

Approaches to the Regularization of Informal Settlements: the Case of PRIMED in Medellín, Colombia

by John J. Betancur

This paper documents and examines PRIMED, a model program for regularization of low-income settlements in the process of formation in Medellín, Colombia. Considered one of the most advanced models for intervention in these types of barrios in the country, the program includes a basic infrastructure of streets, public facilities and public space; home improvements or relocation; and legalization of tenure within a framework of community building and participation. An attempt to address the problems of poverty, social decomposition, violence, and the absence of the state from such neighborhoods, the program became a model to pursue in other neighborhoods in Medellín and other Colombian cities suffering from the same conditions and challenges. After an initial background section, the paper goes into a summary description and an assessment of results. This analysis concludes that the program was built on very sound principles and methodologies, achieved a high proportion of its specific objectives but fell short in addressing critical social problems facing such settlements. Although the program made significant improvements on the harsh physical conditions of these barrios, it did not include the social interventions that could start speaking to critical issues of employment, income, education and health. The author raises questions about the limits of such interventions and the need for policies at higher and deeper levels to make a bigger difference for residents. Lastly, the author points to the continuation of top-down and paternalistic approaches at the mercy of changing administrations with short term, electoral priorities. The paper is based on information provided by PRIMED, conversations with staff and barrio participants, various visits to the target areas, observation of meetings with the community, and examination of relevant literature.¹

Background

Medellín is the second largest city and urban economy in Colombia. Capital of one of the most populated states in the country, the city hosts major activities serving the region and beyond. Profiting from the earnings of gold mining and coffee production, local businessmen carried out the first major industrialization drive in the country. As a result, the city developed in the first decades of the 20th century a significant number of large manufacturing quasi-Fordist plants and many other middle-size and small industries.

The concentration of jobs, education and opportunities turned Medellín into the major migration magnet for the northwest region of Colombia. A growing process of land concentration largely related to the reorganization of farming around production for the

¹ Special thanks to Jose Hernandez for feedback on an earlier draft and access to documents and other PRIMED information extremely valuable for this document.

market freed up a large mass of peasants. Lastly, a civil war fought mostly in small towns and the countryside between the late 1940s and 1950s precipitated a massive migration to the city while intensifying the process of land concentration in the countryside. Medellín grew from 138,266 people in 1938 to 358,189 in 1951, 1,151,762 in 1973, 1,698,777 in 1993 and an estimated 2,093,624 people in 2005²--or 15 times the 1938 figure. Moreover, the population of the metropolitan area—excluding Medellín—grew from 77,759 in 1938 to 853,301 in 1993 and to 1,324,804 in 2005 (DANE 2005). The immigration process intensified again since the 1980s when guerrilla and paramilitary activity—and the actions of the army—terrorized the countryside sending hundreds of thousands of refugees to urban centers while producing a further wave of land concentration.

Although the local economy did well in absorbing immigrants—compared to other Colombian cities, it was never able to provide formal jobs to a large and ever growing proportion of them. Medellín started losing its industrial advantage since the 1950s when protectionism helped other cities catch up and take industrial and economic activity away. Although still growing in absolute numbers, the city's aggregate industrial value as a percent of the nation's declined from 22.6% in 1966 (Goüset 1998:14) to 18.1% in 1994 (Cámara del Comercio 1999). Similarly, the city's national share of jobs decreased from 24% in 1966 to 21.2% in 1991. A generalized national economic crisis in the last three decades added to this problem. As in most countries with a Fordist industry, manufacturing lost its role as the main engine of economic growth. To survive within a deregulated and increasingly competitive globalizing manufacturing activity, the industry engaged in a process of restructuring based on labor downgrading and subcontracting that added to the poverty and generalized economic crisis. All local industries have cut their wages getting closer and closer on the average to the minimum established wage. The informal sector has continued growing: in 1970, it provided around 40% of all local jobs compared to 50.2% in 1984, 51.8% in 1992 and 55.7% in the year 2,000. The rate of open unemployment oscillated between 12.5-14.7% in the 1973-82 period, to 14.2-16.8% in 1982-88, 11.5-15.2% in 1990-96, 16.3-22.2% in 1997-2000 and 15-20% in 1998-2005.

A generalized loss of faith in the economy and government and the growth of criminal activities such as the Medellín cartel, intensified paramilitary (both government sanctioned and underground) and guerrilla intervention in low-income neighborhoods, and multiple other criminal activities (e.g. murder and kidnapping for profit, blackmailings, 'vacunas', and 'paseos millonarios')³ intensified the crisis. As a result of these and similar others actions by the police and the army, Medellín became the murder capital of the world (as measured by violent homicides per 100,000 people) since the 1990s. With 7% of the national population, it reported 25% of public order problems in the country in 2001 (El Tiempo 2001: 1-3).

² Colombia has not had a census of population since 1993. The 1993 figures, meanwhile, are not reliable as the government itself established. Most people agree that the population of the city is much larger but this cannot be determined until the country carries out a new and more reliable census of population.

³ "Vacuna" is a payment imposed by armed groups in exchange for 'protection' or non-aggression. 'Paseos millonarios' is the name for a practice in which criminal groups kidnap individuals with ATM Cards and force him/her to withdraw the maximum per diem amount of money allowed until his/her account is emptied out. At that point, the individual is dropped anywhere or killed.

Under these circumstances, the Presidency established a special program in 1990, *Consejería para el Área Metropolitana de Medellín*, to address the problems of violence, governability, and social decomposition in low-income neighborhoods. Along with this, local and national branches of government engaged in various initiatives to address the crisis—including a recent emphasis on militarization but also physical and social programs. PRIMED and *Consejería* were the major two efforts in the latter group. A generalized urban crisis along with a process of constitution writing in the early 1990s—that included a wide range of sectors, produced the proper enabling legislations and mandates for development of urban plans and programs attempting to address the crisis (See Appendix). PRIMED was a forerunner in these fronts. Proposed by *Consejería*, the program was part and parcel of the overall effort to confront the generalized problems of violence and social decomposition in low-income neighborhoods.

Programa Integral de Mejoramiento de Barrios Subnormales en Medellín⁴ (PRIMED).

The process of urbanization of Medellín included high levels of informality especially after 1950. Whereas for the most part neighborhoods of the upper and upper-middle sectors were built according to codes and established norms, the rest of the population engaged in self-housing. Land invasions and illegal subdivisions produced unregulated settlements with high densities and lacking the proper street systems and minimum public facilities and spaces. Judged by this, nearly 2/3 for the population currently lives in barrios that do not comply with the minimum standards and that lack the proper facilities. Over time, the administration and public utilities managed to establish services and institutions in many of them⁵; then, the city decided to incorporate much of the growth under the category of ‘normalized’ neighborhoods, categorizing the most extreme and recent settlements as ‘subnormal.’⁶ Given the large presence of refugees recently, these barrios became strategic: not only did they include people displaced by guerrilla, military and paramilitary action, but they housed cells carrying the work of the former two groups in the city—along with others. Also, they occupied terrains of high risk that could result in major tragedies caused by mud slides. Lastly, they lacked any presence of the state in the form of institutions or even a minimum of compliance with established regulations

PRIMED started in 1993 as a pilot program of cooperation between the city of Medellín and the governments of Colombia and Germany (through the Federal Minister of Economic cooperation, BMZ and KfW bank). It was conceived in 1992 as a form of incorporation of these settlements into the city both physically and socially. The first phase (1993-1997) intended to move a set of informal barrios from levels 2 to 1; a second

⁴ Integrated Program for Improvement of Subnormal Barrios in Medellín.

⁵ Most of this work was done under a scheme of local patronage (clientelism) in which the city provided materials, machinery and technical assistance, and residents provided unskilled labor on an unpaid basis. Working with local *juntas*—required by government to receive help, politicians often ‘godfathered’ particular neighborhoods intervening to facilitate the process of improvements in exchange for votes.

⁶ Public figures from the Administrative Department of Municipal Planning put the number at 87 informal or subnormal settlements with 250,000 people or 14% of the population in 1997 (PRIMED no date: 15).

phase (1998-2003) would move another set from level 3 to 2.⁷ Phase one was extended to 2000 due to unexpected delays and the availability of extra funds. PRIMED was terminated in this year. CORVIDE, the umbrella organization housing PRIMED assumed the remaining work for one additional year when a new administration dismantled the agency. The total cost of Phase I was nearly 30,000 million Colombian pesos. The project was financed with a soft loan from KfW and a mix of national and local funds. It benefited around 51,000 people (or one-fifth of the total population living in informal settlements in the city) in fifteen barrios. Phase II was planned with funds that became available when KfW waived the 1997 interests on the loan. This phase targeted an additional 60,000 people or 24% of the city's estimated population in these types of barrios. The total projected costs for this phase was 42,569 million pesos.

Building on programs of government intervention in the late 1980s and early 1990,⁸ PRIMED developed its own approach and methodology of regularization that differed radically from earlier approaches of slum clearance, isolated paternalistic interventions, crisis intervention, repression of informal settlements, political clientelism, or negligence. Table 1 summarizes the objectives and activities of the program. The diagnostic was based on the study of the dynamics of self-settlement, identification of physical and social deficits associated with such process, and determination of local assets. PRIMED designed its own approach on the basis of major issues, lessons from earlier experiences, existing legislation and involvement of relevant existing public and private coming up with its own administrative structure and process. The diagnostic, as PRIMED articulated it (No Date: 15), emphasized the low quality and marginalization of these settlements reflected in "insecurity and violence, lack of infrastructure and services, deficits in communal facilities, high risks of mud slides and flooding, overcrowding, low housing quality, and the absence of the proper land tenure." Planning was carefully completed with input from university researchers, people with previous experiences in such settlements, *Consejería*, and local and national authorities and institutions. The final product was a detailed design including objectives and target groups, community participation, improvements (i.e. general infrastructure, public services, public and communal space, home improvements and relocation, land tenure, and geological risks), target areas, institutional participants, costs, and mechanisms of implementation. Briefly stated (Facultad de Arquitectura, Universidad Nacional de Medellín, 1993: 29),

⁷ The city classifies 'subnormal' settlements into three levels. Level one includes those barrios with a high level of government intervention that have come close to meeting the basic standards of normality. Level two includes barrios with some previous but limited public assistance; finally level three includes barrios with no previous government intervention and an incipient infrastructure and inventory.

⁸ The first of them was precipitated by the closing of a garbage site, Moravia, home to 15,000 people, many of them dedicated to recycling. In consultation with residents, the city carried out a process of provision of public services, environmental improvements, regulation of water streams, legalization of land tenure, and physical improvements. A second intervention responded to a tragic mudslide in Villa Tina, an informal barrio in the Western slopes of the Valley. It included home relocation, control of streams, reforestation, development of a basic infrastructure of streets, and utility connections. This same approach was extended to Trece de Noviembre, another settlement in a high-risk location. In all cases, the city provided materials, equipment and qualified labor and the community provided unskilled labor on an unpaid basis.

Table 1: Major Objectives and Corresponding Activities of PRIMED

Objectives	Activities	Areas Involved
<u>General</u> : improve the quality of life of subnormal barrios through mechanisms that guarantee the continuity of the program of urban improvements	All	Center oriental zone (COR), Center Western Zone (COC) and North Occidental Zone (NOC)
<u>Superior</u> : contribute to the unification of the city via the incorporation of subnormal barrios and to achieve peaceful <i>convivencia</i> in Medellín	All	
<u>Specific Objectives</u> : 1. Establish the proper mechanisms of planning and implementation; 2. Promote citizen participation 3. Barrio Improvement 4. Home improvement and relocation 5. Legalization of tenure 6. Mitigation of geological risks	1. A decentralized, flexible structure and the proper support mechanisms; institutional agreements; funding sources by component; coordination between government agencies, NGOs and community groups; systems of follow up, evaluation and control; adoption of PRIMED's approach for barrio regularization. 2. Strengthen ONGs and community organizations; identify leaders to facilitate citizen participation; negotiate with the community legalization of tenure, home relocations and community participation; involve the community in project development, subcontracting, administration and evaluation; develop small community programs; and establish mechanisms of citizen awareness. 3. Determine and prioritize needs with the community; improve the area's mapping; negotiate projects related to open public spaces, street layout, and community facilities; coordinate development of public utilities with the entity in charge; and develop projects of environmental control. 4. Identify housing NGOs; promote home improvements and provide the proper credit; train participating subcontractors; establish agreements with the proper entities; home relocation; and project financing. 5. Identify fast track processes; negotiate with landowners and the community; carry out the proper procedures; apply housing subsidies to the process; work with the proper offices to expedite the process; and issue titles. 6. Determine the areas of high risk; develop an infrastructure of stabilization and environmental control; promote the proper technologies and practices to mitigate risk; community education; make sure that all projects abide by environmental priorities and practices	

Source: Author's summary based on PRIMED 1992

[The program] attempts to reconstruct the social fabric and institutional trust initially in the hills of Pan de Azúcar, Picacho and Nuevos Conquistadores through actions that contribute to improvements in the quality of life of residents and the incorporation of these communities into the life of the city via provision of public services, construction and provision of communal facilities, recovery of areas of high risk, legalization of barrios, enactment of titles, restitution of public space, income generating programs and development of family and social integration to establish the presence of the state in these areas through an initial, intense intervention, in which the proper institutions of government, under the coordination of PRIMED, worked in partnership with the community to address these problems, connect the settlements to the general urban fabric, and get them started on the path to normalization and social incorporation. It privileges interventions with long-term multiplier effects.

Administrative Structure and Methodology/Approach

PRIMED's structure and approach included six major elements: a flexible and relatively independent administrative structure with direct access to the sources of power, inter-institutional cooperation, a clearly defined focus, a comprehensive approach, continuity, and a community participation framework. They are described next.

Administrative Structure and Inter-/Intra-Agency Cooperation. Although operating under the umbrella of CORVIDE, the Housing and Social Development Corporation of Medellín, PRIMED functioned largely as a self-standing entity. Placed under the mayor's office, it also had direct access to the presidency via Consejería. A coordinating group including the mayor and representatives from Consejería as well as all agencies involved in program funding and delivery (e.g. CORVIDE; INURBE, the National Institute for Social Interest Housing and Urban Reform; SENA, the national skill training institute; the confederation of NGOs, the Metropolitan Area administration; PNUD, the United Nations Development Program; EPM, the local utilities company; city departments and a community representative) worked closely with PRIMED's director.

PRIMED coordinated its ongoing work with the entities involved through a monitoring and administrative group of such agencies. All institutions involved in particular aspects of the program had a role defined in the general plan and a separate budget for their participation. The structure also included technical support from KFW, universities and others as needed. Separate offices coordinated the work in each of the target zones and barrios. PRIMED was responsible for planning, coordination and administration. Government entities, NGOs and subcontractors implemented the respective projects. In this way, the work of the different agencies was incorporated when and as needed while PRIMED focused on the whole. This arrangement generated savings and efficiencies while promoting a culture of cooperation and coordination. It represented a unique innovation in an environment in which each agency carried out its programs on its own.

Focus. Initially, PRIMED focused on settlements classified as Level II. The agency chose a contiguous group of barrios allowing for comprehensive solutions at the proper

scale along with more specific interventions at the barrio level according to the unique circumstances and conditions of each. Also, it included a fund for smaller projects sponsored by community organizations and NGOs. In this way, the agency could specialize in one approach, maximize results, and go from the general to the particular as needed. Finally, it focused on physical improvements, geological risk and land tenure.

Approach/Methodology. PRIMED tried to eliminate the extremes of paternalism, political patronage/clientelism, favoritism, and isolated or crisis interventions. It sought to prevent disasters and the multiple social and legitimacy problems associated with marginalization and exclusion. It assumed an a-political form of intervention including high levels of professionalism and efficiency. This approach allowed the Program to interact with insurgent local groups because it did not represent any political party or individual or the police and army for that purpose—not at least directly. It operated on the basis of a carefully designed plan and criteria for each of its components. In this way, it was able to attract an array of social forces (e.g. the Catholic Church, philanthropic entities, institutes and universities) that had been alienated by the politically charged and self-interested approach commonly involved in this work. Moreover, PRIMED had privileged access to decision-making powers (e.g. the presidency and the mayoralty), and to international (the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation), national, and local entities. Lastly, the work was carried out in close partnership between different levels of government, BMZ, local agencies, NGOs and the community. Perhaps the most important asset here was the acceptance of informal settlements as a given and the willingness to work with them—rather than manipulate, oppose, ignore or harass them.

Comprehensiveness. An effort to tackle multiple associated factors together was at the root of the program. It addressed physical improvements, housing conditions and tenure, employment and training, health, education, the environment, social relations, community building, safety and governability all at once as part of the same package. Certainly, most of the interventions were physical. Yet, they all aimed at improvements in economic conditions and quality of life with long-term social impacts. A methodology of partnership with the community, public awareness, de-politicized action, professionalism, transparency, monitoring and evaluation represented a model of action that could lead to community ownership of the projects and the ensuing change in behaviors, and public participation towards a comprehensive partnership of sustained development.

Continuity and Community Participation. The program intended to generate a culture of partnership in which the community took charge of the future and continued the work on its own and through ensuing partnerships with government and others. For sustained development to happen momentum had to be built and taken advantage of for further actions and residents had to gain ownership of the process, multiply the effects of interventions, and continue the effort through the institutions generated or strengthened and the education delivered. The punctual, ad-hoc interventions of the past had fallen short in all these fronts. Many, in fact, fell into disrepair or were abandoned (e.g. parks and open space projects). PRIMED wanted community involvement from determination of needs and establishment of priorities to implementation and maintenance. The agency was convinced that if the community did not gain ownership, the Program could not

Table II: Major Accomplishments by Objective

Objective	Accomplishments	Other Outcomes and considerations ⁹
1. Establish the proper mechanisms of administration, planning and implementation	PRIMED was able to establish a structure with the characteristics described under administrative structure and inter-agency cooperation (above).	
2. Promote citizen participation	Citizen participation assumed a rather passive/client form; it took the forms of information; involvement of residents in implementation on a paid (subcontracts and employment projects) and unpaid basis (labor provision for specific projects); education on issues related to project maintenance and use; funding of small projects proposed by NGOs/CBOs; subcontracts with CBOs; and negotiations over relocation and conflicts. At the end, on the suggestion of the community, residents appointed a committee to represent them in the process of decision-making and planning.	Reactivation of local CBOs and increase in female leadership; emergence of new organizations and leaders; involvement of local Juntas in the formulation of various projects; establishment of a watchdog committee including citizens; inclusion of community representative in PRIMED's committees at multiple levels
3. Barrio Improvements	Improved the pedestrian infrastructure from a coverage of 40% to 60% (compared to the average of 90% for the rest of the city); brought the infrastructure of streets to 80% of the area (close to the 90% level of coverage for the rest of the city); established health centers in NOC and advanced plans for COR; provided 2,800 meters in parks and open spaces; built secondary education establishments in each of the zones and a school in COC; added 5,500 sq. m. of recreational space with an additional 20,800 projected for development; added 6,000 m. in water pipes sufficient to serve 95% of households; built 1,000 sq. m. for a communal facility and 7 communal restaurants; built 5,000 m. in sewers as part of a projected coverage of 90%.	This was the most visible and perhaps successful outcome; although coordinated by PRIMED, most of this work was actually carried out by the corresponding municipal agencies (e.g. the local utility co. EEPP, the municipality's secretariats of Community Development and Public Works, and Social Welfare and others)
4. Home improvement and relocation	Improvements in over 3,500 dwellings; relocated an undisclosed number of dwellings; worked with INURBE, CODEVI and other low-income housing organizations to increase the use of subsidies and loans for improvement of thousands more	
5. Legalization of tenure	Identification of issues and requirements for legalization under the different existing conditions of land tenure; establishment of process of legalization for those areas in which it was most feasible; legalization of more than 2,100 households or less than 5,180 targeted; establishment of a process that is guiding legalization in other areas of the city	This was perhaps the most challenging aspect of the program; a complex set of issues including existing legislation, land ownership; land condemnation; household ability and willingness to participate, among others.
6. Mitigation of geological risks	Recovery of 5 Ha. and stabilization of 8.5 Ha. or nearly 70% of areas classified as high risk; channeled 640 m. recovering the basins of streams in a high level of deterioration	

Source: Table developed from information included in PRIMED 1992 and PRIMED no date.

⁹ These are 1997 figures provided by the agency. No figures were available for 2000 when the program was completed on the basis of an extension. Informants suggest that most pending projects had been completed.

achieve its intended and more intangible goals and would not have much of an impact on the local fabric, namely, the effective insertion of the area to the city, trust in government, its institutions and the rule of law, and continuation of the work.

Major Achievements

This section examines results. It starts with the major outcomes by specific objective to then conclude with a review of the overall objectives, the approach/methodology and its potential for future interventions.

Table II lists program outcomes as identified by PRIMED. Measured by these results, the program was a success. In most cases, it achieved a high proportion of the projected outcomes. Success came from the six major components identified earlier; the strong (though short-term) commitment of the local and national government, the staff, and the agencies involved; a careful process of planning and monitoring; program coordination; the power entrusted on PRIMED/CORVIDE; the ability of site teams to stay away from sectarianism and patronage politics, and the inclusion of the proper parties (from citywide NGOs, though decentralized municipal institutions, to community organizations).

Shortcomings and Issues

Although on the whole, PRIMED accomplished a high percentage of its specific targets, it fell short in its overall effort to move the areas from level 2 to level 3 in the local scale and to develop as deep a sense of local ownership of the projects as originally envisioned. Perhaps the major shortcoming in tangible outcomes was in the issuance of land titles. The process proved too complex and the target too high. The judicial process involved was particularly cumbersome and land tenure included multiple variations. Local government decided against required land expropriations. These factors along with political turf between agencies and levels of government affected the prompt issuance of housing subsidies for home improvements. The components that ran most smoothly were those most directly in the hands of local authorities and PRIMED—e.g. improvements in infrastructure, expansion of public services and construction of facilities. The absence of a data baseline made evaluation of household impacts (e.g. on family patrimony and employability) practically impossible. Instead, the program conducted a survey measuring the perceptions of participants (discussed later in this paper).

Local resistance/low levels of readiness, unexpected factors, lack of experience, political priorities, organizational difficulties, agency disagreements, and unrealistic expectations explain many of the shortcomings. *Local resistance* came from armed groups demanding payments (e.g. *vacunas*) or participation in the material benefits (e.g. jobs and contracts) and from changes of guard in the armed groups controlling the settlement (each time a new group came relationships had to be renegotiated). It also came from disagreements on the proper solution to environmental and other physical problems. *Unexpected factors* included incomplete information, technological difficulties related to the nature and extent of the work, and the difficulty of involving local organizations. *Lack of experience*

applied especially to inter-institutional cooperation, subcontracting with local groups, and the complexity of an approach with so many partners and elements.

Political priorities refer to the commitment of the various levels of government and the slow pace or limited interest of some of the participating agencies (especially from the national government). Most importantly here was the clash between dominant politics of clientelism and paternalism and the program's long-term professional approach intent on excluding patronage and ad-hoc political relationships. *Organizational difficulties* had to do with previous arrangements also based on patronage or paternalism and almost exclusively focused on ad hoc brick and mortar solutions; they were also related to the gap between highly formalized institutional requirements of participation and the informal structure of community organizations (re. accountability, and ability to handle subcontracts within the established terms); moreover, they had to do with limitations in the representativeness and limited mobilization power of local *juntas*; other difficulties came from unstable or fly-by-night organizations, lack of professional, paid staff, and poor ability of local organizations to coordinate the work among them. *Agency disagreements* speak to the priorities and commitments of the different agencies involved. Although entities such as the public utilities were able to sort out differences, others such as the department of planning of the city were unwilling to bend their rules and procedures standing in this particular case in the way of formalization of barrios in areas of risk—even after removal of risk. This aspect also refers to the unwillingness of municipal agencies to assume responsibility for institutional maintenance of projects once PRIMED completed its work. Finally, *unrealistic expectations* refer to assumptions such as the level and form of community participation, the inability of all agencies involved to deliver at the time and within the terms expected, and the assumption that the interventions scheduled would have the types of impacts assumed. The next pages specify some of these challenges by the major elements identified earlier

Administrative structure and Inter- and Intra-Agency Cooperation Although highly successful, the coordination of so many entities involved in project delivery proved difficult. Location of PRIMED within one of the city's departments affected its standing vis-à-vis public agencies that did not take full responsibility for success of the program. The coordinating committee had too many representatives and operated mostly as an informational entity; distribution of responsibilities among the member institutions was not very clear from the beginning. PRIMED may not have been the proper organization responsible for coordination with the community as the city has its own department exclusively dedicated to this work.¹⁰ Meanwhile, in an effort to avoid the instability of political bickering and the lack of continuity of clientelism, the program took the form of a free standing, separate intervention with a high level of professionalism. In the end, this approach risked political support in an environment of electoral politics in which votes are exchanged for bricks and services. Conceding this, the second phase tried to make it part of the organic municipal structure and include it in the general plan for the city assuming the risk of reinserting it into a structure of clientelism that placed it at the whim

¹⁰ The major issue here, however, was that the city's department in charge of community relations was based on high levels of clientelism and ad hoc interventions based on party priorities. PRIMED tried to change this for a partnership of efficiency and continuity in which patronage did not play any role.

of electoral politics.¹¹ Separation between planning and project implementation also presented a challenge as each agency had its own institutional approach, technical choices and modus operandi and had difficulty adjusting to or accepting the plans developed by PRIMED. This experience proved that agencies could cooperate within the proper administrative structure but that they did not enjoy intrusion in their particular fields of expertise (“tell me what I have to do and let me do it in my terms”). In spite of this, participants saw the benefits of working jointly in ventures of this type.¹²

Focus. As mentioned earlier, the projects under the responsibility of government institutions and citywide NGOs were quite successful. In contrast, smaller projects sponsored by community organizations and financed by PRIMED at 75% of the total were few (60 proposed and 18 completed compared to the funding available and the projected total of 240). PRIMED argued that this failure had to do with the lack of experience of local organizations to comply with the technical requirements involved and to manage the projects within the established stipulations¹³ and the inability of PRIMED to lend them technical assistance. At the same time, community organizations found the process too bureaucratic and formalistic and resisted extracting unpaid labor from the community to contribute their 25% share.

Approach/Methodology. Although the approach proved effective at overcoming patronage, paternalism, sectarianism, natural disasters, and isolated interventions with highly alienating effects on residents and the political process, this same success may have been counterproductive. Political support ended with the first phase and PRIMED was discontinued. This decision actually may have confirmed how deeply entrenched such factors were in the local practice of politics. Although the crisis had not receded at the time of PRIMED’s termination, the political forces coming to power did not have the same commitment and went back to the old practices. According to a former PRIMED staff person, the second phase was discontinued for various reasons: 1) disagreements between the national and local government over the municipality’s responsibility for the debt incurred in the construction of the local Metro led the former to prohibit the city from any further foreign indebtedness; 2) unwillingness of new administrations (both locally and nationally) to continue the program; and 3) entrenched practices of clientelism and paternalism tied to electoral politics. Perhaps the last two are the most important as foreign financing amounted to less than 20% of the total.

Changes in the local and national administrations and their political platforms were particularly damaging. Locally, the dismissal of PRIMED coincides with the change of guard from one administration focused on negotiations with armed groups and strategic

¹¹ PRIMED believed that the problem could be only addressed by a long-term sustained intervention outside the framework of clientelism.

¹² The issue had to do mostly with control of the different agencies. As government entities got distributed between parties and sectors within them, each agency used its powers to do engage in proselytism. This arrangement, in turn, encouraged competition between them as each competed for the same clientele.

¹³ Relationships between politicians, parties or fractions of them and local leaders are crucial here. Politicians obtain local visibility and votes; communities receive help with infrastructural and other needs; and leaders secure jobs or other ‘favors’ for themselves and their relatives or friends.

interventions to address the alleged causes of violence to one combining large projects of urban ostentation with militarization and para-militarization of the neighborhoods.

The experience, however, is still there and is guiding lesser interventions by the municipality. Other cities such as Bogotá have taken inspiration from this approach to design their interventions in low-income settlements.¹⁴ Meanwhile, political cleavages, special interests and clientelism worked all along to undermine the project. Initially conceived as a technocratic approach, this methodology was threatened by political appointments, politically influenced subcontracts, conflicts between CORVIDE and PRIMED over control of resources and appointments, decreasing levels of local hiring, and multiple other political skirmishes.

Comprehensiveness. This aspect suffered from the absence of a program of social intervention as extensive and aggressive as the physical one. In the words of a PRIMED employee, there was “too much cement and no social component.” Similarly, the project was largely limited to a local barrio scale—without the corresponding interventions at the macro level to address the deeper issues of income and employment. Moreover, as PRIMED itself (no date: 68) explained in the plan for the second phase,

PRIMED would be strengthened in the achievement of its objectives with the definition and implementation of complementary municipal policies aimed at the reduction of those problems that the Program cannot confront directly, including: violence and armed conflict, unemployment, low educational and health levels as well as deficiencies in cultural and youth strategies and attention to children and the elderly.

Continuity and Community Participation

As the approach claims, success depended on a sustained effort, on the assumption of community ownership and commitment to project maintenance, development of a local culture of conservation and environmental sustainability, and continuation of the process after PRIMED. This was not the case. As a PRIMED interviewee indicated, “When the project was over, the committee folded.” The community was absent from initial planning and decision-making. It was included in those aspects of implementation in which local consent was required, residents had to play a role, or collaboration was a *sine qua non*. In most cases, this type of participation was achieved through the cooperation (cooptation?) of local organizations, workshops to educate residents on the use of installations, or negotiations with the parties involved. Other than this, participation included educational workshops, cultural and sports events, legal consultations, and program information and publicity. For home improvement and relocation, it included negotiations with the families involved, counseling, sweat equity (in the form of unpaid labor mostly), and training. Residents resented involvement in the form of unpaid labor. Some of them pointed to the outside-in approach and their role of clients.

¹⁴ An interviewee indicated that the methodology was being used by German sponsors in their work in other Third World countries.

The stated intents of the project—to instill among residents a sense of citizenship, to entice their participation in the city’s development, to get them to participate in PRIMED’s activities, and to *legalize* the settlement—may be interpreted as a one-sided agenda. Some residents told this author that all that counted was what government wanted and that the program did not take into consideration their inability to participate for instance in a formal housing market with all the associated expenses and risks. One of them went as far as saying that what they needed was a decent job allowing them to pay their way and educational opportunities for their children. Others did not go that far, were highly supportive of the program, and were of the opinion that cooperation was a way of getting what they could not buy. When people live in such deprivation, any help counts.

In its analysis of experiences from Phase I and the proposals for the second, PRIMED (no date: 67) defined participation as “the process of sharing with the community the planning, financing, implementation and evaluation of the different interventions.” The term *sharing* can have top-down connotations. To its credit, PRIMED valued participation very highly and tried to make it as meaningfully as possible. For the second phase, it established a process of workshops to develop the capacity of representatives of community organizations and leaders involved in Phase I to participate in the formulation of the more specific plans by neighborhood. Then, PRIMED presented its general diagnostic for each zone and facilitated a process of feedback incorporating the results in the final document. After this, participants were organized into 4 groups (participation, infrastructure and facilities, housing, relocation and mitigation of geological risks). Following PRIMED’s presentations of the corresponding diagnostics, the group identified priorities and programs. PRIMED staff addressed issues related to the feasibility of the proposals, came up with potential scenarios and engaged the community in the determination of the final scenarios.

At the same time, in its community diagnosis, PRIMED (no date: 26) alludes to organizational deficiencies (e.g. low levels of leadership, authoritarian leadership, NGO and government paternalism, limited management and cooperation among the leadership and among local organizations). The underlying expectation here may be one of NGOs with all the technical capabilities and willingness to cooperate unconditionally or within the terms of government institutions. It is important to take into consideration that community organizations often represent an independent voice calling for self-determination or fighting for frameworks and policies that allow them to reach their potential or to access the same opportunities of the middle class. They have been often alienated by government practices, public institutions and politicians. Moreover, they depend on volunteers and participation competes with household and survival obligations often absorbing an inordinate amount of their time and effort. This raises questions about financial support allowing them the time to engage in collaborations, to hire staff, or else.

One of the classical challenges here is to join people and their organizations where they are and to accommodate to their possibilities and conditions. PRIMED’s model for the second phase was an attempt and succeeded in gaining the participation of the leadership participating in the first phase. We do not know the implications of leaving the rest of the community out of the process.

Were the Large Objectives Achieved?

From the way in which objectives were formulated, achievement of overall objectives is a function of the achievement of the more specific ones. PRIMED conducted a survey measuring the social and economic impacts of the projects completed in the first phase.¹⁵ Survey results were highly positive. Ninety-six percent of respondents indicated that their quality of life had improved. The highest levels of satisfaction came from home improvements (66%), public spaces (49%), and legalization of tenure (36%). The lowest levels came from health services (15%), legalization of tenure (10%) and improvements in the environment (10%). A high percentage (70%) agreed that their travel time had decreased, that access to transport had improved (92%), and that they were better linked to the city (91%). The increased presence of the state was recognized by 76%; 93% knew about PRIMED; 64% give the organization credit for home improvements, 21% for barrio improvements, 11% for skill training; 10% for legalization of tenure; and 10% for development of parks. In fact, PRIMED had the highest credibility among government entities at 48%, followed by the utilities company (14%) and by the city's department of community development (13%). A total of 84% of respondents had some level of participation in local government projects; 68% indicated that citizen participation had increased; 69% believed that the community had the ability to participate in project identification and design; and 75% believed that it had the capacity to establish organizations for its own development. Similar percentages indicated that residents had the ability to watch over and respect the established norms (77%); to see that public spaces are not invaded (63%); and to take care of the infrastructure and public facilities (69%). They claimed that relations among neighbors improved (81%); that safety had improved (86%); and that risks of natural disasters had diminished (99%). These results, however, have to be taken with a grain of salt as two-thirds % of respondents had received benefits from the program—in the form of home improvements. The survey also focused on perception and responses may be short-term and may be related to the level of benefit and to PRIMED's high profile and publicity.

From this perspective and from visual evidence, it is clear that the target areas were incorporated to the city via streets and paths. Infrastructure improved significantly. The program carved out open spaces and produced or improved public facilities and institutions. Many households were able to improve their houses and legalize tenure—even if this meant incurring in debt and new monetary obligations. The program, however, did not have much impact on critical matters such as employment and income and had limited impacts on education and health. Interviewees indicated that the jobs

¹⁵ Entitled Measurement of the Social and Economic Impacts of Public Sector Projects in phase I, PRIMED completed a survey of a random sample of 300 households (from a universe of 10,465). Conducted in 1999, the survey measured impacts on life quality, physical improvements, gobernability, community participation, barrio and neighbor relations, housing, legalization of tenure, mitigation of ecological risk and environmental improvements. Participants were selected on the basis of their time in the target areas, participation in community organizations and groups, participation in local development projects and the projects, and participation in the benefits of any of PRIMED's projects. The survey was a partnership of PRIMED staff and consultants from a local public university, Universidad de Antioquia.

generated were temporary¹⁶ and the skills developed were useful but did not lead to “real” jobs *per se*. This is in part a result of the absence of programs such as job development and placement and skill training in well paid occupations and the absence of higher level (municipal, statewide and national) interventions expanding the job market or making dramatic improvements in access to professional education and health services. Most importantly, efforts to curb violence belong to a different level. PRIMED stayed away from this issue: had it confronted armed groups, most likely it would have not been able to enter the community and engage in the process it did.

PRIMED’s overall strategy corresponds to the belief that violence can be curbed through a mix of state presence and legitimacy, reintroduction of hope, youth programs, policing, neighborhood improvements and alike. Consejeria intervened in some barrios with youth programs; funding of small cultural, educational, and entertainment programs; communal forums, and other initiatives of community participation and self-help. Yet, the limited scale of these interventions vis-à-vis the massive level of need made them largely symbolic. Recently, the state opted for high levels of policing as its preferred alternative to defeat violence. Violent deaths have decreased in the city although they still have the highest levels in the world and nobody can determine their relationship to such interventions. Altogether these types of strategies, arguments and expectations have not been and perhaps cannot be evaluated. Informal economic activities, drugs, and multiple criminal activities have emerged as economic alternatives in a country and city with growing levels of poverty, unemployment and underemployment. Tackling such problems calls for other interventions beyond the barrio. As far as PRIMED, it succeeded in physical improvements and utility connections as well as in the provision of public facilities and services. The situation may call for a similarly comprehensive and aggressive effort in the social front coordinated with municipal, regional and national strategies of development addressing income, employment, education, health and the multiple other deficits associated with them.

PRIMED was a good beginning. Unfortunately, this was yet another case of one-time, ad hoc interventions at the whim of political forces in power. Documents and conversations with the staff along with plans and processes in place for Phase II implied or suggested significant improvements especially in community participation and process. One crucial element of the intervention was an ongoing process of evaluation inspired by a deep commitment to learn from experience and to adjust the methodology accordingly. But all of this aborted when the program was discontinued and the team dissolved. At the end, the politics of clientelism, ad-hoc, dependency creating or punctual crisis interventions prevailed over long-term, sustained and comprehensive interventions based on inter- and intra-institutional cooperation and community self-determination. In the long run, these types of politics may lead to further cynicism and state authoritarianism.

¹⁶ The Program included a fund for small, community based projects. Duly registered local organizations could apply for these funds and carry the work with community labor. Similarly, other general infrastructure and facility projects hired residents. This is as far as the work program went.

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Final Note: This author followed PRIMED from its inception through available published and unpublished documents, materials shared by staff persons, visits to the projects, observation of meetings, conversations with residents after these meetings or in tours of the communities. This presentation and analysis are based on these materials and experiences along with the author's own insights.

Appendix: Relevant Colombian Policies for Informal Settlement

Most low-income immigrants to Colombian cities availed housing through land invasion/self settlement or acquisition of illegal partitions and self-settlement in the urban periphery. Under these circumstances, illegal forms of tenure, precarious dwellings, and all kinds of violations of established urbanization regulations and code violations characterized most of their settlements. These conditions tied the hands of government who could not intervene especially in invasions because it would be violating land property rights and other legal stipulations. Hence, improvements depended largely on settlers. Eventually, government developed a mechanism of intervention based on the distribution of construction materials and the loan of heavy equipment to settlers who then provided the labor. Meanwhile, government policies addressing the housing needs of the poor evolved from direct development of public housing to the provision of subsidies to the poor. This section provides a quick survey of these policies.

1940-1970. The main characteristics of this period were the creation of institutions and regulations, and a mix of tolerance and selected interventions to discourage and punish invasions. These institutions included EEPP, a decentralized institution in charge of public utilities in Medellin (1955); Casitas de la Providencia, a local low-income housing NGO in charge of collecting funds to build housing especially for relocation of squatters from the downtown area (1956); ICT, a national public agency in charge of housing development and rehabilitation (1942); Comité de Barrios EEPP, in charge of home improvements and utility connections in informal settlements in the city (1958),¹⁷ the Planning Department (1960), Acción Comunal (Communal Action), a local office working with local juntas in the physical improvement of barrios (1965);¹⁸ and Fondo de Habilitación de Barrios (Fund for Barrio Improvements), a committee of the assessor's office to work to avoid the emergence of new non-compliant settlements (1964); make sure that seeing that settlements did not take place. The most relevant regulations charge city council with the responsibility of determining and reinforcing urban perimeters (1962); charges Superintendencia Bancaria (the banking regulatory authority) with the power to stop further development of informal settlements; order the eviction of invasions in strategic locations of the city; and directs government institutions to develop public housing. In short, this period seeks improvements in long established informal settlements in the periphery, prevention of further settlement, eviction of squatters in central locations, and development of public housing. In spite of this, settlements accelerate as a result of mass migration and public housing only serves a small sector of the better off among the poor and the middle class.

1970-1983. During this period, government works with the private sector to consolidate the formal construction and mortgage industries. Public policy includes the strengthening of previous regulations, the establishment of adjustable rate mortgage institutions and a series of institutions and regulations concerning the environment and interventions in geological areas of high risk in cities. CORVIDE substitutes Casitas de la Providencia (1975). Defensa Civil (Civil Defense—1971, 1974 & 1979) and Centro Habitacional para Calamidades Públicas (housing Center for Public Calamities--1975) are responsible for tragedies caused by mudslides. Law 61 of 1978

¹⁷ In 1964, this committee was replaced by a Fondo Rotatorio de Habilitación de Barrios (Rotating Fund for Barrio Improvements) and a División de Habilitación de Vivienda de EEPP (EEPP's Division for Home rehabilitation).

¹⁸ First created by the national government in 1959, Juntas were legally incorporated NGOs to channel public resources to barrios; each barrio had one; although by definition they should stay away from partisan politics, eventually these groups became the main mechanisms of patronage as they worked with individual politicians to attract resources to their neighborhoods; in turn, politicians demanded support in elections from the barrio.

enables municipalities to enact development plans making room of areas of self-construction within the confines of established land property laws and regulations. National law 1306 of 1980 requires that municipalities develop integrated development plans. In 1981, Medellín established a green ring (cordon verde) to control urban expansion; this decree reiterates local opposition to further informal settlement. In 1982, the nation creates Comité Nacional de Emergencias (National Committee for Emergencies) to coordinate a national effort to identify areas of risk and develop plans to deal with them.¹⁹ In December 1982, Medellín issues a housing amnesty to legitimize self-help informal housing construction. This measure frees owners of any penalties associated with self-construction while giving utility companies and the city the ability to engage in the necessary corrections and inventory these properties. In short, this period continues the emphasis on regulations but opens the doors for private experimentation and legalization of informal dwellings without offering a public solution. As a result, entities and individuals propose legitimization of the informal settlement process and development of public support structures to improve upon it.

1983-1990. This period opens with dramatic urban tragedies caused by quakes, mudslides, flooding, volcano eruptions and others. National and local governments respond with legislation to engage in efforts of prevention and relief. In Medellín, the office of planning estimated in 1986 that 87,000 people living in 15,000 dwellings in 48 neighborhoods were at a big risk from such natural disasters and insists on the need to engage in preemptive and relocation activities. Ensnung city council ordinances of 1986 and 1987 commit local government to work with communities around these and other problems of informal settlements, to limit city growth and to integrate settlements to the city fabric. They instruct the city to work to provide informal settlements with utility connections and basic infrastructures and to relocate high-risk settlements. Finally, they charge COVIDE with coordination of these efforts. Efforts include development of low-income formal barrios for relocation of settlers in high-risk areas. Interventions in areas of disaster emerge as the flagship, best-integrated programs in informal settlements and provide the foundations for PRIMED. The 1989 development plan for the city includes provisions for relocation and rehabilitation of informal settlements. Other decrees create institutions of disaster relief and prevention. The national government (1987-1990) engages in a policy of elimination of absolute poverty that includes systematic intervention in informal urban settlements. Multiple other efforts and ordinances are oriented to regularization of areas of self-construction and the recovery of high-risk areas. To sum up, this period commits the city to engage in partnerships with informal communities around minimum processes of regularization and to address areas of risk. At the same time, however, it continues insisting on efforts to prevent further growth of informal settlements.²⁰ It is also a period of isolated actions without a clear political policy. In Medellín, this period marks the recognition of a formal/integrated and an informal/segregated city.

1990-today. The national Urban Land Reform of 1989 entrusted local government with the responsibility of addressing these issues on the basis of mandatory local development plans. It mandates “integration of subnormal settlements to the formal city,” development of the proper inventories, and establishment of norms for the informal city, around improvements in the quality of life, environmental control and community participation. Particularly important in this period was the alleviation of social decomposition and urban safety. The main vehicle for this was the

¹⁹ Over the years, Medellín registered major tragedies caused by mudslides in 1938, 1961, 1962, 1973, 1979 and 1992. However, the city only started paying organized attention to this matter since the 1980s.

²⁰ This is most explicit in elements of the proposed 1989 Plan including the freezing of lands for potential urban expansion, reenactment and enforcement of the green zone surrounding the city, sanctions against violators and formalization of low-income neighborhoods.

Presidential Advisory Committee for Medellín and its Metropolitan (Consejería). This body was explicitly created “to coordinate the actions of national institutions serving the city and its metropolitan area and to facilitate mechanisms of agreement between national, state, metropolitan and urban authorities to unify objectives and carry out programs contributing to peace; promote fundraising from international entities; coordinate the search for solutions and give advise to the national government on social policy for the region” (Facultad de Arquitectura 1995: 27). In 1997, the national government creates INURBE to replace ICT and preside over programs of social interest housing. Particularly important here is the replacement of public housing for subsidies to households. Equivalent to a maximum of 15 minimum monthly salaries, these subsidies can be applied to home construction and improvements (including relocation and legalization of tenure for the case of relocation and programs of barrio regularization). Since 1992, local ordinances expand the urban perimeter of the city to include settlements complying with a minimum of infrastructures, facilities and conditions within the formal city.

All these enabling legislations provide the foundations for the design and implementation of PRIMED. As part of its efforts to improve the legitimacy of the state and address some of the causes of social decomposition, Consejería formulated this program in October 1982. PRIMED integrates the schemes developed for interventions in areas of tragedy and ecological risk with those oriented to the regularization of informal settlements in general. It adds housing improvements to come up with the most comprehensive intervention to date in informal barrios in the city. Lastly, it does this work in a framework of community development that PRIMED refined very significantly.