



Boosting Pride and Participation in Colombia

Challenge

The development challenges of Colombia are well-known. People struggle to live productive lives in a country weakened by economic crisis, illicit crop trade and violence. Many communities are located in areas where confrontations with the region's drug-traffickers are frequent, and sometimes daily occurrences.



Photo: ARD, Inc

USAID helps to improve a bridge in the municipality of Puerto Caicedo in Columbia, while encouraging citizens to play an active role in improving their communities.

“The number of students increased by 60% after the bridge construction. Now we need one more school teacher because we have more children in school.”

-Ligia del Carmen Pejendino, school teacher

Results

By encouraging beneficiaries to identify their most pressing needs and take an active role in the selection, design, and construction process, USAID creates the sense of ownership and achievement in Colombia's high-risk regions. USAID has been able to implement over 200 social infrastructure projects in Colombia which have benefited 491,630 people. The impact goes far beyond simply building a new bridge or health center. In a country where daily life is shadowed by violence, these projects bring neighbors together to work towards a future where fear and conflict are replaced by freedom and opportunity.

Initiative

While these high-risk areas present multiple challenges for development in Colombia, USAID's activities provide badly needed bridges, health stations, and aqueducts while restoring a sense of community pride and possibility. One of the key ingredients to the success of these activities is community participation.

A prime example is a bridge project in Puerto Caicedo, a major coca-growing region. While completing the final inspection of the bridge, the civil engineer noticed a large sack of steel re-enforcing rods at the work site. Concerned that the community action group purchased more steel than required and the corresponding oversight committee had not reported the mistake, she called a meeting of local leaders.

Somewhat sheepishly, the leaders confessed that they had conspired to build two bridges rather than one. Because they had paid cash for the materials, a local supplier had given them a substantial discount, and they convinced the workers to donate half of their wages back to the project. With those savings and the proceeds of dances and raffles, they had almost completed the construction of a second bridge. The engineer was surprised when she saw a very well-constructed bridge, even longer than the first.

Case Study

