



USAID/OTI Colombia Annual Summary Report

October 2008 - September 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, 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, and technical assistance to improve both production and business operations.

The program is also providing assistance to the consolidation process through 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 – In early September, the Colombian Congress approved legislation that authorizes a national referendum to amend the constitution to allow President Alvaro Uribe to run for a third consecutive term. The Constitutional Court is in the process of reviewing the referendum to determine its constitutionality. Assuming the legislation is deemed constitutional, the vote on the referendum must occur prior to the March 13, 2010, deadline for President Uribe to register as a candidate for the general election in May 2010.

Regional Relations – Colombia's relations with the rest of South America suffered in the wake of the public announcement of a new defense cooperation agreement with the United States. The agreement will provide the U.S. military with access to seven Colombian bases that would be used to monitor regional drug and terrorist activities. The Colombian bases will replace an Ecuadorean base that has been used for monitoring activities. Responding to criticism over the arrangement, President Uribe visited regional counterparts to explain the agreement and alleviate concerns. Although Uribe's visits garnered generally positive responses from regional leadership, the agreement was a major topic on the agenda during the subsequent meeting of the Union of South American Nations. Despite the increased regional tension, bilateral relations between Colombia and Ecuador continue to improve.

Some Demobilized Combatants Join Criminal Groups – Since 2002, more than 50,000 members of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, the National Liberation Army, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)

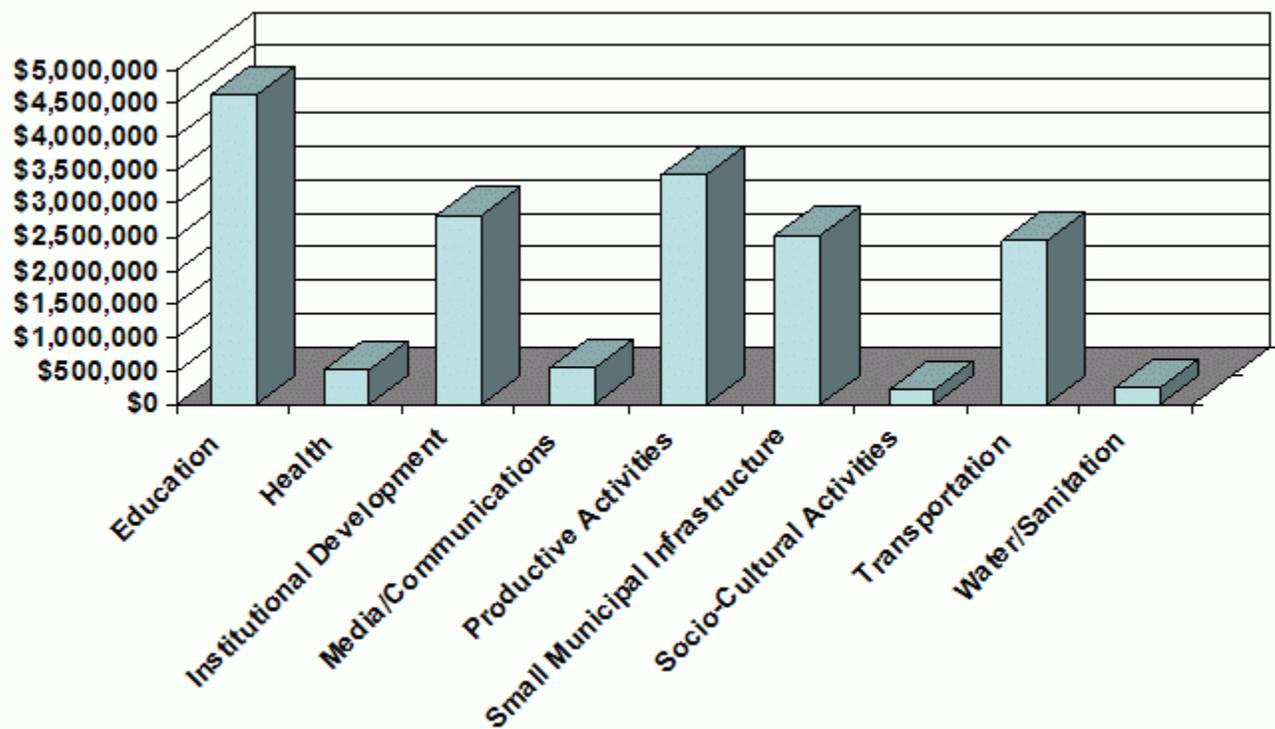
have demobilized under two GOC programs that offer combatants support as they reintegrate into society. Currently, the recidivism rate is estimated to be between 12 and 20 percent, and it is presumed that the majority of the recidivists have joined forces with criminal groups that have emerged in parts of the country where there is money to be made from the coca economy—either through production or transport. These criminal bands increasingly appear to be allying with FARC fronts; however, their activities are focused on the drug trade rather than acquiring and holding territory. The growing emergence of criminal groups has direct implications for the GOC's National Consolidation Plan, given that the responsibility for apprehending and bringing criminals to justice falls to the police, whereas the mandate of the country's military only covers armed combatants such as the FARC.

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

Funding breaks down by sector as follows: Education, 27%; Health, 3%; Institutional Development, 16%; Media/Communications, 3%; Productive Activities, 20%; Small Municipal Infrastructure, 15%; Socio-Cultural Activities, 1%; Transportation, 14%; and Water/Sanitation, 1%.



Highlights

Transition Projects – The consolidation strategy hinges on a key premise: once permanent security has been established and coca eradicated, civilian programs will assist communities make the transition from the coca economy to the legal economy. In the absence of sufficiently robust GOC programs to facilitate the consolidation process, the Dutch Embassy has been supporting target communities immediately post-eradication through food support activities and agricultural projects that allow residents to quickly generate income. However, recent political imperatives in the Netherlands compelled the Dutch to curtail support for their transition projects. Consequently, OTI has stepped in to provide support for this key part of the transition process through the spring of 2010, when it is anticipated that the Dutch will have resumed their activities or the GOC will be playing a larger role.

Programming in Puerto Lleras – At the GOC's request, programming began in a seventh municipality of Meta, including a part of Puerto Lleras. The municipality is contiguous to the main consolidation area where significant eradication efforts have recently been completed. Eighteen projects are underway, including activities focused on community health centers, school cafeterias, community recreation centers, and a boarding school.

PCIM Documentary – Throughout the process of rolling out the GOC's National Consolidation Plan and developing the U.S. Embassy's country team strategy, differences with regard to the understanding and interpretation of the idea of "consolidation of State presence" have been apparent. In response, OTI engaged a local video production company to produce a primer on consolidation, explaining the PCIM (Plan de Consolidación Integral de La Macarena) through the words of individuals directly involved with the process in Meta, including community leaders, local and national GOC officials, and consolidation plan staff. The video is designed to both explain consolidation and to stimulate discussion on the concept and will be publicly presented in a series of forums at the municipal as well as the national level.

Independence Day Celebrations – For the third year in a row, OTI supported municipal-level celebrations on Colombia's independence day, July 20. The celebrations included contests that recognized neighborhood efforts to support consolidation, short histories of the transition from the coca economy to the legal economy, and sporting events, for which OTI provided prizes.

Community Radio – The program trained 180 people in radio production techniques to help stimulate new community voices. Trainees included members of municipal councils, producer groups, and associations as well as high school students, church leaders, and other interested parties. The training focused on the production of radio spots highlighting the transition from a coca economy to a legal economy emphasizing the values of legality, security, participation, democracy, and regional identity. In addition, the bureaucratic process of legalizing community radio stations in six municipalities was completed, pending an announcement by the Ministry of Communication in November as to which stations have been approved. Another round of training will begin in the coming months. This second round of training will focus on the technical aspects of running a community radio station as well as business operations, including methods of generating revenue to cover costs and GOC taxes. OTI will be assisting the stations with set-up activities, including equipment purchases.

Value Chains – As small-scale productive projects take root in consolidation areas, opportunities to link groups of farmers to markets through value chains increase. By joining forces, these small producers—who had been marginalized in isolated communities—can have access to markets. One set of projects is seeking to raise the standards of milk production by constructing small milking stables, providing stainless steel buckets, and improving access to pasture. OTI has also supported several projects to establish milk-cooling facilities in the municipal capitals as well as in more remote communities. Once complete, the improvements should not only increase the price farmers receive for their milk but also provide a more dependable supply. Another project involved setting up a rubber tree nursery to support a group that received training in sap extraction and equipment for rubber production. The group also received technical training on practices for harvesting old trees and taking care of the new seedlings. The project will greatly expand the group's acreage of rubber trees and also provide opportunities for others to begin production.

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.



Agricultural projects in La Macarena are improving yields and connecting farmers to markets.

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 a 75 percent drop in coca production in OTI's area of operation in Meta. More importantly, acreage that has undergone eradication is being replanted in coca at a rate of less than 3 percent, whereas replanting rates run from 40 to 60 percent in areas of the country that are not part of a consolidation process. The increasing number of spontaneous returns by families who had fled fighting between the Colombian Army and the FARC provides another indicator of success. In addition, a marked change in attitude in communities undergoing transition from the coca economy to the legal economy is apparent. For example, initial community meetings in consolidation areas were, for the most part, sparsely attended with little spontaneous interaction. At these meetings, GOC representatives had to elicit discourse with questions. Today, these same communities are outspoken with their concerns—and sometimes harsh criticisms—regarding the GOC's performance.



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

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 and the departments of Antioquia and Tolima.

Next Steps

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 strategy currently under development;
- Finish refining the post-eradication model and begin implementation in three geographical areas of the PCIM;
- Complete the development of the strategic and operational plans for 10 municipalities in Antioquia and 4 municipalities in Tolima;
- Begin implementation of a project to "vaccinate" communities against violence;
- Complete planning on another phase of the effort to rehabilitate tertiary market roads, using 1207 funding, in Meta; and
- Complete the second round of training for community radio journalists and initiate a training component for high school radio journalists.