

# USAID/OTI Colombia Field Report

July - September 2008

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## Program Description

USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives' (OTI) Initial Governance Response Program (IGRP) assists the Government of Colombia (GOC) to stabilize areas recently retaken from insurgent forces by promoting government presence and responsiveness to local needs. OTI's main government partner is the Center for Coordination of Integrated Action (CCAI by its Spanish acronym), which is part of the Office of the President and is responsible for coordinating the establishment of government services in 12 prioritized parts of the country. All OTI project activities are carried out in the name of Acción Social, the partner organization for CCAI. Through the promotion of Acción Social's presence, the program strengthens the credibility and legitimacy of the GOC in post-conflict areas; increases the willingness and capacity of communities to cooperate and interact with the GOC; and improves the GOC's capacity to respond to community-prioritized necessities, including efforts to increase economic opportunities, in a timely and credible manner.

## Country Situation

**FARC Threats** – The July rescue of 15 hostages being held by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in the rainforest, including three Americans and former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt, in combination with the deaths of three members of the FARC secretariat and increasing levels of rebel desertions, led to a widespread sentiment that the "beginning of the end" was at hand for the FARC. The FARC responded to these events by issuing several communiqués declaring that its revolutionary struggle will go on and threatening acts of terrorist retaliation throughout the country. Subsequent incidents in Bogota have included the ignition of incendiary devices on buses and in stores and the detonation of bombs of various sizes, including a car bomb that killed four people outside the courthouse in Cali.

While these acts have the country holding its collective breath waiting for a larger attack, to date these incidents have reached nowhere near the magnitude of terrorist actions of the not-so-distant past. Many observers point to the muted response as evidence that the FARC has lost the ability to wreak major havoc in areas of the country that are firmly under the control of the state. It is clear, however, that the FARC's demise is not a given. Only sustained and continued expansion of military presence, counter-narcotics efforts, and the establishment of a state presence in FARC-controlled areas can lead to the permanent marginalization of the guerrilla group.

**Continued Regional Tensions** – Despite efforts to repair diplomatic relations between Colombia and neighboring countries Ecuador and Venezuela, tensions persist. The Ecuadorian Government has claimed that the files retrieved from the computer of slain FARC secretariat member Raul Reyes—who was killed in a cross-border incursion by the Colombian Army—were adulterated by the GOC before they were turned over to Interpol, thus calling into question documents linking the FARC to members of the Ecuadorian Government. The GOC has filed a report with the Organization of American States that claims to document FARC encampments still present in Ecuadorian territory. In addition, the U.S. Treasury Department has placed one former and two current members of the Venezuelan Government on its list of active supporters of the FARC. Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez has strongly denied that his government provided support to the guerrillas.

**Will President Uribe Run Again?** – Colombian President Uribe's second term ends in August 2010. Supporters have gathered more than 5 million signatures supporting a change to the constitution that would allow him to run for a third term. The proposed change follows a similar change that allowed him to run for a second term. President Uribe has stated that he would decline a third nomination if his party could agree to support a single candidate. This declaration, however, leaves open the possibility of pushing forward with a constitutional amendment should his party fail to agree on a nominee. President Uribe's supporters claim he is the only president that has successfully take on the FARC, an accomplishment that is reflected in his approval rating, which is over 70 percent. Opponents of the constitutional change fear that the future of the Colombian democratic system would be threatened if Uribe runs for a third term.

## OTI Highlights

### A. Narrative Summary

Implementation of the government's consolidation plan continues. Forty-two infrastructure projects (secondary roads, electrification, and water projects) funded by the GOC's High Commission for Peace were finalized during the quarter. OTI provided technical assistance to facilitate planning of the larger projects. Additional OTI support will complement these projects by focusing on repairs to tertiary roads that provide access to markets. The governor and his staff, local mayors, and now the full complement of consolidation planning staff meet frequently to plan coordinated interventions in the area. A fund has been established to help the mayors meet their commitments to projects that have received OTI support. In addition, planning staff meets regularly with national level ministries and government entities to program activities in target municipalities.

Increasingly, the consolidation plan model is seen as *the* model for creating the conditions necessary to establish a sustainable state presence in recovered areas. The model entails sequenced military actions and the establishment of a police and judicial presence. These efforts are coupled with voluntary and forced coca eradication and the formation of the civilian government, which initially focuses on creating alternative economic opportunities for families that have lost their coca income. All these efforts are made possible by the ongoing provision of security to the civilian population in consolidation zones. Two indicators point to the success of the plan: First, the rate of voluntary coca eradication is higher in the consolidation areas than it is in the rest of the country, and second, there have been no community protests or violence against teams engaged in forced eradication in the zones. Both of these indicators are unprecedented in the rest of Colombia.

During the quarter, the National Park Service, with technical assistance from OTI, finalized the strategic plan for an initiative to resettle people living illegally within park boundaries. The resettlement initiative will protect the park from the destructive consequences of coca production and reduce an important source of logistical support for the FARC. The Park Service has been meeting with the appropriate government entities to solicit support for the resettlement of an initial 300 families, many of whom agreed to move after seeing the resettlement package, which included some support from OTI, given to a pilot group of families.

Consolidation planning staff are coordinating closely with OTI field staff to identify and implement small projects in transition zones—areas that have been militarily recovered as few as six months ago and where a state presence is just beginning to be established. OTI's support to the GOC's small-scale, quick-impact projects is widely recognized as key to building confidence in the government and buying time for establishing a state presence.

The program's economic development component, which was initiated in late November 2007, continues to show great promise. The methodology developed for implementing quick-impact, small-scale economic support activities in relatively secure areas is being adapted for implementation in the transition zones, where security is more tenuous. OTI is coordinating closely with a new Netherlands Government-supported program that is providing assistance immediately following eradication activities. Both programs are working with the consolidation plan staff as it grapples with the lack of a GOC post-eradication program. The staff of OTI's economic development component continues to play a major role in pulling together various key actors and catalyzing the linkages between programs and resources to focus efforts on the consolidation process. With the recent hiring of the consolidation plan's Economic Development Coordinator, OTI will be able to expand its support role.

During the last reporting period, the U.S. Embassy received notice that funding had been authorized through the 1207 transfer authority to help with consolidation efforts that are being supported by the OTI program. The funds will be allocated for staffing of the consolidation plan, improving infrastructure (primarily tertiary roads), preventing the recruitment of youth into illegal armed groups, replicating the consolidation model in one or possibly more areas of the country, and responding to new opportunities as they present themselves.

## **B. Grants Activity Summary**

During the reporting period, the program approved 49 new projects worth \$1.28 million. Total activity spending to date is \$7.72 million on more than 289 grants.

Spending, with examples of recent activities, breaks down as follows:

- Technical Assistance (including assistance to CCAI): \$2.12 million. Initiatives receiving technical assistance included a project to support the preparation of documentation needed to put to bid several important infrastructure projects that will be funded by the GOC's Fondo de Paz. In addition, a database that will be used in the target municipalities for monitoring implementation of their municipal plans was finalized during the period.
- Municipal Assembly Activities: \$4.25 million (e.g., assistance to schools, sports programs, and health posts and water, electricity, roads, and transportation projects). These activities included repairing several key roads and bridges that link communities to markets and a training program for local teachers in an area where conflict is ongoing. The training has strengthened the teachers' ability to provide basic educational

services in their communities.

- **Income-Generating Projects:** \$1.35 million. Technical assistance continues to be an important part of these projects. The Center for International Tropical Agriculture is providing assistance to partner associations and groups to help farmers increase productivity and establish regional linkages that will facilitate long-term sustainability.

## C. Indicators of Success

The program's economic development component continues to play a catalytic role as staff not only responds to the need for productive projects in post-conflict and post-eradication areas but also focuses on mobilizing GOC programs to support the same target groups. During the reporting period, an agreement was reached with the national training institute to provide more than 40 courses to farmers' groups on topics such as phytosanitary standards, business training, and organic pest control. The institute will provide instructors and training materials; OTI will pay for transportation and other miscellaneous costs; and municipal governments will provide the training venues. In addition, OTI has been working with two dairy groups that will receive significant financial support from a GOC program to improve their market linkages. The project is being co-financed by the departmental government, with 10 percent of the co-financing coming from OTI.

During the reporting period, OTI completed the first phase of its work with a local nongovernmental organization (NGO) that specializes in providing training to teachers in remote rural schools. The NGO designs curricula and develops strategies that involve the community to help improve the quality of teaching. The NGO worked with teachers in an area that is still heavily influenced by the FARC. In the words of one of the teachers, "This is the first time that we feel the presence of the state." Many of the newly trained teachers have returned to their schools where they are now forming student governments that will teach students the value of participation and provide them with opportunities to develop leadership skills. Despite instances where the FARC has used intimidation to control communities, the teachers have pressed forward with the program, calling the groups "community harmony organizations" to avoid problems with the guerrillas. The project is being expanded to other conflict-prone parts of OTI's area of operation.

OTI also initiated a communication strategy for the consolidation plan's area of operation during the quarter. Initial components of the effort included posters announcing the launch of the consolidation plan; a photography contest focused on the themes of participation, peaceful coexistence, and partnership with the state; and brochures highlighting the major components of municipal development plans. (The brochures were developed with OTI technical assistance for distribution by mayors to citizens in an effort to invite community oversight.) In addition, as part of the effort to improve GOC communications with citizens in the transition zones, a perception survey was completed during the reporting period. A follow-up survey will be performed in six months to help guide the communication strategy and track the impact of the consolidation plan.

## Program Appraisal

The GOC remains committed to quickly establishing a presence in areas recently recovered by the military and recognizes the value of using small, quick-impact projects as part of a larger framework of medium- to long-term initiatives. However, the civilian component of the state response can be slow and inefficient.

It is apparent that administrative rigidity is a factor hindering the GOC's ability to respond rapidly to opportunities as they arise. Difficulties arising in the transition zones provide clear examples. This rigidity is the consequence of 1) the normal bureaucratic processes inherent in any democratic government; 2) a history of corruption that has spawned layers of processes to combat that corruption; and 3) a political culture that is accustomed to using administrative infractions to punish political opponents. This rigidity manifests as an institutional reluctance to try anything outside of the clearly defined administrative box. To address this inflexibility, a "comfort zone" needs to be established where GOC employees are allowed to take small chances and adapt procedures so that processes can move forward in the transition zones where rapid and flexible responses are required.

## Next Steps/Immediate Priorities

Priorities for the next three months include the following:

- Continue working with partners to implement the consolidation plan, focusing on the continued mobilization of the GOC into the program area.
- Expand the program area as the security situation in the transition zones permits.

- Finalize and begin implementation of a project to provide technical assistance to Juntas de Acción Comunal and other local leadership to increase their capacity as community advocates.
- Begin providing technical assistance to municipal governments, in collaboration with the Ministries of Justice and the Interior, focusing on areas such as transparent budget management, community outreach, and municipal management.
- Develop a database to be used by CCAI and the consolidation plan staff for data management.
- Work with the team assessing the causes of youth recruitment into illegally armed groups to finalize and begin implementation of a strategy with incoming 1207 funding.
- Finalize an operational plan for the consolidation process in Montes de Maria. The plan will focus on mobilizing the GOC to comply with constitutional requirements mandating that appropriate conditions (e.g., education, housing, water) be in place to enable the return of the displaced population.
- Achieve clarity regarding possible assistance to the Departments of Tolima and Valle del Cauca, which will almost certainly be prioritized as a national consolidation policy is developed.
- Complete a project that establishes a ferry linking a strategically important town to the rest of the country. The Ministry of Defense has committed to implementing any additional civil works that may be necessary. President Uribe has committed to attending a ceremony that will recognize the completion of the ferry, acknowledge a U.S. MilGroup-supported project, and celebrate the town's recent connection to the national electric grid.