and be relatively upward mobile in socio-economic terms. This was due to a combination of the capabilities of the migrants and the lack of rigidity in urban occupational specializations. Now, two things seem to be happening that make upward integration more difficult in urban areas:

- a. The quality of migrants is tending to decline.
- b. Urban jobs are becoming more specialized and as such, occupational specializations tend to be more rigid.

In large cities, the socio-economic structure is still complex enough to permit upward mobility. However, this is more difficult in smaller cities.

12. A recent national fertility survey involving a sample of 6,000 rural women indicated that 90% wanted their children to move to the city. They persisted in this position even when forced to admit the difficulties often experienced there. It was regarded as a status symbol for the parent and at least a chance for much greater opportunity for advancement for the child.