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COLOMBIA

CASE STUDY

Unprecedented Grassroots Participation for Agricultural Reform

Central government's historic meetings with campesinos throughout the country contribute to bottom-up rural development policy making



Photo: <http://pactoagrario.minagricultura.gov.co/Sala-de-Prensa/noticias/Paginas/Gran-Cumbre->

CHALLENGE In late August 2013 Colombian campesinos, faced with increasing prices for raw materials and fuel to transport their goods as well as decreasing profits for their products, took to the highways, creating roadblocks in rural areas and eventually marched through the streets of Bogotá requesting help from the government. After three weeks of protests and subsequent negotiations, President Juan Manuel Santos announced a series of reforms in the country's agricultural policies as outlined in his Pacto Agrario, the Agrarian Pact, stating "the protests have made us rethink how we plan the sector's development." In addition to being responsible for the implementation of this new strategy, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) is increasingly aware of the need for innovative strategies to gather information and integrate feedback from local campesinos.

INITIATIVE USAID is working directly with the Government of Colombia (GOC) to provide essential support for the implementation of its land and rural development agenda. To this end USAID has been providing technical assistance to MARD as it plans local level meetings to be organized by the Municipal Councils of Rural Development (CMDR) as well as departmental and regional level meetings, to be organized by the Sectional Council of Agricultural Development (CONSEA). These meetings are expected to strengthen communication channels between Bogotá and the regions, making sure that campesinos' voices are heard by their national representatives. After receiving inputs from the local, departmental and regional levels, the national government will then prioritize the needs of rural communities incorporating them in the 2014-2018 National Development Plan.

RESULTS This high level of participation by civil society, citizen and local government in consensus building processes around rural development issues has not been seen for decades. Although it is early in its development, a highly democratic grassroots initiative appears to be underway, one in which campesinos and civil society organizations are able to provide suggestions and reach a consensus on the most pressing priorities for rural development all over the country. Broad efforts to train and encourage local participants are underway and community forums are planned to begin in January 2014.

Telling Our Story
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