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Chapter Title: Comment on "Do Conflicts Create Poverty Traps? Asset Losses and Recovery for Displaced Households in Colombia"

Chapter Authors: Martín González-Rozada

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**Comment** Martín González-Rozada

The chapter analyzes the determinants of asset losses due to the internal conflict in Colombia. In particular it focuses on understanding the magnitude of household's asset losses caused by forced displacement by armed groups and the dynamics that eventually helped displaced households to recover their productive ability and asset base. Since there is evidence that after these kinds of conflicts end criminal and illegal activities emerge, establishing how the asset losses occur during internal conflicts and understanding the process of asset accumulation post-conflicts will help to design public action aimed at preventing an increase in criminal violence. The study uses both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to achieve these goals.

The chapter does a very good job in describing the losses stemming from forced displacement and the qualitative methodology used is very well suited for this. This methodology is also used to identify the determinants of asset losses and asset accumulation. On the other hand, the quantitative methodology used to quantify the determinants of asset losses and asset accumulation in the new places deserves a few comments.

The quantitative analysis is based on a constructed sample of displaced households' beneficiaries of income-generating programs (treatment group) and displaced households' nonbeneficiaries of such programs (control group). Even when the authors say that the control group is representative of the displaced population at large there are reasons to think it could be a strong assumption. The control group sample is selected using another sample as a sampling frame (the RUT system). The RUT system covers only 150,000 people of the more than 2.5 million people affected by forced displacement (as reported in the chapter). The RUT system is not representative of the displaced population; however, the design of the control sample is based on it. The RUT system is taken as a sampling frame. From this system, through a stratified sampling procedure, authors select a group of RUT households and add another group of similar size (non-RUT displaced households) obtained from neighborhood households to the RUT households selected in the stratification process. It seems that the whole representativeness of the control group sample depends on the RUT system having all the characteristics of displaced population in Colombia. This feature is not trivial since to be listed in the RUT system the displaced households had to request assistance in a parish of the Catholic Church, or they are included by censuses conducted by the Catholic Church (not in all municipalities). The fact that at most about 6 percent of the displaced people requested assistance from a parish of the Catholic Church seems to indicate

that probably displaced people not listed in the RUT system have dissimilar characteristics. Given the size difference between those displaced people listed and not listed in the RUT system and the potential differences in the characteristics of both groups, one should expect the non-RUT households to be of a larger size than the RUT households. All these features make it difficult to believe that the control group sample is representative of the displaced population. Nevertheless, the chapter points out that there exists “a recent survey representative of the displaced population” that shows similar observable socioeconomic characteristics to those founded in the chapter. I think it should be useful, as a way to improve the robustness of the important results already founded in the chapter, if the authors can address in more detail the aforementioned concerns.