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# COLOMBIA COUNTRY PROFILE

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) supports Colombian efforts to transition out of conflict towards a sustainable and inclusive peace.

## OUR WORK

Colombia is not a typical aid recipient and USAID’s commitment stems from the instability and strife associated with the country’s 50-year civil conflict. Colombia’s status as a steadily growing middle-income country masks severe inequities. In reality, there are two Colombias: a dynamic and sophisticated Colombia in a half-dozen urban centers, such as Bogota and Medellin, and a poor, conflictive and neglected rural Colombia where USAID focuses its efforts.

The transition towards peace demands that Colombia address this duality which lies at the center of the conflict and fuels an illicit rural economy of drug trafficking, extortion, illegal mining, and other maladies. The Government of Colombia (GOC) is actively working in these areas to redress the historic neglect of rural Colombia by increasing citizen security; expanding GOC institutions, basic public services, and infrastructure; increasing public and private investment; and promoting reconciliation among the conflict’s victims and perpetrators. While donor contributions amount to 0.6 percent of GDP, Colombia looks to USAID – the country’s largest bilateral donor – to strengthen its capacity to address development challenges. Thus, from 2014-2018 USAID will continue to be an important partner in Colombia with four overall objectives:

### OBJECTIVE I: INCREASE PRESENCE OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Strengthening the presence and performance of national and sub-national institutions in far-flung rural areas is essential to fill the space currently occupied by illegal armed groups and to effectively implement the peace agreement. GOC institutions face challenges to consistently guarantee the democratic rights of citizens, administer justice impartially and transparently, invest public resources effectively and

expeditiously, and deliver citizen-prioritized services. USAID therefore supports Colombian efforts to increase institutional presence, foster a culture of respect for human rights, promote access to justice, increase public investment, and provide services to historically underserved and conflictive rural areas.

One of the most basic functions of any state is to protect the rights of citizens and ensure access to justice. In Colombia's recent past, human rights violations (e.g., massacres, assassinations, kidnappings, threats) have occurred with some significance, especially in rural areas. While Colombia has improved human rights trends over the past 10 years, there is still more to be done. For this reason, USAID coordinates closely with GOC institutions to prevent human rights violations, protect those under threat, investigate when abuses occur, strengthen the ability of citizens to submit complaints, and defend the rights of minority groups. In addition, USAID supports GOC initiatives that expand access to justice by promoting alternative dispute resolution mechanisms and justice houses, as well as legal and other services for sexual violence victims.

Expanding government services to reach citizens, especially marginalized populations in historically neglected areas, is a major challenge. To this end, USAID supports efforts to restructure public investment toward traditionally marginalized areas. USAID has worked with Colombian officials to develop policies and programs that build state presence in areas recently stabilized by Colombia's security forces. For example, USAID is supporting the GOC to implement a multi-billion dollar royalties system that re-directs revenue generated by income from the country's natural resource wealth to underserved areas. USAID is also supporting greater collaboration between national, departmental and municipal governments to catalyze significant resources for strategic investments in conflictive areas. In carrying this out, USAID brings together local civil society organizations, traditional authorities, public officials and the private sector to strengthen local governments' capacity to provide citizen-prioritized services. Moreover, USAID increases transparency and reduces corruption by supporting national and local authorities, as well as civil society organizations.

## **OBJECTIVE 2: PROMOTE RECONCILIATION FOR VULNERABLE POPULATIONS**

Fifty years of conflict and violence have created a tragic legacy of nearly eight million victims, including over six million Colombians displaced from their communities and land. A critical step towards reconciliation was achieved in 2011 with the passage of Colombia's Victims and Land Restitution Law. This landmark legislation addresses the needs of conflict victims through comprehensive reparations, land restitution, truth-telling, and psychosocial support. USAID supports this transformative process by building the capacity of the GOC's Victims Unit as well as of other key entities charged with delivering services, reparations, and transitional justice to victims, as mandated by Colombian law. USAID also supports civil society organizations that protect victims' rights.

USAID is advancing reconciliation in Colombia by changing citizens' perceptions and attitudes affected by the internal armed conflict. USAID supports reconciliation efforts through a variety of strategies including truth-telling; strengthening citizens' awareness about truth and reconciliation; and, building public-private partnerships to advance reconciliation. As an example, truth-telling offers victims a sense of closure and raises societal awareness of the pain of the conflict, helping ensure that history doesn't repeat itself. USAID is supporting the Center of Historical Memory to document the impacts of the conflict and strengthen society's commitment to ensuring Colombia does not return to a state of violence.

Ethnic communities represent up to one quarter of Colombia's population and have disproportionately suffered from the conflict. USAID partners with the GOC, civil society, and the private sector to strengthen the socio-economic inclusion of ethnic communities. USAID strengthens institutions and civil society, enhances economic opportunities, raises awareness of the importance of ethnic diversity, and strengthens governance capacity for ethnic communities. Assistance has resulted in 11,154 persons gaining

formal jobs in over 1,500 private sector companies; the formalization of more than 250,000 hectares of collective lands; a 19 percent increase in estimated income of Afro-Colombian and indigenous families in priority areas; and the leveraging of \$17.4 million through public-private alliances.

To break down barriers that hinder access to education and job opportunities, USAID supports English-language and leadership training as well as graduate education opportunities for emerging Afro-Colombian and Indigenous leaders. Through USAID support, 35 leaders have conducted their graduate studies in high-ranking US universities while 125 undergraduate students have benefited from English language and leadership training in Barranquilla, Cali, Cartagena, Medellin and Quibdó.

USAID also promotes the reintegration of ex-combatants back into society, as well as the rehabilitation of former child soldiers. Since 2006, USAID has supported the Colombian Agency for Reintegration (ACR) in the successful reintegration of demobilized or deserted ex-combatants from illegal armed groups. This includes provision of psychosocial services, formal education, vocational training, income generation assistance, and health care support. With USAID assistance, more than 15,000 ex-combatants have successfully completed the reintegration process.

USAID also supports the Colombian institutions in responding to the basic needs (health, education, security, stable family environment) of disengaged child soldiers while strengthening the GOC's prevention of recruitment activities and campaigns. Since 2001, USAID's assistance has helped the Colombian government attend to almost 6,000 disengaged children and has reached almost 250,000 at-risk children in recruitment prevention activities. In addition, a USAID-supported prevention strategy was recently rolled out in 30 municipalities classified as high risk by the GOC, and USAID continues preventing recruitment by increasing economic and education opportunities as well as monitoring at risk children and youth.

In addition, USAID supports women's efforts to prevent gender-based violence while incorporating a gender approach throughout its programming. USAID also supports the inclusion of people with disabilities through sports, training, employment opportunities, and rehabilitation centers.

### **OBJECTIVE 3: IMPROVE CONDITIONS FOR INCLUSIVE RURAL ECONOMIC GROWTH**

Effectively transitioning towards a sustainable and inclusive peace requires that Colombia address long standing socio-economic inequities while improving the licit rural economy. Although Colombia's GDP per capita grew by 29 percent between 2010 and 2015, rural areas, especially those devastated by conflict, have not fully shared in this prosperity. And although the percentage of rural citizens living below the poverty line (US \$1.90/day) decreased by 19 percent over this same period, in 2015 roughly 40 percent of rural Colombians still lived in extreme poverty.

Improving livelihoods by encouraging a diversified rural economy is a long-term and challenging endeavor, one that will take at least a generation and extraordinary GOC and private sector commitment. Over the next five years, USAID is committed to helping the GOC create the preconditions for a vibrant rural economy with actions in four broad areas.

First, USAID is spurring greater public and private investment in the rural sector. For example, USAID is strengthening the capacity of local governments and community groups to advocate for and manage Colombian public funds for productive infrastructure projects, including roads. Through public-private partnerships that connect private firms with small producers and ethnic communities, USAID assists the rural population to access higher paying markets for local products.

Second, USAID is ensuring that producer associations, a lynchpin of the rural economy, are better able to provide services and benefits to their members (e.g., smallholder farmers). For example, USAID supports

producer associations in the coffee, cacao and rubber sectors by helping them find markets and negotiate with large buyers. As these producer associations grow, they are also increasingly able to provide extension services to members, helping farmers escape poverty and the trap of illicit crop production. USAID efforts build the capacity and sustainability of such associations.

Third, USAID increases financial inclusion in Colombia's rural economy. By improving rural financial services, USAID is promoting the inclusion of those that have historically been excluded from accessing financial resources, a precondition for making productivity-enhancing investments. In addition, USAID has helped establish several investment funds that are focused on financing high-potential firms in Colombia's rural economic sector. Financial inclusion is also being promoted through the Development Credit Authority (DCA) mechanism, by which USAID is incentivizing financial institutions to expand their operations into rural, conflict-affected.

Finally, USAID is working through key GOC institutions to return land to its rightful owners and speed the granting of land titles, including collective titles of indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. USAID's assistance is helping to modernize the cadaster system, permitting the GOC to maintain accurate land ownership and titling information, a prerequisite to guaranteeing citizen's property rights.

#### **OBJECTIVE 4: STRENGTHEN ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCY AND LOW-EMISSIONS DEVELOPMENT**

Sustainable environmental management is critical to protecting Colombia's economic future. Colombia is one of the most biodiverse countries in the world, and its natural systems provide water and energy that contribute to economic productivity. For example, 30 percent of Colombia's water comes from the country's fragile *paramo* ecosystem. In addition, approximately 40 percent of Colombia's territory is covered with natural forest, giving the country tremendous capacity to store carbon and capture significant development investment from the nascent carbon market. USAID activities focus on improving natural resource management, including forest and watershed management, to reduce threats to biodiversity. USAID efforts strengthen the capacity of GOC institutions to protect biodiversity, foster stakeholder participation in community-based conservation, and introduce best environmental practices, especially for mining and fisheries, among other productive systems.

The failure of the Colombian state to control vast swaths of resource-rich Amazonian forest, inter-Andean valleys, and Pacific lowlands has been a driver of conflict. Without the state engaged in sound environmental management, illegal armed groups are able to exert control in these areas, the majority of which are located in Afro-Colombian and indigenous territories. Improved GOC capacity to administer these biodiverse areas will reduce their use for illicit purposes (e.g. illegal gold mining).

Colombia's economic future also hinges on reducing vulnerability to changing climate patterns. The 2010-2011 flooding in the Magdalena watershed displaced approximately two million people and caused \$2.6 billion in damage.

USAID assists Colombia to reduce poverty while protecting the environment. For example, USAID supports GOC efforts to create incentives for firms and public sector entities to reduce their overall level of carbon emissions, while contributing to improved local livelihoods. USAID also builds resilience to anticipated climate impacts by diversifying local economies and improving water management.