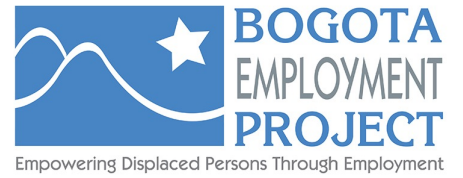


2018-2019 ANNUAL REPORT



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Bogota Employment Project (BEP) successfully completed another year of assisting displaced women in Bogota, Colombia. We provided over 15 months of transportation to 5 women who were able to maintain employment, arrive at work safely, and spend more time with their children.

Currently, Colombia continues to see a large influx of migrants from Venezuela and as of this report, the situation shows no signs of improving in the near future. To date, more than four million Venezuelans have migrated throughout the region. They are overwhelming health systems with previously eradicated diseases, such as polio and tuberculosis, due to the lack of health services in Venezuela. Our referring partner CEPCA reported that they have seen a significant (50%) increase in the number of persons arriving from Venezuela every week with no money and only the clothing on their backs. While in Bogota, I observed an increase in the number of homeless families with small children who were begging for food in the streets and sleeping under bridges. In my conversations with these families, they all said they were Venezuelans who had come to Bogota simply to survive as shortages of food, medicine and electricity exist throughout Venezuela. I also visited the border between Venezuela and Colombia in Cucuta where 30,000 plus people/ day are crossing back and forth from Venezuela to Colombia seeking health and nutrition assistance. What struck me was the number of migrants in wheelchairs, with disabilities and the elderly. These are real and tangible indicators that the situation in Venezuela has deteriorated to the point that the individuals with the least amount of resources and ability to travel are finally doing so out of desperation. I talked with one elderly man in his eighties who said he traveled two hours to stand in line at one of the feeding stations in Cucuta, “There’s nothing where I live; no food or medicine, so I come here where I can get one meal every day.”

Despite these challenges, the government of Colombia is attempting to provide food and health assistance to the migrants with the help of the international community while simultaneously navigating its own peace process. Due to the on-going peace process, the number of internally displaced persons has dropped significantly which has reduced the number of participant referrals we are receiving from our partner organizations. With this decrease in referrals, the Bogota Employment Project has decided to discontinue services beyond 2019. We recognize that as Colombia works towards a lasting peace, there will remain some armed actors or dissident groups who refuse to participate. However, over the long term, the trajectory for displacement is a hopeful one with an end in sight.

This will be our final report on the highlights, challenges and successes that we've accomplished over the past seven years of our activities in Colombia. We hope you find as much joy in recounting how far we've come with support from individuals like yourself who've believed in our mission from day one. THANK YOU again for your support over the past seven years.

Sincerely,

Robinson Cook

Executive Director

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Since 2012, the Bogota employment Project has assisted 52 participants through three mechanisms:

- Subsidized wages
- Micro loans
- Transportation assistance.

Subsidized Wages

In 2012, the first year of the project, we initially started by providing subsidized wages to participants. The participants worked for three months and were paid a monthly minimum wage (approximately \$200) plus transportation assistance (\$35/month). At the end of the three months the employer could then hire the participant as a “formal” employee. Of the 13 who participated, eight continued to work for the employer for at least three or more months.

Highlights

- Because most of the women were the head of a household with children, they almost always reported that with the new wages, their stress level and anxiety decreased significantly. One participant reported that they were able to now take their children to the doctor for routine checkups with the extra funding.
- Initially we thought that child care would be a problem. However, most of the participants reported that they left their children with family members or neighbors who would look after them until they came home.
- When we surveyed the participants before and after the three-month employment period, they all reported that they felt more confident about their ability to find employment. They also thought that they could take their experience and use it as a ladder to their next employment.

Challenges

- One of the challenges of implementing the subsidized wage portion was convincing employers to take a chance on the participants. Most employers expressed concerns around having a person who was under threat work in their business. They feared that someone would follow them to work to seek retribution. Employers also wanted more information about the potential employee’s background such as where they lived and who they associated with. Ana, the program coordinator had to spend an extra 2-3 hours per participant traveling to their home to see where they lived and what routes they would take to work in order satisfy the employer’s concerns.

- Another challenge was once the participant started working and earning income, their spouses or significant others would become jealous and, in some instances, abusive. This usually happened in cases where the male was not working which is typical if they don't have proof that they served the obligatory two years in the Colombian armed forces in order to work legally. We encountered a handful of instances where this was reported as a reason for missing work. Due to our limited capacity to handle domestic abuse, our coordinators referred them to external resources for assistance.
- In 2011 the Government of Colombia and the United States signed a free trade agreement that included labor rights legislation designed to decrease the amount of third party contracting (abused by employers to avoid paying benefits) and increase the amount of formal employment. One of the laws (Code 23 of the Colombian Labor Code)¹ in particular stipulates that employers are obligated to pay for a worker's social security, health care and formalize their employment in the past, if an employee complained, an employer could avoid any legal claims if they used third party hiring mechanism like ours. This legislation affected our program as it became impossible to convince an employer to take on a short-term employee for three months as an apprentice or intern unless they were absolutely 100% sure they want to hire this person at the end. By law, the BWSP was also required to formalize the employment of the participants as well as we were no longer seen as providing "paid work experiences" thus making it too expensive to have more than one participant at a time. After thoughtful consideration and internal debate, we decided to cease doing subsidized wage program.
- If the participants didn't continue their employment, we struggled to locate them three to six months afterwards because their telephone numbers would change or no longer be functioning. We estimate that about 85% of the participants were not connected to the internet, so following up via email or social media was also not an option. Even if they did have email or social media, they weren't regularly connected via mobile devices or personal computers where they could respond to our inquiries. Thus, follow up was difficult. In those instances where we were able to contact past participants we found that almost all of them were still employed in some form or another.

¹ Colombian Ministry of Labor, "Colombian Ministry of Labor Codes." Accessed March 4, 2014. <http://www.mintrabajo.gov.co/colabora>.

Alejandra is an internally displaced woman from Central Colombia. Alejandra fled her home after receiving threats against her life after she refused to comply with an extortion attempt by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). A member of the FARC came to the motorcycle shop where she had worked as a sales representative for seven years and told her to deliver seven motorcycles the next day. Alejandra went to the police to report the extortion. Two days later, four armed men showed up at her father's house demanding to know her whereabouts. Her father said he did not know. The men left, but waited for her to arrive at her residence only a few kilometers from her father's house. Alejandra was alerted by her aunt that the men were waiting for her. Alejandra used a back road to reach her father's house, grabbed a few personal items and left on a motorcycle with her 16-year-old daughter, leaving her two small children behind with other family members. They drove eight hours straight to Southern Bogota where she now resides.



Alejandra is now working at Stromboli Deep Dish Pizza where she hopes to strengthen her customer service and administrative skills. She said "I can't go back ever. I am starting over and making a new life for myself and my family here in Bogota." While she doesn't think her two small children are in danger, she is working diligently to bring them to Bogota once and for all by the end of the year. "I want to have my entire family reunited again."



Sandra worked with Sinergia, a wellness center, in Bogota.

Sandra is 18 years old and from the state of Risaralda, Colombia. She moved to Bogota after her family received threats from local paramilitary groups. In Risaralda, Sandra worked on her family farm until the paramilitary took their land and her family was told to, "leave or die." Sandra's family left four days later on a bus to Bogota where they have been ever since. Sandra hopes to one day become a veterinarian.

Micro Loans

In the early days of the Bogota Employment Project, some of the referring organizations who we worked with requested that we make micro-loans to participants with small businesses. We made four low interest rate loans ranging from \$70 up to \$500. Three out of the four loans were repaid on time and with interest. In the one case that was not fully repaid, the participant (a licensed street vendor) repaid 60% of the loan. Her reason for defaulting was due to family illness that took her away from her daily duties limiting her ability to generate enough income. She eventually closed down her stall.

Highlights

- One of the highlights of the micro loan program is that three of the four businesses are still functioning four years after completing their loans with us. I regularly used to stop at Mary Buitrago's stall in downtown Bogota when I would visit and she is still selling traditional dolls that her and her husband (both victims of landmines) make in their home workshop.

Challenges

- While the loans were a great way to satisfy our referring partner's requests, we discovered that we did not have the capacity or expertise to administer small loans (collection and spending payment reminders). Given that participants typically were not connected to the web or used to paying back conventional credit, our coordinator had to call to remind them that a payment was due and then had to physically go and meet the participant to collect the payment. This was problematic given the traffic congestion in Bogota, it didn't make sense to spend \$10 on transportation to pick up a \$20 payment. We were also putting our Coordinator at risk if they were going to pick up larger amounts (over \$100) in a public location.



Vilma Estela (52) is a displaced woman from Apartador, Antioquio whose son is a victim of a landmine which he stepped on. The explosion left him nearly blind.

Vilma has been making handicrafts for the past two years out of her home in Southern Bogota. Her crafts focus on cooking tools such as oven-mitts and potholders. She is looking to expand her business exponentially. She has a business partner and a vendor who is willing to purchase the articles she makes.

Transportation Assistance

Because of a change to the labor laws in Colombia that outlawed third party hiring, we began providing displaced women with transportation assistance for three months. The idea for subsidized transportation assistance is to help alleviate the burden of transportation costs during their first three months of employment and help launch them successfully into longer term (six + months) employment.

Highlights

- Of the 35 participants who enrolled in the program, 90% reported that they were able take their children to doctor visits and other errands because they could work less hours without having to worry about making the time to pay for transportation.
- Participants also reported that they were less susceptible to robberies and theft because they could now afford to take formal transportation verses the informal buses where they were more vulnerable to crime.
- For the last two years of the project, we delegated the case management (enrollment, participant stories and photos) to the partners. At the beginning of each quarter, we gave them enough money to enroll four to six participants which allowed us to streamline our coordination and services. We would then meet with our partners at the beginning of each quarter to learn about the demand for participation and fund them according to their needs (and also verify that the services had been provided). This change made more sense because the partners maintained more frequent contact with the participants since they came to their locations weekly for training.
- A participant recounted to us that “for the first time in several years, I was able to take a day off from working and spend it with my daughter without worrying about where I would make up the money for taking time off.”

Challenges

- We found that the transportation assistance is a great source of temporary financial relief, but that when we followed up with participants there was no guarantee that they had generated long-term savings. A solution to this problem would be to extend the assistance to six months which would reduce the number of persons we could serve. We did have requests from participants to extend benefit which we did in cases where they were making less income than the monthly minimum wage. However, we typically only extended the benefits for one month due to our limited resources and to allow us to serve more participants.

- Our coordinator had a difficult time following up with participants to administer the second and third months of assistance because they often times didn't have enough minutes on their phone to receive a call. Our coordinator started adding minutes to their phones so she could call them and arrange a time and place to meet. There were many cases where the person would not answer immediately and those minutes might be used by another caller. Also, because they were not regularly connected to the internet, we had no other means of communicating once their phone # changed or ran out of minutes.



Mora is a Venezuelan who recently came to Bogota after fleeing what she described as a horrible crisis in Caracas. The violence and constant gun-fire near her home from the gangs who controlled the neighborhood, along with the lack of food and medical services, made staying there impossible. In November of 2017 she crossed into Colombian via the city of Cucuta where she stayed for a few days before heading to Bogota. In Bogota she reunited with her sister and her two small children and began attending classes to become a manicurist.

Mora is now working as a manicurist in another part of the city. She hopes that the situation in Venezuela improves soon so that she and her family can return to their home. Until then, she plans to continue to work and contribute to her family's well-being.



Mariana fled Tumaco in Western Colombia because of threats from the Paramilitaries who wanted her family's farm. She first went to Popoyan where she connected with her sister who helped her open a small restaurant selling lunch. The restaurant didn't generate enough income to support herself and her three teenage children, so they closed it and the family moved to Bogota. Once in Bogota, she started taking classes to learn about running a small business with the hopes of one day opening another restaurant in the future.

Currently she commutes an hour each way to work as a street vendor selling fruit in front of [SENA](#) (The National Learning Center) in Northern Bogota. SENA is also where entrepreneurs in Bogota go to register their businesses. She hopes that her presence in front

of SENA will lead to conversations with other business people who might be interested in investing in her next attempt to open another restaurant.



Silvia fled her home in Western Colombia after receiving threats from the FARC because her community is located in an area that they wanted control over. She and her four children first went to Cali before making their way to Bogota.

Silvia is a single mother of four teenagers (two boys and two girls) who works as a housekeeper, but is now enrolled in beauty school. She commutes for 60 minutes each way on the local and informal buses so that she can reach work by 7:00AM. In the afternoons and evenings, she attends school with the hope that soon she'll be able to fully support herself and her children as a hair stylist.



It was 3:00AM when a small group of armed men from the *National Liberation Army* ([ELN](#)) came to the farm where Jane lived with her two daughters, an uncle and a cousin. The men said Jane and her family had eight hours to leave and warned them not to tell the local authorities or they would hurt them. Jane's uncle and cousin refused to leave so when the men returned the next day, they marched the two men into the woods and held them captive while they raped Jane and a neighbor. Jane immediately fled with her two daughters to Bogota where they moved in with her mother-in-law.

Jane is now working as a caregiver and is studying to become a nursing assistant. She hopes that with the implementation of the Peace Agreement, she and her daughters can return to their farm soon, restart their lives

again and begin searching for her husband who was [disappeared](#) by the ELN several months before. She is not sure what happened to her husband, but fears the worst and said "he was a good man and father." For now, she is simply working to make sure her daughters can finish school and have enough to eat each day. Jane says the BEP's assistance will give her some breathing room for the first time in a long time.



Nathalie lived in Cartagena until a few years ago with her mother, two brothers and two teenage daughters. The neighborhood they lived in was categorized as an informal zone that was never officially part of the city's planning process. Over time hundreds of families built homes and began to pressure the city to provide basic utilities and sanitation services to the area. Nathalie's mother was one of the community leaders who took a visible and active role in advocating for the community's needs. As they became more organized in their efforts, they began to be harassed and threatened with violence by a local right-wing paramilitary group. One afternoon, the paramilitary group threatened to kidnap Nathalie's daughter if her mother didn't stop her activities and told her that if she reported the threats to the police, they will harm her entire family. Fearing for her life, Nathalie immediately fled with her two daughters to Bogota.

Nathalie now cleans homes to support her daughters so they can finish school. Working full-time has been a struggle for Nathalie because three men broke into her house looking for money. The robbers beat her so badly with a gun that they broke her jaw, nasal bones and several teeth causing difficulty breathing. She hasn't been able to seek the proper long-term care needed to fix her injuries because the insurance won't cover the surgeries.

Despite all of the difficulties she faces, Nathalie says, "I'm happy every day that I can work and support my daughters." Her eldest daughter has finished high school and the younger will graduate soon. Nathalie feels this is progress since she wasn't able to finish high school. When her second daughter finishes high school, Nathalie plans to return to school to get her diploma so she can secure more stable employment and move on to a better paying job and fix her injuries.

Demographics

3

average number of children per participant

80%

had less than a high school degree

90%

reported that they had some sort of medical condition related to their trauma

38

average age of participants

All stated that they simply wanted to make a better life for their family, especially their children.

100%

reported saving time by being able to use the formal bus system to get to work

50%

reported that there was not enough food in the house each week to feed themselves and their children

90%

reported having been the victim of a robbery or theft during their transit to and from work

Partners

Centro de Atencion al Migrante (CAMIG) Migration Attention Center

CAMIG provides case management and basic needs assistance to internally displaced persons in Bogota. They are affiliated with the Archdiocese of Bogota, Colombia.

Centro Pastoral y de Capacitacion (CEPCA) The Pastoral Training Center

The Pastoral Training Center provides trainings such as textiles, baking and small business entrepreneurship classes to displaced women.

Campaña Colombiana Contra Minas Anti-Personal - Colombian Campaign Against Landmines (CCAL)

CCAL raises awareness and helps victims and their families rebuild their lives after being injured by a land mine. Many of the victims of landmines have also suffered some form of displacement.

The National Victim's Board, an Afro-Colombian led organization that is focused on assisting displaced Afro-Colombian who reside in Bogota with securing basic needs such as housing, employment and nutrition.

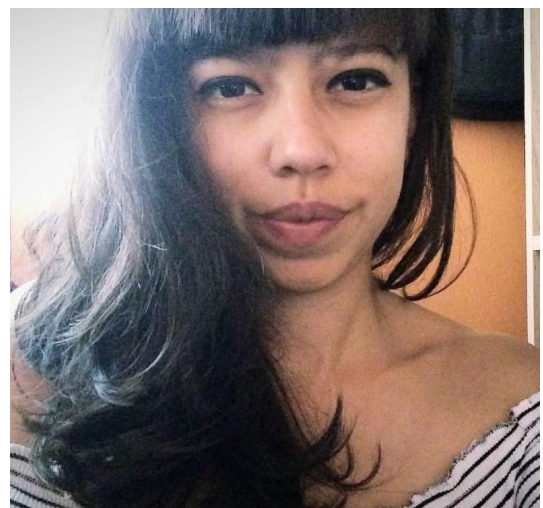
Staff

Ana Maria Villa Navas worked with the organization from 2012 - 2018. Ana successfully met with and recruited participants, conducted outreach to local organizations and maintained relationships with all of our partners in Colombia. Ana also spent countless hours meeting with each of the participants recording their stories and making referrals to external resources. When the Bogota Wage Subsidy Project shut down, she helped us pivot to providing the transportation assistance. When I left Bogota, she picked up the leadership of the organization for the past six years by serving as our official representative and decision maker

and handled all aspects of the programming. Ana secured the trust and strengthened our relationship with the participants and implementing partners. The organization would not have survived without the successful efforts of Ana. THANK YOU to Ana for her hard work and dedication to the Bogota Employment Project.



Paola Palacios joined the Bogota Employment project in 2018. Paola was a student at the National University in Bogota Colombia where she received her bachelor degree in International relations. Paola also served in a representational role and maintained relationships with our partners and carried on the work of Ana Maria Navas. THANK YOU, PAOLA



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2018-2019 Organization Budget

REVENUE

Individuals Donations	\$1,818
Carryover	\$601
Total Revenue	\$2,419

EXPENSES

Salaries	\$769
Client Transportation	\$730
Staff Travel	\$342
Banking Fees	\$80
Marketing and Website	\$498
Total Expenses	\$2,419

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