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HUMAN RIGHTS COMPASS

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*Change agents training women in remote Quibdó neighborhoods in their rights
Photo Credit: Red Departamental de Mujeres Chocoanas*

Empowering GBV Victims in Quibdó

In Quibdó, Chocó, a growing number of women victims of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) have begun to take back their power and voices for the first time. Against a historical backdrop of silence, fear, and sense of hopelessness, USAID's HRP III has supported initiatives over the past year targeting one of the most pervasive, invisible and unspoken crises impacting women and girls in this region. In an area where poverty index rates reach 64% and where underreporting of sexual or intrafamilial violence against women is estimated to be approximately 75%, the odds for women and girls to develop and thrive in an environment free from violence are rather bleak. Colombia's brutal 50-year internal conflict has only had a magnifying effect on the repression of women and girl in many cases transforming them into weapons of war.

Teaming up with the local women's organization, *Red Departamental de Mujeres Chocoanas* in June 2013, 28 women have received training in advocacy skills and Law 1257, a Colombian law passed in 2008 focused on the prevention of and response to violence and discrimination against women. In the first six months, these newly trained agents of change have then gone on to train yet another 600 women throughout their neighborhoods of Quibdó. Now, as part of a community support network, they are able to provide guidance on reporting, available

services, and perhaps most importantly represent a safe place for victims to turn to and be heard.

Manuela Bonilla, one of the 28 agents of change in Quibdó, proudly claims, "The program with USAID and the *Red* changed my way of thinking and self-perception as a woman. Before, I never left the house, I didn't speak in public, I didn't know the State had an obligation to care for my rights and that I had a responsibility to demand them. Today I have a [newfound] freedom of expression! ...I now speak in my community... and now I know that I can do something to improve the situation of families and women impacted by violence".

HRP III's institutional support strategy has also had resounding impacts. Since July 2013, Women Victims' Center in partnership with the Ombudsman's Office, the HRP III-hired lawyer and psychologist gender-focused team has provided immediate services to 92 women victims of violence so far. Through its legal and psychosocial support, the *dupla* team has accompanied women in processing their cases before other institutions including that Attorney General's Office, Family Commissary as well as seeking health services. With new tools, women from Quibdó are forging new paths of self-empowerment and breaking down the walls of silence on SGBV.

The opinions expressed by the author may not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government

Cultivating an Intelligence Community Mindful of Human Rights

Over the last year, USAID's HRP III has supported Colombia's Inspector General's Office (IGO) in improving oversight of the several government agencies carrying out intelligence and counterintelligence duties, in particular, over their handling of intelligence and counterintelligence files. However, unlike any other government project, this initiative has reached out across borders, to Guatemala and Spain, and back in a unique and collaborative effort focused on best practices of intelligence file management that both protect sensitive information and prioritize the rights of its citizens.

In late 2011, an end of an era was announced when President Santos declared Colombia's Administrative Department of Security, or *DAS*, defunct. Hallmarked by corruption and scandal linking high-ranking Colombian officials and politicians, the agency garnered national and international attention as the use of illegal surveillance tactics including illegal wiretapping, or *chuzadas*, involving death threats came to light targeting international and national human rights defenders, union leaders, journalists, judges, political opposition leaders, and virtually anyone they deemed an "enemy" of the State. The information leaked leading to the *DAS*'s dissolution unveiled gaping oversights and weaknesses regarding the government's administration of, not only intelligence activities, but moreover the protection of its citizen's fundamental rights and liberties.

In an effort to restore public faith and strengthen its institutional integrity, the government passed, for the first time ever in Colombia's history, definitive legislation in 2011 and again in 2013 regarding intelligence and counterintelligence jurisdiction and administration. Therefore, the management of intelligence files, particularly the purging of files that once targeted citizens indiscriminately, became a priority under the law. With sixty years' worth of archives and intelligence information collected from across several agencies, the Colombian government's task goes beyond just organizing and defining the management of its intelligence archives. Many of Colombia's intelligence files amount to piles of documentation which remain to be deciphered and analyzed as often the information is encrypted or found in an unintelligible form. The IGO's role as leader of the commission to define the management of intelligence files places it in a unique position to provide sound recommendations on this matter.

To jump start the process, HRP III worked with the IGO to organize an international study tour involving countries with vast experience in archives and intelligence manage-

ment. Guatemala and Spain were carefully chosen for their diverse and rich historical contexts that offer a wide range of models for Colombia to learn from in understanding the challenges in intelligence file management and in customizing their own system.



Inspector General, Alejandro Ordoñez, addresses International Dialogue
Photo Credit: IGO

At an international dialogue supported by HRP III in March 2014, these international counterparts joined the IGO, civil society, and government institutions in charge of intelligence and counterintelligence in Bogotá to regroup on lessons learned and exchange perspectives. Reflecting on Colombia's road ahead with regard to its handling of intelligence files and activities, Velia Elisa Murales, Guatemala's historical archivist expert, commented, "Colombia already has the legal structure in place which includes the establishment of an inter-institutional commission to guide this process. However, moving forward, political will be needed to drive such an endeavor forward... the political will to coordinate efforts, to build consensus and provide a long-term vision towards a democracy that is accessible to its citizens."

Meanwhile, Spain's National Intelligence Advisor, Maria Ángeles López, reminded stakeholders that consideration of archive management must be laid out in the context of transparency, public information access, and matters of national security. This fine balance can be established and guided by national, international and constitutional norms.

As Colombia turns a new page in its history to improve its intelligence activities, HRP III continues to support gateway opportunities informing Colombia's process in a manner that will foster a culture of the respect for human rights. •

Legal Clinic Advancing Access to Rights for Victims



*Caseworkers assisting victims at legal clinic.
Photo Credit: Universidad de Cartagena*

In perhaps one of the most conflict-affected regions of Colombia, USAID's HRP III has begun to pave paths of access responding to needs of a widespread victim population who otherwise never knew they had rights or recourses. In the past few decades the accounts from victims that have emerged from the Montes de Maria region of Colombia detail one of the most brutally impacted communities by conflict, which largely consist of campesinos and indigenous populations. Subjected to terror tactics used against the civilian population such as forced recruitment, forced displacement, murder, disappearances, torture, massacres, threats, among others, communities have braved some of the highest levels of human rights violations characterizing Colombia's conflict. It is also across this tainted landscape that since December 2013 HRP III grantee *Universidad de Cartagena* inaugurated its satellite legal clinic providing legal and psychosocial support to over 380 victim cases.

Garnering a solid reputation for efficient and reliable action and follow-up of victims' cases, the legal clinic has rapidly become synonymous as a center for guidance, advice, support, and hope for this largely isolated population. As part of its outreach strategy to surrounding remote communities, the legal clinic carried out a mobile day of services to the nearby municipality of San Jacinto which successfully registered 58 cases of 61 community members in that one-day session alone. With support of local institutions such as the Ombudsman's Office, personería, and local victims' round tables, word is spreading on the availability of this valuable and alternative community resource.

Issues brought to the legal clinic case workers include a range of the most pressing and current needs including: accessing the Victims' Unit Registry, access to income

generation programs, humanitarian assistance, and a rising number of land restitution issue-related cases. The latter comes mainly from *campesinos* that are also conflict victims demonstrating the complexities case workers assess on a daily basis. Through positive advocacy efforts, the municipal Victims' Unit came to see a more comprehensive perspective of victims' challenges in accessing services and has since streamlined their processes improving response time. In addition, the clinic has held informational sessions on the land restitution law, Law 1448, to *campesinos* and facilitated assistance through the Ombudsman's Office to secure legal representation through an assigned attorney.

"The legal clinic has been transformed by victims into a space in which they trust us, where they share their hardships and conversely they are being provided with answers to their questions and requests. The casework load has completely surpassed our expectations and illustrate that there is a great need in this region for legal and interdisciplinary response and that there is a lot of work to do with regard to access to victims' rights" says Angélica Navarro Monterrosa, legal clinic coordinator.

From these experiences, HRP III's grant will also produce two very important communications tools: a documentary on the work being carried out at the legal clinic and two newsletter bulletins for public dissemination, including local institutions and academia. With the proper guidance, information, and encouragement, victims of Montes of Maria have begun to exercise their rights and find ways to rebuild a social fabric torn by decades of violence and isolation. •

Citizens and Institutions Take Action to Prevent Land Mine Accidents



Volunteer Mine Risk Education Training with Antioquia Governor's Office
Photo Credit: Juan Pablo Escobar Belancur

Statistically speaking in many parts of Colombia, innocent acts such as a child chasing after a ball in an open field or a *campesino* herding their livestock in pasture could easily translate into tragic consequences involving the loss of limbs, if not death, due to the widespread presence of anti-personnel mines, unexploded ordnances and other improvised explosive devices. As a deadly trademark of Colombia's ongoing conflict, land mines planted by illegal armed groups and public security forces particularly in recent decades have left swaths of territories blanketed with these deadly devices endangering the lives of people and animals and deterring returnees from their lands in a country that has one of the highest levels of internally displaced persons in the world.

According to Colombia's Presidential Program for Integral Action against Mines, from 1990-2014, land mines have claimed 10,657 Colombian victims. Antioquia ranks as the department with the highest number of landmine victims in Colombia, accounting for 22% of the total victims. It is in the heart of Antioquia's countryside that USAID's HRP III's grantee *Corporación Paz y Democracia* has been breaking ground in engaging citizen and institutions alike into taking action to prevent further mine-related accidents.

Given the lack of clarity on the roles and responsibilities of institutions in attending to landmine victims, a fundamental advance spearheaded by the *Corporación* has been mobilizing the coordination of departmental and municipal-level institutions in developing and implementing response mechanisms, *rutas*, and protocols. Due to these efforts, Antioquia now has its first-ever departmental action plan with strategies targeting key municipalities plagued by landmine accidents. A critical component to this plan are communications tools including brochures, radio announcements, and banners used to spread the word on accident prevention ensuring that the messages reach even the youngest of citizens against possible accidents.

The project's unique approach relies on and has thrived on the participation of its volunteer citizens who have participated in the Mine Risk Education component of this project carried out in HRP III priority municipalities including Zaragoza, Anorí, Cáceres, El Bagre, and Tarazá. Due to the remote areas and communities impacted by landmine risk, the only sure method of reaching these locations solely depends on its own community members. Community member from the vereda Anará of the municipality of Cáceres, Faidith Cardozo Díaz remarked, "Through my participation, I have far greater awareness of my surroundings and about landmines which is all critical information to be shared with my community. Where there is one landmine, there are many. Through workshops which have engaged children and youth and who have really taken an interest on the issue, there is a multiplier effect taking place not only in our homes but also in their peer circles."

Interestingly, risks for citizens regarding the issue of landmines extend beyond the physical repercussions of coming across one along a path. Due to the presence of illegal armed groups in these communities, citizens sharing information to educate the community on the issue of landmines and associating with these armed actors bear a risk of being identified as an informant. In light of this, the volunteer citizen training component implemented by the *Corporación* includes raising awareness techniques mindful of careful messaging and sticking to messages of prevention and care for victims. Prior to this initiative, fear to speak openly on this topic had created an environment of silence and invisibility regarding landmines.

Through this innovative and comprehensive strategy, HRP III has provided community members and institutions vital tools and skills to better respond to the deadly and hidden risks associated with landmines.

¿Cómo puedo evitar un accidente con minas antipersonal, municiones sin explotar o artefactos explosivos improvisados?

Las minas antipersonal, municiones sin explotar o artefactos explosivos improvisados son diseñados para matar, herir o mutilar a una o varias personas; y se activan por la presencia, proximidad y contacto de la propia víctima.

- NUNCA transito por lugares donde ha habido presencia o paso de actores armados.
- NUNCA me acerco a torres de energía, infraestructura importante o puentes destruidos.
- NUNCA entro a casas abandonadas.
- NUNCA me salgo del camino seguro, ni a tomar agua, ni a coger frutos o flores, ni a hacer mis necesidades, ni a buscar agua o sombra, ni a perseguir animales de carga.
- NUNCA me acerco a lugares donde hayan ocurrido accidentes.
- SIEMPRE sospecho al ver cosas en la naturaleza que no deberían estar ahí.
- SIEMPRE sospecho al ver señales de combate.
- SIEMPRE sospecho al ver cambios en el suelo o en la vegetación.
- SIEMPRE sospecho al ver señales de advertencia u objetos abandonados en los caminos.
- SIEMPRE CAMINO DE DÍA. SALGO DE DÍA Y LLEGO DE DÍA.

Lucho y Pautina
Es el primer libro de niños víctimas

USAID UNIÓN EUROPEA GOBIERNO DE ANTIOQUIA