
USAID/OTI Colombia Quarterly Report

April - June 2009

Program Description

USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) launched the Initial Governance Response Program (IGRP) in March 2007. The program's goal is to reinforce stability in high-priority, conflict-affected areas of Colombia. In support of this goal, IGRP's objectives are to strengthen the credibility and legitimacy of the Government of Colombia (GOC) in post-conflict areas through small, community-driven activities; to increase the willingness and capacity of communities to cooperate and interact with the GOC; and to expand the GOC's capacity to exercise timely, credible, and responsive civil functions.

Activities

The IGRP program's model of rapid responses to community-identified needs, implemented in the name of the GOC, both creates confidence in the GOC and leads to further investment by the GOC as part of the process of consolidation of State presence. IGRP is supporting this consolidation process in four parts of the country through the following activities:

Small Community Activities – Once the military has provided permanent security in an area, and coca has been eradicated, OTI provides support to the GOC for small, quick-impact, community-prioritized social infrastructure projects. These projects are frequently the first concrete demonstration of government support for historically marginalized communities and serve to quickly begin building trust between communities and local government. Projects also serve as a vehicle for building trust in areas typically characterized by lack of community because of the historical illegal underpinnings of the economy. Typical projects address needs for community centers, street lighting, road and drainage systems, and school kitchens.

Productive Activities – OTI supports the GOC's small, quick-impact economic opportunities for groups making the transition from the coca-based economy to the legal economy. Projects build on what people already know how to do and are directed at the local market. Typical projects provide agricultural inputs, planting material, small machinery for transformation, and technical assistance to improve both production and business operations.

The program is also providing assistance to the consolidation process with technical assistance to GOC consolidation teams and local mayors' offices and by supporting a communication strategy promoting consolidation, the National Park Service's efforts to resettle families living illegally in national parks, and a strategy to prevent youth recruitment into illegally armed groups.



Schoolchildren work with newly donated supplies in a rehabilitated classroom in La Macarena.

Country Situation

Change in FARC Tactics – The FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) has been shifting strategy, relying less on direct combat activities against the military and adopting more traditional terrorist tactics, primarily bombings in urban areas. The shift is a response to relentless GOC military efforts to neutralize the group combined with significant loss of coca revenue from eradication and interdiction efforts. However, the FARC remains most active in rural areas. In several parts of the country—in addition to areas where combat is still taking place—the FARC intimidates citizens through several methods, which include distributing threatening pamphlets, moving small groups of well-known militants attired as civilians through areas to make their presence known, and burning vehicles in small towns. In the field, eradication teams are increasingly met with mines and, on occasion, sharpshooters rather than direct confrontation. Analysts predict that terrorist activities will increase in the lead-up to next year's presidential election.

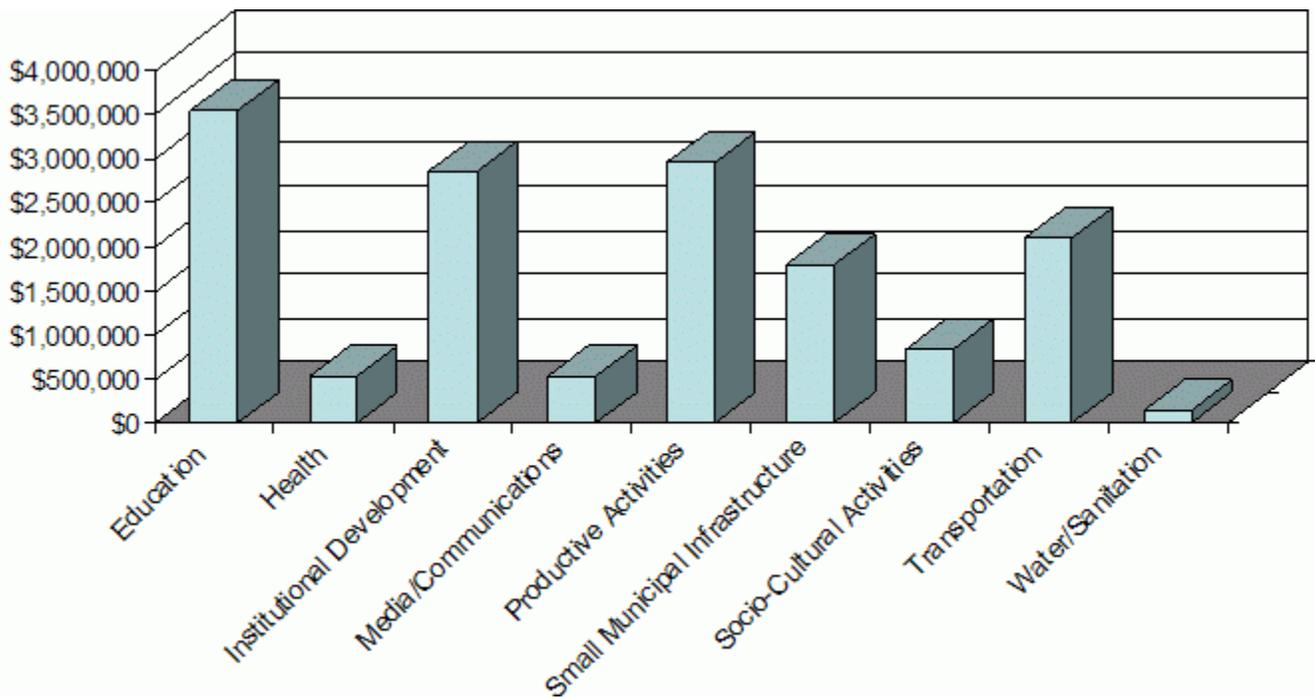
National Consolidation Plan – The National Consolidation Plan was officially launched during the quarter. The plan prioritizes strategically important parts of the country where consolidation of State presence will greatly reduce the ability of illegally armed groups to operate with impunity and retard socioeconomic development in targeted areas. A presidential directive mandates that GOC agencies and ministries prioritize these regions, primarily within current budgets. "Fusion Centers," which bring together military, police, and civilian agencies to coordinate and manage the consolidation process, have been established in most of the targeted regions.

Budgetary Impact of Global Financial Crisis – Reduced tax revenues stemming from the global financial crisis have lead to widespread GOC budget cuts. These cuts have affected all key partners in the consolidation process and diminished their ability not only to support ongoing programs but also to increase investment in the consolidation zones as security conditions permit.

Upcoming Events

President Alvaro Uribe's second term ends in August 2010. Efforts to change the constitution to allow the president to serve a third term continue to be promoted. Whatever the outcome of these efforts, election-related activities leading up to the presidential election in May 2010 may distract from national consolidation efforts.

Grants Summary



Highlights

Montes de Maria Consolidation Effort – The consolidation process in four municipalities of the northern departments of Bolívar and Sucre is driven by GOC efforts to comply with the constitutional court's mandate that conditions be created for the "safe, voluntary, and dignified" return of the many thousands of families displaced by massacres committed by the FARC and paramilitary groups. OTI has assisted the return process through the following: major repairs to tertiary roads that connect remote communities to market centers; technical assistance for the development of a regional strategic and operational plan; set-up assistance for a Fusion Center; and support for Independence Day celebrations as a means for rebuilding the social fabric of the region.

Values Workshops, Community Radio, and Regional Newsletter – During the reporting period, as part of an overall communications strategy, workshops promoting the values of legality, security, participation, democracy, and community cohesion were held throughout the six municipalities of Meta where OTI operates. The values were selected during community meetings and validated as essential to the consolidation process. These principles are emphasized in a program that trains community radio journalists who produce spots aired on army and police stations as well as on Radio Don Bosco—a network of the Catholic Church that has received equipment from OTI to expand its coverage to the entire region. The local organization providing the training also worked with community groups to complete applications for broadcast spectrum for six community radio stations. In addition, the reporting period saw the launch of a bi-monthly newsletter that provides updates on socioeconomic projects. The publication seeks to generate a public conversation with the mayors and provide examples of the prioritized values being put into action.



Workers unload a new fire and rescue boat for an isolated community in La Macarena.

Expansion of the Escuela Nueva Program – The Escuela Nueva program focuses on small rural schools that have one teacher (or at most two) for grades one through eight. These schools generally have inadequate facilities, high teacher turnover, and high dropout rates. The program trains teachers to more effectively utilize curricula, to improve teaching methods, and to increase student and parent participation in school operations. The program was piloted with 300 teachers in two areas of the Meta consolidation zone. The pilot program was so positively reviewed by teachers, students, and local government that it has been extended to all six municipalities. The expanded training program will increase community confidence in the ability and interest of the State to improve educational opportunities in remote areas. The program will also provide a higher quality education for the students and, it is hoped, will have a positive impact on the dropout rate.

Tertiary Roads Program – Eight grants helped to rehabilitate a total of 97 miles of tertiary roads in Meta. The roads plan was developed in close collaboration with mayors, the governor, and the consolidation team. Projects were prioritized according to their potential for connecting isolated communities with coca-based economies to legal market opportunities. Contractors were selected based on their commitment to using local labor. (Because of economic distortions caused by the coca economy, it is often cheaper to use labor from other regions.) The governor's office has committed to an equal matching of funds. An additional package of tertiary road repairs will be finalized once the last tranche of 1207 funding is received.

Departmental Coordination Mechanism – In addition to improving linkages with the private sector, a fundamental emphasis of OTI's productive activities component has been to connect farmers and local businesses to government programs that support economic development. An important mechanism in this effort has been the Mesas Municipales de Coordinación, which meet regularly to bring together the mayors' offices, the private sector, community groups, and representatives of local and national government programs. More than just a forum for updating partners, these meetings have come to serve as important venues for decision making and for the allocation of resources. During the reporting period, the departmental agricultural office decided that a similar forum should be established to focus on development at the regional level. The first meeting of the group included representatives from all agricultural programs, the Chamber of Commerce, the National Park Service, research institutions, universities, Acción Social (the GOC's socioeconomic development agency), the private sector, and the banking sector.

Program Appraisal

The GOC's pilot consolidation effort in Meta continues to be widely seen as *the* model to be replicated in other strategically important parts of the country. Confidence in the ability of the model to provide security to communities through the marginalization of illegally armed groups, to significantly decrease coca production, and to expand civilian State presence is shared by both the GOC and the U.S. Embassy, which are basing their new strategies on the pilot experience.

Eradication statistics provide a concrete demonstration of the success of the consolidation effort in Meta. Numbers from the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime for 2008 show an 18 percent decrease in coca production across the country—while the numbers in Meta are down 47 percent. In the last four years, the amount of cocaine produced on the national level has been reduced by about 170 metric tons, and 100 tons of the decrease is attributed to reductions in Meta in the past year.



A farmer in La Macarena checks on pigs received through the program's productive activities component.

The OTI program continues to expand its geographic coverage within Meta as security and eradication efforts permit. At the same time, the program is providing varying levels of support to consolidation efforts in Montes de Maria, Antioquia, and Tolima/Valle de Cauca.

Next Steps/Immediate Priorities

- OTI priorities for the next quarter include the following:
- Begin implementing a post-eradication strategy in new areas of Meta determined to be free of coca;
- Continue working with the USAID Mission to determine how best to serve as the bridging mechanism between the current Mission strategy and the new strategy currently under development; (This will include finalizing a spending plan through the program's close-out on September 1, 2010, once the remaining budget questions have been clarified.)
- Complete the development of the strategic and operational plan for 10 municipalities in Antioquia department;
- Finalize a tertiary roads plan in Montes de Maria and begin implementation; and
- Work with the Center for Coordination of Integrated Action's coordinator for Tolima/Valle de Cauca to finalize an agreement on support from the OTI program in this part of the country, including technical assistance for the development of strategic and operational plans.