

Overview of Development Assistance Latin America and the Caribbean

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The United States is closely allied with Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) through shared values, culture, trade and proximity. Each economic downturn experienced by our neighbors, each setback to peace and democracy, each disaster or epidemic can have an immediate impact on the region's stability and can also affect the United States. Despite a decade of solid economic and democratic progress, poverty, inequality, and social and political exclusion still exist and continue to deny many people access to opportunity. These challenges set the stage and provide the context in which the U.S. Government, through USAID, provides development assistance.

Expanded Economic Opportunity

USAID's economic growth programs have assisted the region's transition from closed to more open economies with competitive markets. Programs focus on accelerating free trade by supporting countries' efforts to address trade-related constraints, such as increasing access to capital for small- and medium-size businesses, removing constraints to market access such as lack of capital, increasing country competitiveness and trade capacity nationally and locally and providing job training and education to marginalized populations. Environmental programs focus on expanding the economic benefits people derive from forests, rangelands and coral reefs through better market access for their products and services.

Key accomplishments include:

- USAID programs support the implementation of free trade agreements (FTA). Under the Central America Dominican Republic - Free Trade Agreement USAID is assisting thousands of small- and medium-sized enterprises to strengthen their capacity to tap into new markets. USAID is also directing resources to help these countries meet their labor and environmental obligations under the agreement. The United States has signed the Trade Promotion Agreement with Peru (P-TPA) and Colombia (C-TPA); both treaties await approval by the U.S. Congress. An FTA with Panama will soon be signed and USAID plans to support implementation of these agreements as well.
- In Mexico, economic development assistance programs are ensuring that more than 1.5 million disadvantaged Mexicans enjoy access to business loans and a place to keep their savings. The Micro and Rural Finance program has facilitated business loans and social services (literacy and health training) to more than 9,000 indigenous women in Chiapas, Mexico's poorest state.
- Over the past decade, USAID's flagship biodiversity conservation program, Parks in Peril (PiP), has improved biodiversity and natural resources management at 45 sites covering more than 45 million hectares in 16 countries. Local non-governmental conservation organizations strengthened by the PiP program are some of the strongest and most influential in the LAC region.
- With USAID support, under the Bolivia Sustainable Forestry Program there have been dramatic changes in the forest sector, including the independent certification of over 2 million hectares of natural forests and an over 80 percent increase in certified forest product exports from 1999 to 2006. Bolivia is now a global leader in certified tropical forestry.

Investing in People

Health: Over the past 15 years, USAID health programs have contributed to saving the lives of over 3 million infants and close to 5 million children under the age of 5 in Latin America and the Caribbean. These programs have contributed to a 45 percent drop in child mortality over the last 15 years, and a 13 percent drop in infant mortality over the last 5 years.

USAID Fact Sheet

USAID programs focus on improving sustainable health systems and institutions – public and private. In addition, USAID’s programs address equity issues in the region by increasing access to quality health services to those most in need. USAID programs also work to prevent and reduce the impact of HIV/AIDS in the region, complementing the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) in Guyana and Haiti.

Key accomplishments include:

- In El Salvador, USAID’s investments in support of the healthcare sector have resulted in significant improvements in the health status of the Salvadoran people, especially mothers and children under age 5. The infant mortality rate was cut nearly in half.
- In Haiti, thanks to USAID’s program, basic health care is available to approximately 47 percent of the population by supporting service delivery through 130 public and private sector clinics located across Haiti’s 10 geographic departments.

Education: USAID’s assistance has contributed to progress over the past decade in primary school enrollment in LAC. Education programs have focused on strengthening primary education systems to deliver quality instruction to the poor and marginalized. USAID has introduced curriculum and teacher training reforms, promoted decentralization, and introduced distance learning and alternative basic education delivery systems. Challenges still exist regarding the poor quality of education, particularly for students from poor and marginalized communities. USAID is now shifting its focus to promote systemic change in the educational system.

Key accomplishments include:

- Since 2003, Cooperative Association of States for Scholarships (CASS) program has trained 1,327 students from Central America and Haiti.
- USAID has helped shift emphasis of education reform in the region to a focus on quality, particularly in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Peru.

Governing Justly and Democratically

USAID assistance to the region has contributed to significant progress made by LAC countries in the area of good governance. Today, democratic governance has come to be recognized as the norm, largely in response to citizens’ growing consciousness of their rights and power. Civilian, rather than military, governments are now in place in all countries of the Hemisphere except Cuba. Hand-in-hand with the strengthening of democracy in the region, violations of human rights have greatly diminished, and governments are taking actions to promote peace and reconciliation.

Despite these successes, democratic rule in Latin America is not yet consolidated. Much less progress has been made in the region in reducing the rising crime and gang violence, corruption and government ineffectiveness. USAID is redoubling its efforts to strengthen democratic institutions by focusing on justice system reform, anti-corruption, municipal development and decentralization, and strengthening the rule of law.

Key accomplishments include:

- In Colombia, USAID is working with local communities to organize 333 citizen oversight committees that are helping to increase transparency and improve efficiency of local governments.
- In Bolivia, USAID is helping the Ministry of Justice establish Justice Houses (Integrated Justice Centers) which increase citizen access to justice and government services in rural areas. These Justice Houses have handled more than 32,000 cases since they began operations in January 2005.
- In Guatemala, USAID support for justice reform has reduced the time in a 24 hour court from several weeks to six hours for a preliminary hearing. The number of dismissed cases in this court has dropped from 77 to 15 percent. USAID assistance to the Public Ministry has increased prosecution of cases in Guatemala City by 45 percent. A second court has now opened in Villa Nueva and support will continue to make the justice system there more efficient and effective.
- In Cuba, USAID will continue close collaboration with the Department of State to support the development of civil society. This involves providing moral, material, and informational support to Cuba’s human rights activists; defending the rights of Cuban workers; helping increase the number and strength of independent Cuban non-governmental organizations; and providing direct outreach to the Cuban people.
- In Guyana, USAID provided assistance for the August 2006 elections in the form of mediation and monitoring activities, that helped ensure, for the first time in 16 years, elections that were free of violence.

Achieve peace and security within the region

To enjoy the benefits of economic development, governments and their people must be free of threats brought on by terrorism and crime. USAID's work to promote peace and security include reducing trafficking in drugs and persons, as well as increasing effective governance.

Key accomplishments include:

- In the Andes nearly 46,000 full time equivalent jobs have been created to provide licit employment in areas where drug crops are being or could be grown, and sales of private firms that received alternative development assistance exceeded \$40 million in 2006.
- USAID also implements non-narcotics-related peace and security programs. Since 2003, USAID has managed a program in the Dominican Republic along the Haiti border that seeks to mitigate the outbreak of violent conflict.
- In Central America, USAID programs are helping local governments improve the rule of law and address crime and violence through gang prevention/youth-at-risk investments.

Humanitarian Assistance

USAID's humanitarian assistance programs seek to both address immediate crises as well as help LAC countries anticipate future needs. In Haiti, for instance, steep terrain, erosion and environmental degradation have made the country vulnerable to disastrous losses as a result of natural disasters such as flooding and landslides. In response to this, USAID helped Haiti assess countrywide vulnerability to food insecurity and put systems in place for early disaster warning, response and mitigation. USAID also extended humanitarian assistance to Guatemala after the country was hit hard by Tropical Storm Stan. USAID programs there helped the country recover from the economic and social devastation caused by the disaster as well as increased preparedness for future disasters.