

USAID/OTI Colombia Field Report

October - December 2008

Program Description

USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives' (OTI) Initial Governance Response Program (IGRP) assists the Government of Colombia (GOC) stabilize areas recently recovered 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), which is part of the Office of the President and is responsible for coordinating the establishment of government services in 13 prioritized parts of the country. All OTI project activities are carried out in the name of Acción Social, the parent 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 Weakened – The FARC suffered several blows during the last three months of 2008. First and foremost was the escape of Oscar Tulio Lizcano, a former Colombian congressman who was kidnapped by the FARC in 2000. His escape was aided by one of his captors, alias "Isaza," who deserted at the same time. Military set-backs and defeats also continued to push the FARC into more remote and less-desirable terrain. Furthermore, the rate of desertions continues to increase in response to GOC offers of clemency and constant pressure by the Colombian military.

The FARC response has been to issue several lengthy communiqués designed to incite revolutionary fervor, to carry out a number of isolated bombings and assassinations throughout the country, and to increase the use of mines as the weapon of choice against military patrols—rather than engaging in combat. Optimists remain confident that the struggle against the FARC is nearing its end, while others foresee years more of armed conflict, albeit in increasingly remote areas of the country.

New Emergent Criminal Groups – As FARC fronts are pushed out of territory or as they prioritize coca production and trafficking over the fight for "social justice," new criminal groups are forming in areas formerly controlled by the insurgents. OTI is seeing this pattern in the regions where it operates, and reports increasingly depict small groups of armed individuals moving in these areas. The Ministry of Defense is responding by establishing three new police posts in areas where FARC rebels have been pushed into the mountains and where crime is on the increase.

President Uribe's Third Term? – An ongoing story throughout 2008 has been the question of whether President Alvaro Uribe will run for a third term when his current term ends in 2010. A third election bid is prohibited under the Colombian Constitution, but supporters have gathered more than 5 million signatures backing a change to the constitution—which was changed to allow Uribe to run for a second term. Supporters claim that Uribe has been the only president to successfully take on the FARC, and that this success is reflected in his approval rating of over 70 percent. Opponents of such a move fear that if President Uribe were to run for and win a third term, the future of the Colombian democratic system would be threatened.

False Positives – A major scandal broke late in 2008 when a number of young men from a low-income section of Bogota were found dead in mass graves in distant parts of the country. The youths were recruited for jobs, assassinated, and reported by the military as FARC combatants killed in combat. Such reports are known as false positives. An investigation showed that the "recruitments" and killings were the work of elements of the military attempting to demonstrate effectiveness by reporting larger numbers of enemy kills. These false positives occurred despite a change in military policy in early 2008 that officially shifted reporting emphasis from body counts to numbers of captures and desertions. The results of the investigation spurred an outcry from both national and international human rights organizations—which cited the deaths as a reason to reject the Free Trade Agreement that has been languishing in the U.S. Congress for more than a year. Twenty-seven officers, including three generals, were dismissed following the investigation, and the commander of the Colombian Army stepped down.

OTI Highlights

A. Narrative Summary

During the quarter, implementation of the government's unified consolidation plan continued. The effort is the GOC's first-ever attempt to put into practice a sequenced and coordinated strategy to consolidate areas formerly held by insurgents. The process begins with the provision of security and is followed by voluntary and forced coca eradication, the establishment of police posts, and the provision of civilian government social services, including a judiciary. To assist this effort, OTI supported activities to develop a strategy to prevent youth recruitment by illegal armed groups, to hire key staff to manage logistics for the civilian elements of the consolidation plan, and to develop a communications strategy for the consolidation effort in cooperation with the civilian consolidation coordinator. OTI meets regularly with the consolidation team to coordinate responses in areas that have only recently been recovered from illegal armed groups and where security remains tenuous. In these transition zones, OTI is working with the civilian staff at CCAI to identify activities to productively engage communities in remote areas that were previously inaccessible.

Security and eradication efforts are progressing faster than anticipated at the plan's outset, although efforts to establish civilian governmental structures continue to proceed slowly. Progress has also been made with efforts to mobilize resources. The Ministries in charge of roads, electricity, and training have all committed significant resources, as has the GOC's Office of the High Commission for Peace. Furthermore, the governor's office has committed significant funding for tertiary roads and education, and mayors are also contributing to the plan's implementation (within their very limited means).

The OTI program component that implements small-scale community-infrastructure projects continues to increase citizen confidence in the state's commitment and ability to resolve their most pressing needs. During the program's most recent strategy-review session, field staff reported that in some communities the change in community perception of the government presence is "total." The process of prioritizing projects in open community assemblies attended by members of local government is central to the process of improving citizen perceptions of the GOC. The assemblies have been especially valuable for addressing citizen expectations that local government not only contribute to each activity but also be held accountable for its part. Field staff also noted that over the past year there has been a marked shift away from individualism toward a community-focused attitude, and attributed the shift, in large part, to these projects.

The program's economic development component, which started in late November 2007, has begun to show real benefits. The methodology for implementing quick-impact, small-scale income-generating activities that initially focused on relatively secure, consolidated areas has been adapted for implementation in the transition zones, where security has only recently been established and the potential for political impact is the greatest. Support to farmers' groups includes inputs and technical assistance (both organizational and crop-specific). To ensure that technical assistance continues beyond the short life-span of each small activity, the program is also working to strengthen local entities that provide technical support. OTI is coordinating closely with the program supported by the Dutch government that provides assistance (food and productive projects) to communities immediately post-eradication. Program staff plays a major role in pulling together various key actors in the agricultural sector (municipal, departmental, and national) and catalyzing linkages between programs and resources to advance the consolidation process—probably the major impact of the program to date.

Building on earlier efforts, OTI supported GOC preparations to replicate consolidation efforts in other areas and also provided technical assistance to CCAI to develop plans for other transition zones.

B. Grants Activity Summary

During the quarter, the program approved 78 new projects worth \$2.3 million. Activities to date total \$10.1 million on more than 365 grants.

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

- Technical Assistance (including assistance to CCAI): \$109,000. The program provided support for GOC workshops to expand opportunities for higher education for youth in recovered zones and technical assistance to expand consolidation efforts in other parts of the country.
- Municipal Assembly Activities: \$1.6 million (e.g., assistance to schools; sports programs; health posts; water, electricity, roads, and transportation projects; and cultural events). These activities included repairing and rehabilitating health posts, schools, and elderly homes as well as supporting youth and cultural events in consolidated zones.
- Income-generating projects: \$617,000. Technical assistance continues to be an important part of these

projects. The Center for International Tropical Agriculture and the GOC's National Training Service are providing assistance to partner associations and groups to help farmers increase productivity and establish regional linkages that will facilitate long-term sustainability while generating rapid increases in income in consolidated territory.

C. Indicators of Success

The primary program objective of increasing citizen confidence in the GOC in a part of the country undergoing transition to GOC control is being achieved. As activities were expanded in late 2007 to support implementation of the consolidation plan, program focus also widened to support the development of a model for consolidation efforts in other parts of the country.

The consolidation plan is now widely seen in Colombia as *the* model for creating the conditions necessary for sustained establishment of a state presence in formerly ungoverned parts of the country. The GOC is basing its still-to-be-finalized national consolidation strategy on the unified consolidation plan that OTI has supported. Similarly, lessons learned during plan implementation are being used to help shape the U.S. Embassy's new embassy-wide strategy as well as the USAID Mission's revised strategy.

In mid-2008, a decision was made to shift the focus of the bulk of OTI program support from relatively consolidated areas to areas still very much in the transition process—areas where demonstrations of GOC support can have a much greater political impact than those where communities take security and state presence (as incipient as it may be) more for granted. This shift in programming was not an easy process, given the dearth of information about the transition zones (e.g., population, roads, and community dynamics) and security concerns. However, in the final three months of 2008, the shift was completed in close collaboration with consolidation plan field staff.

Program Appraisal

The program strategy is working well, an assessment that was resoundingly confirmed by field staff in the most recent strategy review. The shift of program operations to transition zones has presented challenges in terms of project implementation, but it has also allowed the program to focus on areas where the political impact of its efforts will be greater.

As OTI prepares its exit strategy for mid-2010, the program is working to ensure that its modus operandi of flexibility and quick response can be incorporated into the USAID Mission's new consolidation strategy. The effort is also focusing on lessons learned while developing the consolidation plan model to inform activities supporting USAID's medium- to long-term vision.

Next Steps/Immediate Priorities

Priorities for the next three months include the following:

- Continue to work with partners to implement the consolidation plan, focusing on continued GOC mobilization into program areas of operation to establish a permanent state presence.
- Continue to expand the program's geographic footprint into transition zones as the security situation permits.
- Incorporate lessons learned from the community infrastructure and income-generating components of operations into methodologies that can be replicated in other parts of the country as part of the GOC's national consolidation strategy, the U.S. Embassy's initiative, and the USAID Mission's revised strategy.
- Implement a regional program to increase the capacity of teachers working in one-room school houses, the most common type of school in rural areas.
- Provide technical assistance to community councils and other local leadership to increase their capacity as community advocates.
- Begin efforts to repair prioritized tertiary roads in collaboration with the governor, mayors, and consolidation plan staff.
- Provide 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.

- Work with the team of consultants assessing the causes of youth recruitment into illegally armed groups to finalize and to begin implementation of a strategy to prevent youth recruitment.
- 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 population displaced by violence..