

USAID/OTI Colombia Quarterly Report

October - December 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 and the police have 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, roads and drainage systems, and school kitchens.

Productive Activities – OTI supports 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, 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 in four parts of the country, as well as to local mayors' offices, and 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.

Country Situation

Reelection Referendum – As of late December 2009, the attorney general's office had not made a recommendation on whether the Constitutional Court should allow the referendum process to proceed. The referendum would determine whether the constitutionally mandated presidential term limit could be changed, allowing President Alvaro Uribe to run for a third term. Assuming the legislation is deemed constitutional, the referendum vote must occur before March 13, 2010, the registration deadline for the May 2010 general election.

Regional Relations – During the quarter, the GOC made significant progress in repairing diplomatic relations with the Government of Ecuador, which were damaged in 2008 after the Colombian Army bombed a rebel camp just inside the Ecuadorian border. The attack killed Raul Reyes, the second in command of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Relations with the Government of Venezuela, however, continued to deteriorate.

The FARC Not a Spent Force – In December 2009, a group of FARC guerrillas attacked the home of the governor of Caqueta, kidnapped him, and executed him shortly thereafter. This was the most brazen and high-profile of recent FARC terrorist actions, showing that the FARC still has the capacity to commit atrocities on the civilian population—albeit at a much-reduced level. Ongoing and sustained military pressure has greatly reduced the FARC's capacity to carry out major attacks on government installations; however, the FARC continues to demonstrate its presence with ambushes, antipersonnel mines, selective assassinations, small bombings, and hit-and-run attacks and by burning buses and intimidating communities via small groups posing as civilians.



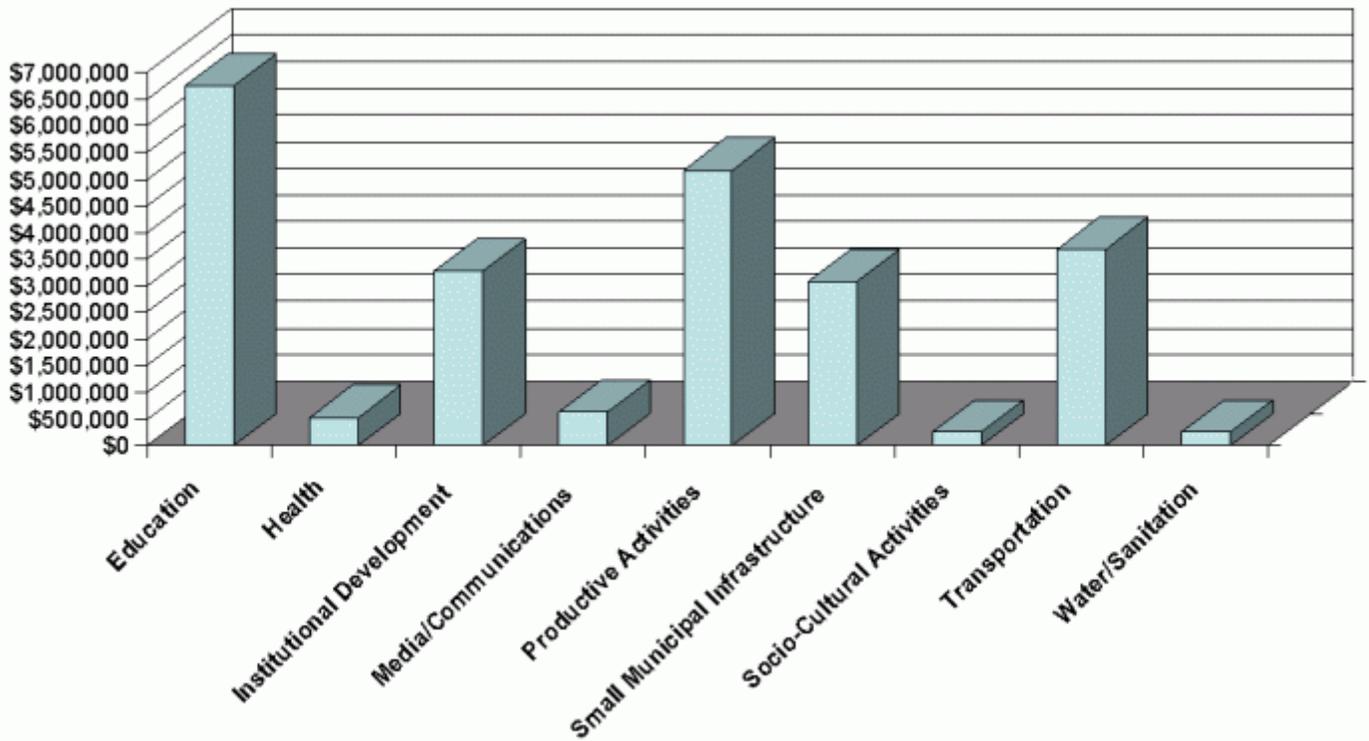
Newly donated computers enhance the learning environment in a classroom in Meta.

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 by his supporters. 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

Funding breaks down by sector as follows: Education, 28%; Health, 2%; Institutional Development, 14%; Media/Communications, 3%; Productive Activities, 22%; Small Municipal Infrastructure, 13%; Socio-Cultural Activities, 1%; Transportation, 16%; and Water/Sanitation, 1%.



Highlights

Income Generation on the March – Ten farmers' groups have graduated from OTI's income-generating program, which focuses on areas undergoing transition from FARC to GOC control. The criteria for graduation included completing a course of technical assistance to improve operations and business capacity, making connections to markets, setting up a self-financed rotating fund to provide a sustainable source of capital, and establishing an official connection to a GOC program.

Also during the quarter, eight OTI-supported groups were selected for inclusion in a GOC income generation program that focuses on displaced and vulnerable populations. OTI guided the groups as they negotiated the bureaucratic process, assisting with the preparation of paperwork and follow-up with the appropriate authorities. The groups have received GOC assistance and are now well on their way to completing the transition to the legal economy.

Technical Assistance for the GOC – As part of the process of developing and implementing the GOC's National Consolidation Plan and the U.S. Government's Colombia Strategic Development Initiative (CSDI), OTI has been providing technical assistance to Regional Coordination Centers in several parts of the country for the development of operational plans. The plans define priority sectors for GOC investment over a three-year period, detailing the resources needed for each sector. The plans also provide a framework for negotiations between the Center for the Coordination of Integrated Action (CCAI, the lead GOC civilian entity responsible for the National Consolidation Plan) and the responsible government ministries, and will serve as the basis for monitoring and accountability. The operational plan for northern Antioquia—one of CSDI's priority zones—is the latest to be completed.

CCAI has also requested technical assistance with an effort to restructure and rationalize the organization and its operational capacity at both the national and regional levels. The restructuring is aimed at building capacity in anticipation of its role in leading the effort under the National Consolidation Plan. CCAI has also requested technical assistance for the creation of a semi-autonomous corporation that will have the ability to implement small, quick-impact, confidence-building projects in priority areas recently recovered from illegally armed groups—a capacity that is lacking within the GOC.

Strategy to Prevent Youth Recruitment into Criminal Groups – Throughout much of the program's area of operation, young people from rural communities are recruited by illegally armed groups. Families leave their homes and settle in municipal capitals to protect their children. While the framework for a national level anti-recruitment policy exists, the GOC faces a major challenge in developing and implementing programs that put these policies into practice in programs that are sustainable and have the desired impact. To support this aspect of the consolidation plan, OTI hired an anti-recruitment specialist to assist agencies involved in preventing recruitment at the departmental level with the development of a joint action plan. The process is helping the agencies define the problem, clarify responsibilities, and identify appropriate actions. To be replicable on a national level, successful anti-recruitment programming will rely primarily on

local resources for implementation. Finally, OTI is using 1207 funding for several projects that directly support the prevention of youth recruitment, including the construction of dormitories for boarding schools and a training center for at-risk youth.

Providing Voice to Communities in Montes de Maria – Encompassing an area in northern Colombia that includes four municipalities, Montes de Maria was severely impacted by paramilitary violence and massive displacements that started in the late 1990s and continued into the 2000s. The GOC and the U.S. Government have identified the region as a priority consolidation zone. With OTI assistance, the Regional Coordination Center has nearly completed an operational plan that, once implemented, will create the legally mandated conditions for the return of displaced people to their home communities. The plan works through Political Pacts, which are collective agreements between target communities, municipal and departmental authorities, and civil society, including the Church and private sector entities, that detail what needs to happen, when it needs to happen, and who is responsible for making it happen. The government has a history of inaction in the area, and in the GOC's absence, civil society attempted to fill the void, with some limited international donor support, which further removed the GOC from the governing process. So a key part of the consolidation process is building trust and dialogue between communities and the government. In addition, OTI is covering the costs of the workshops where the Political Pacts are drafted, as well as financing the rehabilitation of key tertiary market roads, seeking to help the GOC demonstrate that this time the process is more than just words and meetings that lead nowhere.

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.

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, northern Antioquia, and southern Tolima.

During the quarter, it became clear that the model for implementing social infrastructure projects in areas not fully consolidated was suffering from the more remote-control approach that had been adopted for these areas. In particular, the process of community engagement and empowerment tended to take a back seat to efforts to get the work completed. Program staff are reaching out to the municipal associations that bring together elected leaders at the community level to explore the possibility of increasing the role of these groups in the implementation process.



Parents and students arrive for the reopening of a refurbished school in rural La Macarena.

Next Steps/Immediate Priorities

OTI priorities for the next quarter include the following:

- Continue working with the USAID Mission to determine how best to serve as the bridging mechanism between the current Mission strategy and the new consolidation strategy currently under development;
- Finalize a close-out memo with the Mission;
- Implement a follow-up perception survey;
- Begin a campaign to widely disperse and discuss "La Macarena - The Rebirth of a Forgotten Paradise," a video documenting the consolidation process, targeting audiences in the GOC at all levels and stakeholders in the program's area of operation;
- Complete technical assistance for the consolidation effort in Tolima;

- Complete technical assistance for CCAI, which will guide the organization's restructuring process and help it prepare to lead the National Consolidation Plan;
- Begin technical assistance for the consolidation effort in Narino; and
- Complete the second round of training for community radio journalists, including a component for high schools.