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The Victims' Unit: Strategic Vision and Institutional Capacity for Reconciliation.



President Santos addressing attendees at the Victims Forum

Foto: <http://www.eluniversal.com.co/cartagena/nacional/gobierno-espera-reparar-260-mil-victimas-en-2013-122122>

"We are tired of being fearful and we want to live with happiness and hope, and that joy and hope will be restored if we assist our victims, and heal their wounds by saying yes to peace and reconciliation."

President Juan Manuel Santos

*Victims Forum
June 2013, Bogotá Colombia*

The most recent statistics reveal that 11.5% of the country's 47 million citizens have suffered directly from the internal armed conflict. Five and a half million victims have been recognized by the State. "Is Colombia up to the task?"^[1]: This was the question posed recently by *Semana*, the most influential weekly magazine in the country, in an article that explained how providing reparations to such a large number of people will severely test the capacity of the country's public institutions that are responsible for this effort, and constitutes a considerable challenge for the national government, mayors and governors, all the more since this task has to be carried out in the midst of the country's armed confrontation.

The reparation of victims of the Colombian conflict has enormous goals to be fulfilled during the next 10 years: the restitution of more than three million seized or abandoned hectares of land, the provision of economic reparations to one million victims, the safe return of displaced persons to their homes, and, at the same time, the development of reparation plans that will offer victims the possibility of enjoying sustainable livelihoods and overcoming poverty. To meet these challenges, the country now has laws that guarantee the rights of victims, and public policies, regulation and state institutions that have been developed to provide comprehensive reparations to victims. The USAID Public Policy Program has been committed to this task, which has an estimated cost of USD \$30 billion, for the past three years.

In fact, since 2010, the **USAID Public Policy Program** has supported the Government of Colombia (GOC) in various ways. It provided key inputs for the Land Restitution chapter of the Victims' Law that was presented to the Congress, and technical assistance for the issuance of the decrees that established the Department of Social Prosperity, the Victims' Unit (JARIV), the Land Restitution Unit and the Center for Historical Memory, which are responsible for implementing the Victims' Law. The Program also worked with the GOC on the development of the *National Plan for Victims' Assistance and Comprehensive Reparations (PNARIV)*,

^[1] <http://www.semana.com/Especiales/proyectovictimas/index.html>

which established the routes for the provision of individual and collective assistance to victims and defined applicable goals and indicators. In addition, the Program provided technical assistance for the successful operation of the Victims' Unit by designing its organizational structure, developing its processes and procedures, establishing its budgetary needs and supporting the recruitment of its staff. The Program also supported the creation of the 27 Regional Victims' Attention Centers and the operation of the 20 Territorial Directorates of this Unit.

The results are striking. In a little more than a year of operation, the Victims' Unit, which is responsible for coordinating the activities of more than 47 agencies that make up the National System for Victims' Assistance and Comprehensive Reparations (SNARIV), executes an annual budget of USD \$825 million, has delivered administrative reparations for more than 157,000 cases, has developed more than 48,000 Individual Reparations Plans, and, in 2013 alone, has responded to almost 235,000 requests for humanitarian assistance totaling USD \$108 million. In fact, today more than 5,700 public officials work in the agencies that comprise the SNARIV in order to provide comprehensive assistance to victims of the violence.

During this year, one of the Program's major efforts has been directed at consolidating the improvements achieved in the management practices and strategic planning of the Victims' Unit. The most recent achievement was the definition of the Unit's Strategic Map, based on a new management-by-results model, which was constructed with the participation of the members of the National Directorate and its territorial teams. This Strategic Map has strengthened the Unit, enabling it to establish its strategic objectives, reorganize its goals, and define the tactics and operations of its different levels on the basis of these objectives. In this way, the Unit's budgeting and administrative support processes have been made fully consistent with its vision and mission.

The **USAID Public Policy Program** also developed an extensive coaching process aimed at improving the management capacities of the Unit's executive team by improving its planning, time management and assertive communication skills. Consequently, the Victims' Unit now has much more solid management tools and well-appropriated planning processes that function as the axis of a new systematic and organized management model that is oriented towards the achievement of the results that have been planned for the current year.

Another notable result was the strengthening of the SNARIV, which is coordinated by the Unit, through the inclusion of five new public entities, bringing the total number of the System's members to 47, in order to improve the assistance and institutional offer provided to victims. Additionally, the Program provided technical assistance for the evaluation of the results of the SNARIV's first year of operation by analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of its Subcommittees and providing the Technical Secretariat with key recommendations for improving its operations. Thus, the Program contributed significantly to ensuring that the SNARIV has the capacity required to align the different tasks that its component entities must complete in order to provide a comprehensive offer of services in the areas of health, work, education, housing, land restitution and access to justice.

"This year we expect to deliver reparations to at least 260,000 victims", announced President Santos on June 5th during the most recent Victims Forum that was held to analyze the situation of victims of the conflict. In the meantime, the *Semana Magazine's* analysis concludes that the greatest challenge that the Victims' Law now faces is to achieve the recognition that all Colombians, not just the victims, are responsible for restoring the conditions that will enable Colombia to live in peace.