

TOWARD TRUE ALTERNATIVES TO COCA:

Ways Forward for USAID in Colombia



This briefing paper seeks to illuminate ways forward for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)-Colombia as it works to improve alternative development programs and create greater impact in Colombia's most marginalized and coca producing regions. The document's recommendations and observations are largely based on an in-depth consultation process that took place in June 2008 between USAID, international development organizations, Colombian civil society groups and rural farming organizations.



Lutheran World Relief is a ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), individuals and parish groups in international relief, development, advocacy and social responsibility.

This unprecedented consultation was proposed by Lutheran World Relief and other humanitarian aid agencies with partners in rural Colombia who are committed to developing more effective models of community-based alternative development. They are also committed to promoting a model of development designed with the goal of empowering the communities they seek to benefit and bringing an end to the punitive strategy of aerial fumigation in Colombia. USAID was open to and became fully engaged in this extensive consultation process that allowed for frank discussion with small farmers, their associations and independent humanitarian aid agencies.

We believe these recommendations can contribute to a more effective aid program with a greater sense of community ownership. We offer these recommendations and analysis to inform USAID in Colombia and other countries, as well as to provide input for the administration and Congress as they shape new aid packages.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SUPPORT FOR RURAL COLOMBIA

Over the last eight years, Plan Colombia—a largely anti-narcotic and military U.S. aid package—has affected the lives of Colombian

peasants. To a large extent, these impacts have been assessed as negative by human rights, development and civil society organizations working in the country. They note a continued violation of human rights by armed forces, no decrease in coca production and persistent poverty in Colombia's mostly rural regions.

In 2007, taking note of these impacts, the U.S. Congress reduced military assistance from nearly 80% to 57% of total foreign appropriation funds for Colombia and raised funds for social and economic investment to represent 43% of the total package. The majority of these social and economic funds, reaching \$236,891,624 for FY 2008—are channeled through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)¹. This assistance was called for by many Colombian and U.S.-based human rights NGOs and development organizations. It represents an improvement to Plan Colombia of years past.

To some extent, this positive shift represented a return to the original logic embodied in the formulation of Plan Colombia, which had not been fulfilled: Incentives to grow and process coca will be greatly reduced through support and development for Colombia's impoverished rural regions—the coca-growing areas. With this increase in funds, USAID-Colombia

1. Isacson, Adam. October 20, 2008. <http://www.cipcol.org/?p=514>.



received important financial support to carry out numerous social and economic programs. USAID alternative development programs received the largest amount of Plan Colombia social and economic funds in 2008.

Alternative development is intended to provide rural Colombians with opportunities in the agricultural arena—including development of new crops, technical skills, marketing knowledge and access to feasible markets for their products. Above all other initiatives, it is development aimed at Colombia’s poorest rural regions that holds the greatest possibilities for transforming small economies, livelihoods and ultimately creating opportunities for Colombian peasants to transition from illicit crop production to legal rural activities. Possibilities for the U.S. to assist in this kind of transition—and have an impact on the lives of rural Colombians—are real and powerful, especially when one considers that U.S. aid represents the largest amount of money dedicated to rural development in Colombia. More than investments made by any other country, or the Colombian government itself, the U.S. is shaping rural development models in Colombia and thereby the lives of Colombia’s rural citizens. Within this, alternative development takes on a prominent role. Since 2000, the U.S. has dedicated over \$500 million to USAID’s alternative development program².

As this funding increases, it is important to evaluate past programs and ensure that this aid is effectively targeted. While the impulse behind this spending is logical—rural development can help pull small farmers out of poverty and away from coca production—USAID alternative development has nonetheless come under critique over the last eight years for:

- Failing to help curb coca production.
- Failing to mitigate poverty and provide sustainable agriculture options to coca-growing families.

- Lacking in support for local and regionally designed development plans.
- Promoting agro-business models aimed at strengthening private industry and export capacity³.
- Dividing community-level social and economic processes through its resource allocation process.

Alternative Development projects have also been greatly weakened in practice and in public perception by the failure to protect these projects from aerial spraying—two elements of the U.S. counter-narcotics campaign working at glaring cross-purposes.

Due to these critiques, many rural Colombian organizations have refused USAID funding, as have some U.S.-based development organizations. While increased funding for social and economic programs in 2008 represented a step toward improved U.S. policy in Colombia, considerable improvements must be made to USAID’s alternative development programs in order to foster sustainable, comprehensive rural development—and ultimately, a more effective counter-narcotics policy.

CONSULTATIONS FOR CHANGE

In 2007, Lutheran World Relief, with support from international and Colombia-based civil society organizations, began preparations for a consultation process to be held in June 2008 with USAID’s alternative development department. This consultation, to take place between USAID alternative development staff, international development organizations, rural Colombian organizations and peasant farmers was the first consultation of its kind in Colombia. LWR’s initial goals for the consultation were:

2. U.S. Government Accountability Office, Plan Colombia: Drug Reduction Goals Were not Fully Met, 2008.

3. In Colombia, these models often weaken the capacity of small producers and threaten the control of small farmers, indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations.



1. Allow rural Colombian civil society and small farming organizations to learn more about USAID's alternative development programming and the impacts it has, and may have, in rural Colombia.
2. Provide time for the above groups to share their own successful alternative development models, experiences and proposals with USAID. This would enhance the agency's understanding of diverse local approaches to alternative development.
3. Share concerns about specific USAID alternative development projects as well as the agency's overall approach to alternative development in Colombia, and discuss concerns regarding other aspects of U.S. counter-narcotics policy that affect the possibility of successful alternative development.
4. Establish a space in which USAID staff and rural Colombians could exchange information, concerns and, ultimately contribute to improved 2009–2011 USAID alternative development programming in Colombia.

Initial preparation for this consultation included a research project aimed at gathering information about impacts of rural development and, more specifically, USAID alternative development in some of Colombia's most marginalized rural regions. LWR hired an internationally recognized drug policy expert and researcher to lead this project⁴. He carried out in-depth interviews with rural farmers, farming organizations, local and regional governments and civil society organizations in Putumayo, Caquetá, Chocó, and Catatumbo. Some of the organizations receive international and USAID support, and others do not. His research was enhanced by analysis of Colombian government

4. Ricardo Vargas.

documents over the last ten years, such as those produced by the Colombian National Council on Social and Economic Policy and third party research on the issue.

The regions he worked in were chosen because they are rural regions influenced by coca production, characterized by poverty, relative marginalization and ethnically diverse rural populations. Putumayo and Caquetá are two of Colombia's most coca-dense provinces, and were the center of Plan Colombia anti-narcotic and military operations for many years. Putumayo, as such, was the focal point of USAID programming in the first years of Plan Colombia. More recently, Chocó has emerged as a coca-producing province.

REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS

In June 2008 three consultations with USAID alternative development staff and USAID's Director and Sub-Director took place in three Colombian cities: Cartagena, Bogotá and Pasto. USAID was receptive to LWR's request to engage in this consultation process and put forth important resources, time, staff and energy to make these meetings successful. Their support of the process was noted by participants and demonstrated the desire and commitment of USAID alternative development staff and directors to continue developing improved and useful alternative development programs. This commitment remains and has led to subsequent meetings and consultations on thematic topics related to USAID programming including food security, local governance and agricultural mono-crops.

Holding the consultations in three locations allowed LWR, member organizations of el Diálogo Inter Agencial (Inter-Agency Dialogue in Colombia, DIAL) and the NGO MINGA to invite representatives from rural and civil society organizations representing many regions, including the Northern Coast, Chocó, Caquetá, Putumayo, Cauca and Nariño, to participate in the

“For us, local government is not like it is for you: representative of your community. The state, the government and the private sector, as well as illegal groups are one in the same at our local level. To say you work with local governments means something very different to us than what you think. In Córdoba, there have been countless governors over the last two periods because of corruption and illegal acts. How do you ensure that you are working with local governments that are legitimate in Cordoba?”

—Consultation participant,
farmer and NGO-leader from Córdoba.

consultations. Prior to these consultations, LWR and DIAL members met with and facilitated preparatory meetings with all organizations involved. Their participation was largely based on their desire to influence the kind of impact USAID can have in their communities. In the case of communities from Putumayo, they also wished to voice their concern about misguided USAID programs that had damaged their communities. Many farmers participated because they have little access to their own government representatives and therefore believe the best possibility to advocate for change in rural Colombia at this time is through USAID. They also believe that policies and approaches being currently promoted by USAID will likely influence their own government as elements of Plan Colombia are integrated into Colombian policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

USAID alternative development Colombia staff and directors have discussed these recommendations with LWR and have indicated that they will consider them as they develop 2009–2011 programming in Colombia.

- ▶ All USAID alternative development projects should be developed and designed with local stakeholders and with clear audit and

5. Recommendations provided are the result of collaborative work between Lutheran World Relief, Minga, La Conferencia Afrocolombiana, Lutheran World Federation, La Alianza de Organizaciones Sociales, The Latin American Working Group, Catholic Relief Services and El Diálogo Inter Agencial.

accountability mechanisms from the outset. Projects should be developed in accordance with municipal and provincial development plans through a consultation process with farmers, existing local civil society groups and local governments. However, USAID should be aware of “clientelism,” corruption and penetration by illegal armed actors that characterize some local governments. To address these concerns, USAID should look to civil society organizations, not just local government, to convoke and participate in a mandated consultation process prior to, and throughout, the implementation of alternative development projects. Audits and other accountability mechanisms should be implemented.

Currently, alternative development programs adhere almost exclusively to the National Government’s Development plan. As such, programs are neither responsive to nor supportive of local and regional development goals and needs. This has resulted in programming that undermines important regional and local organizing and planning efforts. It excludes proposals that are most well-suited to local cultural, environmental and economic realities. As a result, in many regions, USAID is viewed as an extension of national policy and not as an agency capable of engaging in effective and relevant local development initiatives. Communities report that projects are often re-designed within the framework of national development plans in order to receive support, not necessarily because

they meet the needs or respond to dynamics on a municipal and regional level.

- ▶ Alternative development programs supported by USAID should make food security a top priority. Indicators should be developed before implementation of such programs to gauge, and help ensure, that increased food security of program participants is achieved. These indicators should be developed with local and civil society groups and, where applicable, adhere to food security initiatives already included in indigenous “life plans” and Afro-Colombian communities’ economic and territorial plans. Special attention should be given to the quantity of land needed by families to achieve food security, which varies by region. An evaluation of food security indicators should be included in USAID reports to Congress.

USAID has made food security a priority but has failed to implement programs and evaluation indicators that make food security feasible and attainable for all program participants. USAID alternative development programs have prioritized production for sale and job creation above food security. This focus undermines the importance of subsistence in many of Colombia’s rural communities and is not comprehensive enough to ensure the capacity of communities to access diverse, nutritious, culturally appropriate and affordable foods.

- ▶ The aerial fumigation program in Colombia should be terminated. Until this takes place, all USAID alternative development projects should be protected from aerial fumigations.

To best ensure this protection, the burden of proof and official complaint processing for wrongful fumigations of USAID-supported projects should be shifted to USAID staff from the program participants (small farmers). USAID personnel should visit affected projects within

“I don’t understand how you support us and our communities? Our food crops are fumigated, even your crops are fumigated but you say USAID supports legal programs and food security. It’s like the elbow erasing what the hand of the same arm draws. I do not understand.”

—*Indigenous leader and consultation participant from Putumayo*



seven days of the fumigation, document all damages and fill out the official complaint form and compensation request together with affected program participants. In addition, USAID staff should accompany the participants as they turn in and await the processing of these forms at the relevant government institutions. USAID should also monitor and carry out adequate follow-up on the complaint process to help ensure that participants are provided compensation in a just and timely fashion. Manual voluntary eradication, premised on community support, near alternative development projects is a useful tool that can avoid damaging projects and crops and should be implemented.

Alternative development is incompatible with fumigation. Fumigations threaten the viability and success of alternative development in Colombia. Numerous USAID projects have been decimated by wrongful fumigation. This destroys crops, food supplies and farmers' faith in USAID programs. It also results in the waste of USAID funds and resources and drives farmers back to coca production, thereby undermining U.S. antinarcotics efforts.

- ▶ USAID must shift the geographic location of its alternative development investments to include areas most affected by poverty and coca production, such as the provinces of Nariño, Guaviare and Putumayo.

USAID has shifted alternative development programs away from many of these regions even though farmers in these provinces were the focus of more than half the forced manual eradication and aerial spray operations in 2006 and 2007. Lack of viable development plans and resources in these areas has only led to failed anti-narcotics policies in Colombia and has left people malnourished, poverty stricken and deeply critical of U.S. efforts in their communities. The intention of Congressional funding for USAID alternative development in Colombia was to help mitigate the factors driving small farmers to produce coca. For this to occur Colombia's most vulnerable coca growing regions must receive quality USAID alternative development programs.

- ▶ USAID must formulate criteria for assessing zones vulnerable to coca production and in need of “preventative programming.” These criteria must be based on identifying the local and regional dynamics that have and may lead to expansion (important lessons can be drawn from the recent expansion of coca crops into Magdalena Medio, Nariño and Bajo Atrato).

Currently, USAID justifies its investments in non-coca growing regions as “preventative” programming. Nonetheless, USAID has no elaborated policy or criteria for assessing which zones are vulnerable to coca expansion. As such, programming in any part of Colombia has become justifiable by USAID and has led to the majority of resources being used to support programs in traditionally non-coca growing regions of Colombia.

According to figures from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 85% of families that depend on growing coca live in the regions of Meta-Guaviare, Putumayo-Caquetá and the Pacific. Alternative development funds are not being spent in these regions. Investment in alternative development is concentrated in three regions that contain only 28% of the coca-growing areas. USAID is not building capacity to work in areas most impacted by poverty, coca production and frail institutions.

- ▶ USAID should finish developing and carefully implement guidelines to ensure that U.S. funding does not support any projects on land obtained by violence. USAID should strengthen the draft guidelines by consultation with The Center for Social Justice Research of Los Andes University (El Centro de Investigación en Justicia Social), the Latin American Institute



of Alternative Services (Instituto Latinoamericano de Servicios Alternativas) and the Inspector General's office. This protocol should be translated into Spanish and distributed publicly and posted on USAID's website.

- ▶ USAID should carefully evaluate the political and social contexts of the areas in which it will work. Ultimately, the decision to work in any region should not be made only with an eye toward creating economic security. In particular, USAID should consider whether its programs in areas that the government is targeting for "institutional recuperation" could contribute to the consolidation of power by illegal armed groups and mafia structures over the local population. To avoid this, prior to investing in programs, USAID should carry out a rigorous diagnostic of the regions in which it will work, taking into consideration: changes in the land tenure structure caused by displacement of people through violence; the presence of emerging power structures related to drug trafficking, guerrilla groups, paramilitaries or successor groups that impede free participation in community decision making; and the security of legitimate local community organizations and NGOs .
- ▶ USAID should modify the current requirements in place to access its productive and marketing projects. All alternative development projects, financed fully or partially by USAID, must include protection mechanisms that favor small farmers and producers, ensuring them better access to local and regional markets, credit, and rotating funds.
- ▶ No USAID programs or projects should be designed or implemented by or in conjunction with the Armed Forces. A lack of independence between development work and the Armed Forces is a poor development model. Furthermore, it places

USAID beneficiaries, implementing partners and USAID personnel at risk as well as delegitimizes the work of USAID.

USAID is currently supporting Colombian military initiative Center for Coordination and Integrated Action (CCAI). Under CCAI, the Colombian military takes on social service responsibilities in areas identified as having weak state institutions, and under threat from insurgents. USAID support for CCAI is largely concentrated in the province of Meta. The stated goal of CCAI is to strengthen the Colombian Government's legitimacy by responding to community needs. Among other activities, this includes support for recreational programs, health brigades and schools. These are activities that should be carried out by non-military institutions. To support military involvement in these efforts is to militarize social assistance, putting citizens at risk, and undermining the very government institutions already charged with these responsibilities and in need of support.

- ▶ USAID should immediately present all cases of the violation of human rights of its program participants to embassy staff in charge of the human rights portfolio. USAID should ask that they carry out immediate advocacy on their behalf with relevant government agencies.

Currently, USAID alternative development has no written procedure in place for protecting participants against threats or the violation of their human rights. USAID works in regions polarized by conflict—a conflict in which association with U.S. citizens, agencies or programs can put people at great risk of attack by armed groups. USAID must respond to this reality by offering some level of institutional support and protection for Colombians who compromise their physical security to become a part of USAID programming. If USAID does not provide this support, program participation will suffer precisely in those regions where development is most needed.



- ▶ USAID should implement nation-wide consultations before initiating the design of new comprehensive programming. These consultations should include community leaders, civil society, small farmers, Afro-Colombian, indigenous and international development organizations that do not receive USAID support. These consultations should be used to solicit their suggestions for improved USAID programming, concerns over USAID's alternative development

model, and examples and information about successful alternative development projects taking place in Colombia.

- ▶ Congress should require that reports from USAID-Colombia include comprehensive indicators that are capable of gauging program success on multiple levels. These reports must include information that helps Congress assess USAID's impact on issues most relevant to rural Colombians such as food security, access to arable land, job security and quality, as well as the creation of viable alternatives to coca production.

“One man’s two boys were recently murdered. We think he is dead. This man was a member of a USAID project in Cordoba. We don’t know if this was retaliation, but the question I have for you [USAID] is how do you respond to these things, to these violations of people who are part of your program?”

—*Consultation participant and church leader from Córdoba*

Current reports to Congress rely heavily on information about the number of projects executed, funds spent, and participants enrolled. They do not provide Congress with information or measurements to adequately assess the role of USAID in combating rural poverty, economic

insecurity and thereby coca production. To ensure that reports best assess USAID alternative development success in Colombia they should include the following information:

- An assessment, according to previously established indicators, on improvements in the long-term food security and food sovereignty of USAID alternative development program participants.
- Descriptions and numbers reflecting the type of job creation spurred by USAID projects including participants' income earned, benefits received, options for access to land created, potential job security and improved access to credit.
- Number of projects supported by USAID that have been fumigated, including how many of the affected participants have received compensation, information on complaints that are still being processed, and the total monetary loss such fumigations have caused USAID.
- The number and classification of aggressions against and/ or violations of human rights of any USAID program participants in Colombia, including USAID's response to these violations and the current status of such cases. This information should be provided in such a way that the identity of participants is not revealed or their safety compromised.
- Budgets for all projects, location of projects, a list of project implementers and detailed results of all projects.

This report should be made available to Congress and the public on USAID's website.

ENSURING SUCCESS

USAID's alternative development programming is one of the best tools the United States has to promote development and equality in countries facing poverty and conflict. In Colombia, the role

USAID can play in easing farmers out of coca production and into licit economies is crucial for achieving equality and true security in the country. To date, USAID has failed to do this. Coca production remains steady and the majority of rural farmers still suffer from grinding poverty. As a result, the United States has not met its most basic policy goals in Colombia despite nearly 6 billion dollars in spending.

Currently, USAID Colombia has dedicated staff and leadership capable of implementing successful programming. They demonstrated great knowledge and commitment during the June 2008 consultation process and have since promoted further consultations to enhance their program planning. What USAID lacks are policies and practices that coincide with the intentions and goals of US legislation guiding policy in Colombia. By implementing the above recommendations, USAID will be better able to support US policy goals in the country and improve the lives of rural Colombians. Likewise, these recommendations provide a basis by which Congress can better monitor and provide oversight of USAID programming in Colombia and thereby support, with confidence, increased spending for USAID Colombia in the years ahead.

The June 2008 consultation process in Colombia provided a crucial space for communication and information sharing that has been desperately needed since the initiation of Plan Colombia in 2000. As a result, steps to improving USAID programming and thereby the lives of many rural Colombians have been identified. LWR commends USAID's willingness to engage in and learn from this consultation, and recommends that USAID undertake similarly extensive consultations with members of civil society in all of the countries in which it works. Such intensive communication efforts with colleague organizations and communities will serve to improve the effectiveness of development assistance provided by USAID, the image of the Agency abroad and overall US engagement in the world, and will ultimately result in a much greater impact on the problems of global poverty and injustice.

For more information related to this report, or to order a copy, please contact Lutheran World Relief at advocacy@lwr.org

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