



Colombia

Colombia is one of the oldest democracies in Latin America, yet it has been plagued by violence and continues to endure the longest armed internal conflict in the western hemisphere. In 2000, collaboration between the U.S. and Colombia under the landmark Plan Colombia sought to increase internal security, reduce the power and size of illegally armed groups, disrupt coca cultivation and drug trafficking, and improve the lives of coca growers through alternative development assistance. With these goals in mind, ACDI/VOCA programs in Colombia have assisted coffee cooperatives and boosted the status of indigenous populations.

Enhancing Livelihoods through Specialty Coffee Production

ACDI/VOCA worked on a variety of institutional strengthening projects targeting cooperatives in various regions of Colombia in the 1970s and 1980s, but maintained contacts at arm's length because of security concerns. In 1997, Colombian NGOs, cooperatives and government agencies interested in ACDI/VOCA's Brazil-based Amazon regional initiative invited us to re-engage directly in Colombia, ushering in a new era of work in the country.

In 2002, building off of these relationships, ACDI/VOCA began implementing the USAID-



funded **Specialty Coffee Program**. This program aimed to provide critical assistance to Colombian coffee producers addressing the process of growing, harvesting, processing, storing and marketing specialty coffee. The early ACDI/VOCA team in Bogotá was composed entirely of local staff and worked closely with local organizations including the Federación Nacional de Cafeteros de Colombia as well as volunteers. We also collaborated with partners such as the Specialty Coffee Association of America and the Coffee Quality Institute to help provide specialized training to Colombian coffee producers.

The Specialty Coffee program helped to make coffee a more valuable commodity in Colombia, creating a viable alternative to

illegal coca and poppy production. At the end of the program in 2007, 32,651 hectares remained free of illicit crop production (600 percent of target objective) and 13,686 hectares of licit crops were supported through coffee production and food security (275 percent of target objective). Nearly 7,400 families with small farms benefited from ACIDI/VOCA's program and 86 percent of program beneficiary coffee growers saw an increase in production volume. Our stellar performance in the coffee sector brought the attention of the Departamento para la Prosperidad Social, which awarded ACIDI/VOCA funds to expand activities in supporting the transition towards licit economies. This was an unmistakable indicator of the Colombian government's confidence in ACIDI/VOCA as an effective implementer.

In 2007, ACIDI/VOCA began a four-year follow-on project to the Specialty Coffee Program, employing a value chain approach to sustainably improve the competitiveness and marketability of Colombian specialty coffee in the global market. The program strengthened six elements covering the entire value chain continuum: renovation of coffee plantations; on-farm processing infrastructure; quality improvement; technical assistance in coffee production and appropriate environmental practices; institutional strengthening and training for producer groups and their staffs; and commercialization and marketing.

To achieve these results, ACIDI/VOCA worked closely with a wide range of strategic partners,

each of whom contributed knowledge and technical innovation that strengthened the Colombian coffee sector. We built alliances with the Federación Nacional de Cafeteros and the Departamento para la Prosperidad Social. Our private sector partners included the Specialty Coffee Association of America, the Coffee Quality Institute and Nespresso. Through these various alliances, ACIDI/VOCA leveraged over \$10 million in outside funding, which enabled the program to reach a greater number of beneficiaries and expand geographically to include assistance to several producer groups that had been displaced due to armed conflict in the region.

Over the life of the project, a total of 30,583 Colombian families learned and applied best agricultural practices for specialty coffee production on their farms. In addition, 14 strategic alliances were formed with public and private sector partners to speed up the adoption of specialty coffee production techniques while improving the commercialization of niche products. From 2006 to 2012, the number of bags of specialty coffee exported by Colombia rose from 220,000 to over 2,000,000. Furthermore, in assisting Colombian smallholder farmers, ACIDI/VOCA helped increase their household incomes by an average of 17 percent.

Improving the Well-being and Inclusion of Indigenous Communities

Although most of our work in Colombia has focused on the coffee sector, a recent program, the **Afro-Colombian and Indigenous Program (ACIP)**, has worked to

increase the socioeconomic and political inclusion of marginalized ethnic communities in the country. While USAID in Colombia has indirectly worked with ethnic minorities for over a decade, this is the first time that a standalone program is being implemented for the sole purpose of improving the lives of Afro-Colombian and indigenous persons. Started in 2011, the five-year program targets populations in three geographic regions: Pacific, Caribbean and Central.

ACDI/VOCA uses an integrated approach focused on local participation that responds to the needs of these ethnically and geographically diverse communities. The program:

- 1) strengthens the capacity of key state institutions to develop and implement pro-minority public policies, use their resources effectively and improve their minority information systems
- 2) enhances the advocacy and governance capacities of ethnic organizations
- 3) expands minority populations' access to economic opportunities
- 4) increases the quantity and quality of positive messaging regarding ethnic minority issues.

The Colombian government continues to recognize ACDI/VOCA as an important and effective development implementer. In 2012, ACDI/VOCA began implementing a joint \$5.9-million program with the Instituto Colombiano de Desarrollo Rural (INCODER, the Colombian Institute of Rural Development). The program will empower Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities in some of Colombia's poorest and most underdeveloped regions by promoting economic security and

formalizing territorial rights. The main objective of these efforts is to strengthen ethnic organizations and improve traditional cultivation practices that are being lost, making sure that all activities fit within the cultural framework of the communities.

Looking to the future, ACDI/VOCA will keep working with local partners and the private sector to forge stronger relationships with Colombian government agencies. We will continue to support the country's growing smallholder expertise in coffee production while providing assistance to indigenous communities to make sure these groups are included—socially and economically.

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