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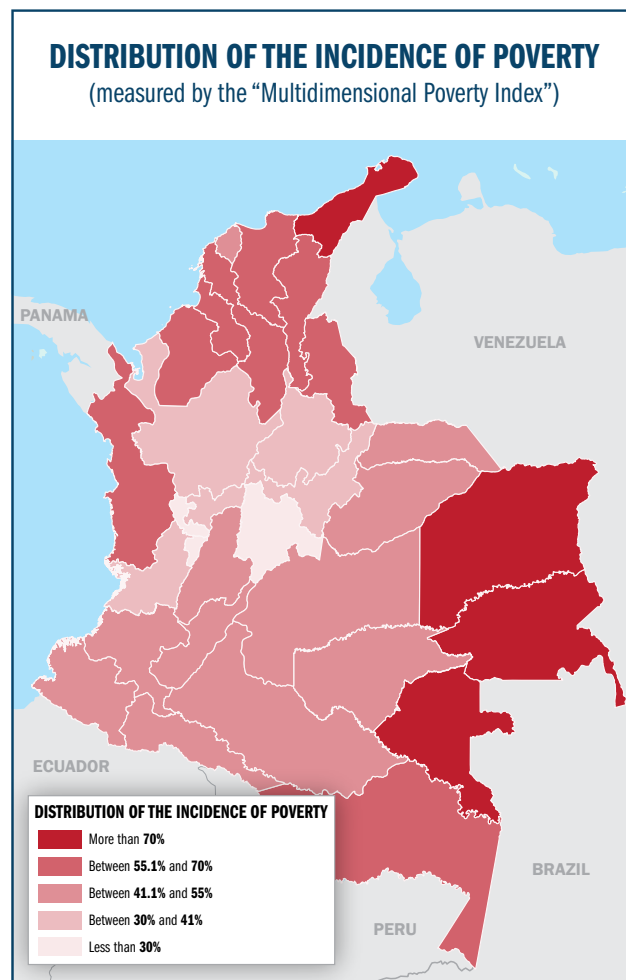
VOICES FROM THE NEW COUNTRYSIDE

THE CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY OF PEACE IN RURAL COLOMBIA

INTRODUCTION

The advent of a signed peace accord in Colombia between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) rebels and government brought the promise of an end to five decades of armed conflict. Unfortunately, on October 2, 2016, in a referendum result with a low turnout, the Colombia people rejected that accord by a narrow margin. Opinions are mixed on whether the accord can be modified and if the current cease-fire will hold. By “sealing the deal” through implementation of a signed agreement with the FARC, Colombia might have begun to tackle some of the most important root causes of the conflict that has displaced nearly six million people, the second highest in the world, exceeded only by Syria. Many of these people are living in major or secondary cities and some are now returning to the Colombian countryside, spurred by the promise of the recently approved Land and Victim Laws.¹ Sustainable rural development in the nuevo campo Colombiano (“new Colombian countryside”) that addresses challenges in rural areas and the needs of returnees is a shared priority of both the leadership of the FARC and the current Colombian government led by President Juan Manuel Santos. As an indication of its importance, this approach, referred to as the Integrated Agrarian Development Land Policy, was one of the first issues agreed to in the long peace negotiations.

¹ LWR and LAWG reports: Closer to Home A Critical Analysis of Colombia’s Proposed Land Law: http://lwr.org/wp-content/uploads/Colombia-Policy_Land_Law.pdf and Far from the Promised Land: Land Restitution on Colombia’s Caribbean Coast: http://lwr.org/wp-content/uploads/Colombia_Far_from_Promised_Land.pdf



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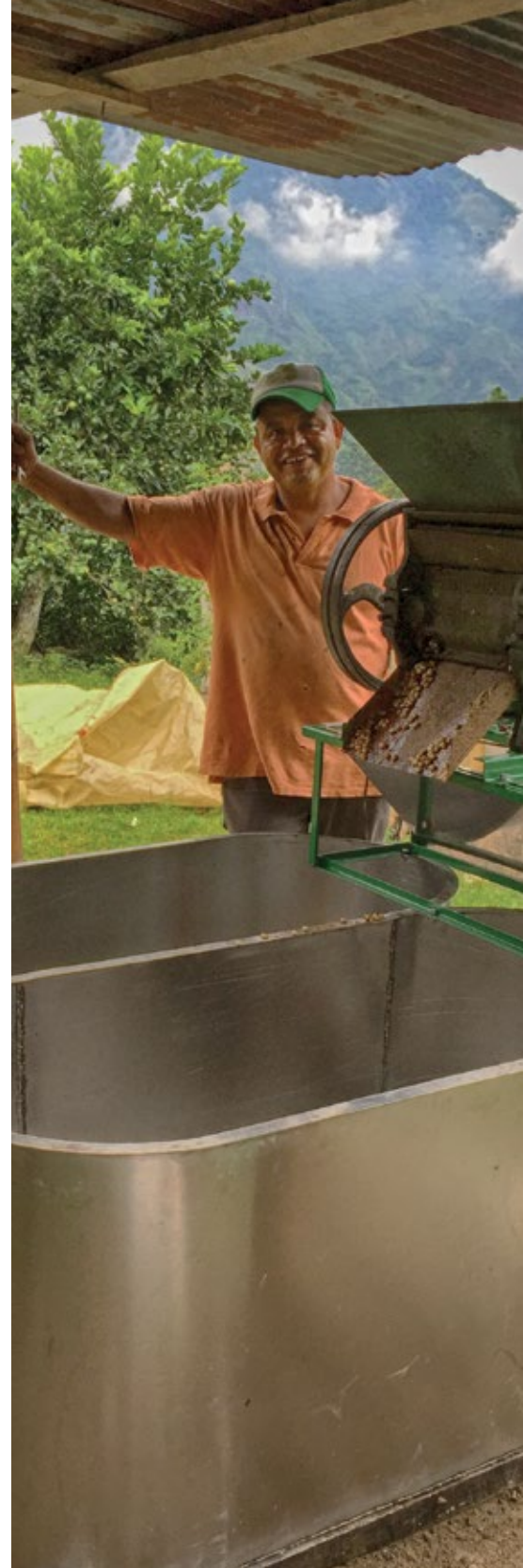
BACKGROUND ON PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

In the past 50 years of conflict, Colombia's rural population has suffered violence and human rights violations often closely linked to issues of land ownership and tenure. The cessation of this decades-long conflict offers an opportunity for long-overdue investment in rural areas to realize a viable peace dividend for those who suffered most in the war. Since the start of negotiations in 2012, key tenets of negotiation between the government and the FARC have included the following:

- **An Integrated Agrarian Development Land Policy** through economic and social development of rural areas and distribution of land to poor farmers
- Elimination of illicit drug production
- Transitional Justice: justice for victims and reduced sentences for some cases²
- Political participation of rebels once a peace deal is reached
- Disarmament/end of the conflict/cease-fire monitoring

With regards to the land development policy, an early draft of the peace accord from June 2014 addressed the impact of the conflict on rural communities by recommending the following actions among others:

- Support access and use of land, including formalization of land titles, borders and protection of reserve zones. Details of land redistribution outlined under the peace accord have yet to be determined. As the governing body of this process, the government of Colombia will offer credits for land purchase, giving priority to women and internally displaced people (IDP).
- Support rural development programs through investment in “enfoque territorial” (a decentralized governance approach): Each region will define its own developmental priorities, including basic infrastructure needs (including road, irrigation, electricity and internet), health services and rural education.
- Support a national plan to provide technical assistance and strengthen cooperatives and associations, which are vital to promoting smallholder family farm production and linkages with markets.
- Educate farmers on their rights, including campaigns to address child labor.



Oscar Ospina processes coffee using the new washing basin on his farm.

² As highlighted by the Friday October 2, 2015 event, “A Conversation with The Honorable Bernard Aronson, U.S. Special Envoy to the Colombian Peace Process:” <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/bernard-aronson-us-special-envoy-to-colombian-peace-process>.

Even if the referendum had passed, a number of challenges to sustaining peace would have remained: cease-fire verification, demobilization, protection of human rights defenders and the potential spoiler role of “other illegal actors,” which include paramilitary and illegal traders. These issues point to the critical question of how to promote a peace dividend for Colombia’s rural population, which includes some of its poorest citizens. Responding to these challenges requires a focused commitment to expand state presence into areas identified as particularly vulnerable, known as “consolidation regions,” under Colombia’s National Consolidation Plan. This effort must be led by local and regional leaders within municipal and departmental authorities in order to change a status quo that has left the most vulnerable subject to violence and displacement. The Colombian government at various levels is well aware of this, as articulated by Sergio Jaramillo Caro, High Commissioner for Peace, Republic of Colombia:

What we need is to instill a logic of inclusion and territorial integration, based on a new partnership between the state and communities, to jointly build institutions in the territory. ‘Institutional’ again understood not only as the presence of some State entities, but as a set of practices and rules governing public life and promote wellbeing.³

The focus in the peace negotiations on rural poverty caused by conflict, inequitable land distribution and the lack of state investment in the countryside elevated these issues to the forefront of national debate within Colombian society and among policy makers. This report offers a snapshot of key challenges in rural Colombia at this key juncture, but also shares the positive experiences of LWR’s local partner organizations in addressing them. Through these voices, we hope to contribute to the discussion about peace in Colombia and its promise to reduce poverty and promote a sustainable and inclusive rural development.

LOCAL VOICES ON THE REALITIES OF RURAL COLOMBIA

In Colombia approximately 30 percent of the Colombian population, or 14 million people,⁴ are members of the rural sector. This number, double the previous estimate, comes from a 2014 study, the first agrarian census since the 1970s.⁵ This change highlights the vital role agriculture plays in Colombia and the importance of rural policy to address the impact of both climate change and conflict. The 2011 United Nations Human Development Report on sustainability and equity underscored the challenge of climate change, especially for the millions of people who depend directly on natural resources for their livelihoods. Knowing what works in this changing current context is a vital tool for informing the Colombian government of the realities of the rural sector, which a lasting peace must take into account.

At this important moment in Colombian history, the **Sustainable Practices in Rural Development** conference, sponsored by Lutheran World Relief and a number of Colombian groups during the 2015 ‘Week of Peace’ at the Universidad Javeriana in Bogota, presented an opportunity to share examples of successful sustainable rural development and highlight their potential to transform national policy. In fact, the peace accord proposes solutions to the same challenges that local Colombian groups articulated at the conference. Their experiences offer potential models for Colombian public policy to support smallholder agriculture and family agriculture. Though small-scale and pilot in nature, in some cases they offer important clues to what can be accomplished, even in light of insecurity and lack of services prevalent in many areas of the countryside.

FAMILY AGRICULTURE

Family agriculture is vital to the Colombian economy because it is the principal source of food and employment for the majority of the population living outside of cities. Nearly 70 percent of the country’s farms are less than five hectares.⁶ For peace to endure, the rural sector in Colombia must be engaged in the peace process. The conference sponsors selected experiences of Colombian civil society organizations that address many of the challenges facing the family farms.

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS: Former Minister of Agriculture and Senator Cecilia López Montaña told conference participants that family agriculture is a critical component of Colombia’s “new rurality.” Families, as economic and social units, are vital to the success of both peace and rural development. However, many families have been separated and dispersed for years and have been blocked from accessing their lands. Legal access to land and appropriate use of ecosystems and natural resources are critical to

³ Sergio Jaramillo Caro, High Commissioner for Peace, Republic of Colombia at La Paz Territorial. Harvard, March 23, 2013

⁴ United Nations Development Program “Colombia rural 2011 Razones para la esperanza: Informe Nacional de Desarrollo Humano” http://www.undp.org/content/dam/colombia/docs/DesarrolloHumano/undp-co-ic_indh2011-parte1-2011.pdf

⁵ Montaña, Cecilia López “El Momento del Sector Rural” Bogotá, Septiembre 14 de 2015

⁶ Censo Nacional Agropecuario 2014: http://www.dane.gov.co/files/CensoAgropecuario/avanceCNA/CNA_agosto_2015_new_present.pdf

INTEGRATED AGRARIAN DEVELOPMENT LAND POLICY IN THE COLOMBIAN PEACE PROCESS

The June 6, 2014, draft of the peace accord addressed rural reform as the first of the five key tenets of negotiations. The draft accord addresses the impact of the conflict on rural communities in the following way:

- **SUPPORT** access and use of land, including formalization of land titles, borders and protection of reserve zones. Details of land redistribution outlined under the draft peace accord have yet to be determined. Specifically, it has not been determined how much land will be distributed and over what period of time. As the governing body of this process, the Land Fund Subsidies will offer credits for land purchase, giving priority to women and internally displaced people (IDP).
- **SUPPORT** the rural development programs with Territorial Focus: Each region will define its own developmental priorities, such as basic infrastructure needs (including road, irrigation, electricity and internet), health services and rural education.
- **SUPPORT** the National Plan to provide technical assistance and strengthen cooperatives and associations, which are vital to promoting smallholder family farm production and linkages with markets.
- **EDUCATE** farmers on their rights, including campaigns to address child labor.

achieving sustainable development objectives. These are also fundamental for sustaining peace and addressing the causes of conflict that have decimated the rural population.

FEMALE FARMERS

Approximately, one quarter of family farmers in the country are female.⁷ In Colombia, as in many developing countries, female farmers work extensive hours to balance their farming activities with their responsibility to care for their family, also known as the “care economy.” As a result, female farmers are limited from fully contributing to productive activities to their fullest potential.

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS: The stories told by members of the regional *Strategic Alliance for the Economic Empowerment of Female Farmers from Antioquia* illustrate how women play a vital role in both the care economy and in farming activities. Highlighting women’s civil and political participation in rural life and the need for financial independence, they also spoke about the important role women play in the care and conservation of natural resources and the participation of women in peacebuilding and reconciliation from a non-patriarchal perspective. Therefore, **women’s roles in civil and political life must be protected and promoted.** Rural women account for most of unpaid care for family and home, in addition to their role in productive activities. In the spirit of a 2010 Colombian law which sought to support the care economy, the state, market and other household members should work to reduce women’s excessive burden, which will reap positive dividends in the production and business of small farms and rural industry.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN FAMILY AGRICULTURE

In Colombia, only about 10 percent of young people under 24 years of age are employed in agriculture, a number in line with other parts of Latin America. The average farmer’s age in Colombia is well over 40,⁸ and more and more youth are moving from rural to urban areas and engaging in activities other than farming. By 2050, Colombia’s urban population is estimated to exceed 54 million people, more than six times the rural population of 8.8 million. This demographic transition will open new markets for rural businesses. But to keep the family farm alive, young people need support and incentives to engage in farming and rural enterprise and improve its economic return.

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS: The youth leaders representing the regional organization: *Red Colombiana de Actoría Social Juvenil (Colombian Network for Youth Engagement)* from the Cauca department shared their experiences defending their communities from the negative impact of both legal and



Fredy Tascón, Resguardo indígena Karmata Rua

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

illegal mines. They also spoke eloquently about promoting a transition in roles from the older generation to a new cohort of rural youth eager to move from being “beneficiaries” of pilot programs to real leadership roles. In their view, effective intervention in the Colombian countryside should seek to (re) dignify and modernize family agriculture. In particular, they recommend incorporating innovation and technology as key components to attract young people and strengthen farms as sustainable business entities, as well as promoting farms as sources of welfare, identity and pride for the families who live and work there.

ACCESS TO LAND

According to the UNDP, land distribution in Colombia ranks among the most unequal in the world, with 52 percent of farms in the hands of just 1.15 percent of landowners. The 2014 Agrarian Census indicates that approximately 6.5 million hectares were abandoned or seized by state-affiliated or other armed actors over the past 30 years. Because of a constant fear of displacement, many smallholder farmers invested in fast-growing crops that have multiple harvests within a year. At the same time, the large-scale cultivation of a single crop in a given area, known as monoculture, has contributed, along with conflict, to land grabs due to new patterns of land concentration, as well as perpetuating existing inequitable systems and practices.

Over the decades of conflict, farmers lived in constant fear of displacement and have therefore not invested in more permanent crops, such as cocoa and coffee which, when combined in an agroforestry and mixed-use system, are more environmentally friendly and more profitable in the long run. The current tax code does not favor family agriculture for these more sustainable kinds of value chains.

Increased ranching is another competing factor for arable land in Colombia. According to Colombia's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 33 percent of the land is designated for cattle ranching, a percentage that has doubled over the past 50 years.

LEGISLATION: Recent legislation and efforts by the Colombian government have attempted to address rural displacement and encourage return and resettlement, but with have met with mixed success. Examples of legislative efforts include the Victims' and Land Restitution Law 1448 of 2011, which sets out procedures for reparations and land restitution for victims of violence. LWR and the Latin America Working Group (LAWG) conducted field research on the Caribbean coast of Colombia in June 2012 and again in June 2013 to monitor the implementation of the Victims' Law, particularly its impact on land restitution. Amnesty International reports that as of August 2014, fewer than

30,000 hectares of land had been returned to peasant farmers and only 50,000 hectares of indigenous territory had been given back to its rightful occupants. The total amount of land to be redistributed to Colombian citizens is estimated to be more than eight million hectares.

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS: Community groups from the local civil society group from Antioquia, “*Trapiche Comunitario*,” (*Community Mill*) shared stories of forced displacement by armed groups. Colombia cannot continue postponing a more equitable and fair distribution of land and must pay real attention to this large cohort of farmers.⁹

LACK OF PRIVATE INVESTMENT IN SMALLHOLDER AND FAMILY AGRICULTURE IN THE COLOMBIAN COUNTRYSIDE:

Colombia is the world's fourth largest producer of palm oil and the largest in Latin America. In 2010, 400,000 hectares were designated for palm oil cultivation.¹⁰ The Colombian government is aiming for a six-fold increase in Colombia's palm oil production by 2020.

In addition to large-scale monoculture, extractive industries also figure prominently in Colombia's economic growth. But they have also played a major role in the history of the conflict and the continuing challenge of access to resources and land for smallholder farmers, including indigenous and Afro-Colombian groups. Extractive industries accounted for 69 percent of Colombia's exports in 2011,¹¹ an increase from 38.5 percent in 1990. This has directly impacted rural populations. Between 1994 and 2001, 70 percent of mining and oil royalties were paid to three states: Casanare, Arauca and Meta. Yet, **these states rank in the top five highest rates of unmet basic needs among their populations**, an indication that royalties have not been used to benefit local communities through reinvestment in support to family farms and related local infrastructure.¹²

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS: Historically, the state preferentially concentrated its resources in cities, starving rural Colombia of public welfare and infrastructure, which cultivated dependency and debt. Investing in research and education for smallholder farmers must also be linked to the realities of rural development. To that end, investments should not focus solely on agroindustry and monoculture as

⁹ Montaña, Cecilia López “El Momento del Sector Rural” Bogotá, Septiembre 14 de 2015

¹⁰ Environmental Investigation Agency: <http://eia-global.org/campaigns/forests-campaign/latin-america/colombia>

¹¹ <http://www.resourcegovernance.org/our-work/country/colombia-0>

¹² “Impact of the Extractive Industry on the Collective Land and Forest Rights of People and Communities: A Summary.” Rights and Resources Initiative. 2013. http://www.rightsandresources.org/documents/files/doc_5915.pdf

the only sources of wealth. Institutions of higher education and the ministry of agriculture should strive to make research and training relevant to the realities of the poorest and most vulnerable families in the rural sector.

ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

As Colombia's President Santos highlighted on the eve of the October 2015 elections, regional and municipal governments play a crucial role in the distribution and investment of resources at the local level. There have been consistent reports of corruption in local elections, as exemplified by the recent voting.¹³ Colombians elected 32 provincial governors and legislative bodies, more than 1,100 mayors and municipal councils, and other local leadership posts. The election monitoring group Ceballos identified electoral fraud in more than 400 towns and cities, often carried out through bribes and bussing in ineligible voters from the surrounding area. Election irregularities in the town of Pueblo Bello in the Sierra Nevada has impacted LWR's Binational Cocoa Project in Peru & Colombia. LWR is partnering in this region with a local organization, Asociación de Autoridades de la Sierra (ASOCIT), to promote sustainable cocoa production with the goal of increasing incomes and improving the quality of life for rural families through better incorporation into the cocoa value chain. The election in Pueblo Bello threatens the critical municipal support needed for this project and participating indigenous groups.

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS: The representatives from the local group "Equipo Agenda" (Team Agenda) from the Sucre department demonstrated that communities can achieve food sovereignty and influence policy to facilitate development in the area. As an example, this group focused on reviving traditional seed varieties in ways that led to self-sufficiency and sharing seeds and advocacy strategies with other communities in national meetings with hundreds of representatives. These sustainable experiences contributed to the transformation of public policies by inspiring and informing institutional practices, as well as influencing budgetary allocations to the states, the governments and institutions.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

SUPPORT THE COLOMBIA PEACE PROCESS

The United States has been a strong supporter of the Colombian government-led implementation of the peace agreement, which includes promoting family farm policies, and should continue to provide advice and appropriate aid. Colombia received \$900 million in U.S. aid last year, compared to a 2015 Colombian government budget of \$108 billion.¹⁴ Despite the rejection of the accord in the recent referendum, LWR calls on the United States to redouble its support for peace and for the continued involvement of the United Nations as an essential facilitator of the process of disarmament and implementing an eventual revised peace accord.

PROVIDE FINANCIAL SUPPORT THAT IS IN ALIGNMENT WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF COLOMBIA'S PRIORITIES

The United States Government should allocate and Congress should approve resources to support the strategies outlined in USAID's 2014-2018 Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS).¹⁵ The CDCS is predicated on the implementation of the peace agreement between the FARC and the Colombian government.¹⁶ Even in the absence of a final deal, throughout its programming, USAID should increase the percentage of assistance provided to a broad range of initiatives that can build enabling linkages for sustaining peace—strengthening civil society in particular. This funding should support small-scale, farmer-led rural development.¹⁷ Equally important is continued support by the United States to provide resources for eventual demobilization, cease-fire monitoring and other key aspects of implementation of a future deal.

¹³ Otis, John. Time. October 21, 2015. "Rigged Colombian Elections Could Be Good for Narcos and Bad for Peace" <http://time.com/4080916/colombian-elections-narcos-farc/>

¹⁴ Mendoza, Naki B. "Colombia: A long road to recovery" September 14, 2015. Devex. <https://www.devex.com/news/colombia-a-long-road-to-recovery-86835>

¹⁵ USAID Country Development Cooperation Strategy 2014-2018: A Path to Peace

¹⁶ Isacson, Adam and Sánchez-Garzoli, Gimén. July 2014 "Is the International Community Ready for Post-Conflict Colombia?"

¹⁷ "U.S. Faith Leaders Support a Just Peace in Colombia:"<http://lawg.org/component/content/article/76/1653>

ADVISE AND ASSIST LOCAL PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES

All actors, especially the United States, other bilateral and multi-lateral donors, and the Colombian government at all levels, must work closely to support the rule of law and an effective state presence to ensure a productive “peace dividend” once a new deal is reached and implementation has begun. There must be a focus on vulnerable rural areas that experienced conflict, land seizures or where development and public funds may be at risk for capture (e.g. indigenous or Afro-Colombian areas, consolidation zones for demobilization, areas of land seizures). LWR partners have recommended the establishment of oversight bodies for such zones that would offer advice and assistance for the reconstruction and reconciliation process. Vetted impartial outsiders (from other parts of the country or the international community) could offer support and a forum for engaging all local actors — including civil society — in ways that promote the transformation of past conflicts into future sustainable development. Part of the responsibility would be to monitor investments to ensure intended outcomes are achieved, and especially that they benefit the poor and those affected by the conflict. Similar approaches were employed during the earthquake response in Haiti, as well as during the reconstruction phase of the 1999 Colombian earthquake in the town of Armenia.

SUPPORT AND PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AS PART OF IMPLEMENTING THE PEACE DEAL

We agree with the view articulated in the November 2015 letter signed by U.S. faith leaders on the Colombian Peace Process, that any aid provided by the United States must be “robust and rights-respecting” and must also “recognize that postaccord does not mean post-conflict.” In that sense, we urge the United States to advocate for effective protection of human rights defenders and communities at risk, and investigation and prosecution of paramilitary successor groups that violate their human rights.¹⁸ Human rights defenders will play a crucial role in supporting the implementation of the Colombian peace accord.



Youth farmers. Youth Building Paths of Peace and Entrepreneurship. Silos, North of Santander.



Everildys Córdoba, Cocomasur in Acandí

¹⁸ Ibid

BACKGROUND ON LWR'S WORK IN COLOMBIA

LWR has worked in Colombia since 1985, reaching communities affected by domestic conflict and forced displacement, and assisting communities attempting voluntary return or initiating resettlement. Together with local partner organizations, national rural development networks and the Colombian government, LWR has expanded its reach to conflict-affected rural communities throughout the country. LWR works with thousands of smallholder farming families to promote climate smart agricultural practices and improve farmers' participation in agriculture value chains, especially within the cocoa and coffee industry.

AGRICULTURE VALUE CHAINS

Cocoa and Coffee: LWR works to increase incomes and improve quality of life for rural families affected by conflict or living in post-conflict areas by diversifying their agriculture systems with the addition of cocoa and coffee as income-generating crops. Along with direct technical assistance to farmers to establish, cultivate and harvest cocoa and coffee, LWR works to establish and strengthen producer organizations with sound governance and sustainable business plans that allow them to manage post-harvest processing and provide services for the future. LWR helps these organizations find links to local, national and international markets and to understand how to establish relationships with buyers. LWR is working with indigenous communities living in Colombia's Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, where conflict and insecurity had long hindered farmers' access to the technical support needed to increase production, improve product quality and access higher-value markets within domestic cocoa value chains. As these farmers — who traditionally produced coffee in high-altitude areas — are able to resettle to the lower-altitude lands from which they were displaced as the result of climate change and conflict, they require crops more suited to the warmer and lower-altitude conditions. LWR is assisting these producers as they transition from coffee to cocoa — or supplement their high-altitude coffee farming operations with cocoa at lower altitudes — making them more resilient to market fluctuations and providing alternate income in case of environmental or climate factors affecting the coffee crops. In Caldas' Guarinó River Basin, LWR is responding to environmental damage caused by intensive coffee monoculture and poor soil nutrient management by helping farmers diversify to shade-coffee agroforestry systems that include integrated pest management. As overstressed ecosystems recover, coffee farmers will benefit from increased yields and alternative food and cash crops grown along with the coffee, helping these households better resist market fluctuations and potential climatic or environmental shocks.



CLIMATE-SMART AGRICULTURE

In Colombia, more frequent floods, more intense droughts and an increase in the median annual temperature have been afflicting farming and fishing communities. LWR works with vulnerable communities to alleviate the effects of climate change by protecting farmland through the construction of dikes, coastal reforestation, soil and water conservation technologies, and environmental and climate education for local authorities. As part of our work, LWR is implementing initiatives to protect the water and agricultural ecosystem services that support farmers. Farm livelihoods and quality of life in central Colombia are at risk due to deteriorating environmental conditions caused by both a changing climate and poor community hygiene and sanitation practices. As profitability of traditional agricultural activities decreases, farmers often adopt unsustainable practices that further deteriorate the natural environment. As the negative spiral continues, migration away from rural communities increases and conflict erupts over the use and control of natural resources — in particular over water and land — threatening to reignite forced displacement in the country. With support from the Starbucks Foundation, LWR is addressing these challenges by improving water quality in the region and introducing climate-smart agricultural practices that support environmentally sustainable coffee farming. Specific project activities include installation or repair of community sanitation infrastructure, and training on hygiene and sanitation; installation or repair of on-farm coffee wet mills; and introduction of climate-smart agricultural practices that improve coffee quality and yields while also protecting the local ecosystem.



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