



SUCCESS STORY

Intensive Restitution Training Breaks New Ground in Area Hit Hard by War

September 2014

Three-month certificate course bolsters local capacity to protect victims' rights and promote reconciliation through improved implementation of the Victims and Land Restitution Law of 2011

SOURCE: USAID/LRDP



The certificate course was conceived of as part of a deliberate strategy to increase public confidence in the restitution process in Cordoba.

SOURCE: USAID/LRDP



Each of the course's 21 sessions ran for five hours, providing ample time for students to receive an in-depth overview of a relevant topic and reflect on their own experiences in a classroom setting.

Telling Our Story

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Just talking about land restitution in some parts of Colombia can put a person at risk. The climate of fear surrounding the topic in the northern Colombian department of Cordoba is particularly heavy. Public confidence in state institutions and processes is at rock bottom because of a lack of coherence between the various state entities involved in critical land processes, cooption by local legal/illegal power structures, and corruption.

Recent policies like the Victims and Land Restitution Law (Victims Law) promote victims' rights and reconciliation on paper, but turning theory to action on the ground has proven challenging.

To tackle this problem, USAID's Land and Rural Development Program (LRDP) teamed up with several local universities, the Land Restitution Unit in Cordoba, civil society, the Organization of American State's Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia, and governmental control agencies to provide a training course on the Victims Law for victims, victims' representatives, journalists, and public officials from the institutions involved in the land restitution process.

Forty-nine students graduated from the three-month course on August 1, 2014. GOC officials now have increased skills and knowledge about how to apply the law, especially those aspects of it related to land restitution, thereby improving implementation and inter-institutional coordination. The curriculum was designed to empower victims and the NGO representatives who support them to utilize existing tools defined in the law to protect and claim their rights. Journalists finished the course with a solid conceptual foundation of the law and its implementation to better inform the public about this new public policy in a transparent and effective manner. Building official capacity will help restore citizen trust and confidence in the restitution process.

Conducting the training course in Cordoba, one of the departments most affected by the armed conflict, also had important symbolic implications. Many of the students were themselves victims of land takeovers and forced displacement. GOC officials participated side-by-side with victims. Promoting spaces for learning and discussion such as this certificate course send a clear message that the government stands with victims.

Based on feedback received from victims and public officials, LRDP plans to continue to support opportunities to promote enhanced citizen awareness through venues such as this certificate course, as well as design more in-depth trainings that cover specific topics of interest.