

A YEAR IN COLOMBIA

SUMMARY REPORT 2011

Plan is ensuring young people get a good basic education



About Colombia

Multicultural, bio-diverse Colombia is the second most populous country in South America. However, escalating armed conflict has caused the forced displacement of over three million people. There is also great inequality, with education, sanitation, water and healthcare in rural areas.

Plan works in 40 municipalities, supporting over 190 communities in building opportunities for children, promoting children's rights and enabling them to make their voices heard.

Problems affecting children in Colombia

- Many children who have been displaced by armed conflict, are abused and mistreated and lack protection
- Lack of drinking water and sanitation in many homes
- Insufficient and poor quality education
- Physical and psychological mistreatment of children and women
- Drug addiction and high pregnancy rates among teenagers

PLAN'S PRIORITIES IN COLOMBIA

1 Children under five

- Helping parents make sure their children are well cared for
- Protecting children from common childhood diseases
- Providing access to drinking water and sanitation
- Ensuring children attend nursery school

2 Education and sexual health

- Supporting young people take part in decisions that affect them in their communities
- Ensuring young people get a good basic education
- Promoting access to sexual and reproductive health services



Family balance on line of sand bags outside their house after floods hit parts of Colombia.

3 Promoting children's rights and participation

- Working with parents, teachers, government and community organisations to strengthen their skills
- Promoting the rights of displaced children, and providing them with support
- Influencing public policy

By being a child sponsor, you have directly supported projects like the ones below. Your ongoing support sustains our long-term development work which impacts the lives of children, their families and communities for generations to come.

Together we are making an invaluable difference to the lives of people in Colombia.

To learn more about Plan's work in Colombia visit:

www.plan.org.au/ourwork/southernamerica/colombia



Plan staff deliver relief aid to family in flood affected areas.

CASE STUDY: PROJECT EL CANDAMO

Jeni and her family fled from violence when she was 13.

In the seven years since, she has felt hatred, fear and hopelessness, but her participation in a Plan project for displaced children has changed her life. Now, she works for Plan, helping her community.

Two million children have fled their homes to escape the armed conflict involving drug cartels and extreme political groups that has raged through Colombia for years. Most end up working. Some are trafficked, sexually exploited, or recruited by armed groups. Many are malnourished, and only one in four returns to school. Nariño Department, on Colombia's Pacific coast, has been the scene of mass displacements. Jeni lives in the city of Tumaco, where there are over 12,000 displaced people.

Jeni, her parents and five younger siblings were forced to leave Tumaco after receiving death threats from an armed group. One night, armed men surrounded their house, terrorising them by firing shots into the air, and threatening to blow up the house. The family escaped, leaving all their possessions.

Life in the country was difficult, and Jeni's parents sent her and two younger siblings back to Tumaco, to a slum called El Candamo. Jeni acted as both mother and father to her siblings, while their parents moved around in hiding, until her father was killed.

Helping young people to start again

In 2006, Plan began working in El Candamo, where 65 percent of inhabitants are displaced. Plan provides healthcare, nutrition and education for displaced children, and helps families rebuild their lives and recover from the trauma they have experienced.

Gradually, Jeni developed friendships with other teenagers in similar situations. "I realised that I wasn't alone and that I liked to help others, and that I benefited from helping because I felt useful and important."

Through singing, dancing, theatre and art, she and 149 others learned about self-confidence and leadership. "The project helped us identify our own skills. The most important thing is that we learned to overcome the fear, hatred and resentment that were growing in our hearts because of what we had gone through," says Jeni.

Each of the 150 participants shared what they had learned with five other displaced teenagers, so that 750 more young people benefited. Mabel, 15, says: "Thanks to Plan, I learned a lot about taking care of myself and my little siblings, and facing responsibilities. I feel I'm important and can make my dreams come true."

Young people are supported to improve their home environment, health and education. Jeni's home and 350 others were equipped with a sink and counter for food preparation, a cupboard to keep food away from rodents, cockroaches and mosquitoes, and a tank for

water storage. These measures helped to reduce high rates of diarrhoea, and water tanks also mean children no longer have to walk long distances each day to collect water.

One of the project's 35 Community Health Agents taught Jeni and her siblings about good hygiene, sexual and reproductive rights, and preventing abuse. They received nutritional check-ups and free school meals. Their school was transformed, with new classrooms, desks and chairs, a new library and computer room. Teachers were trained in strategies to support displaced children. In total, 3,500 children in two schools have benefited from teacher training, school renovation, and equipment.

An inspiring role model

Today, 20-year-old Jeni is a Plan field worker in Tumaco and has a qualification in social work. Her local youth network chose her to represent them at the national summit of children and young people's governors in Barranquilla in December 2008. She addressed the governors, speaking about the difficulties displaced children face.

Jeni encourages children not be defeated by hard times but to fight for their goals. She knows very well that it is possible to achieve your dreams because she has done this herself, against all the odds.

Some names have been changed for child protection and privacy reasons.

HIGHLIGHTS IN 2010

- Trained 953 "community mothers" who provide good quality day-care for kids
- Reduced domestic violence by promoting positive parenting, gender equality and loving relationships to 19,000 children, 45 community organisations, and 4,000 parents
- Promoted children's rights to a wide audience through partnerships with 17 regional and national media outlets, including newspapers, radio and TV stations
- The local authority of Tolima invited Plan to improve its public policy and develop new initiatives to benefit 350,000 children



Jeni, a former victim of violence and Plan staff member, with the children she works with.

"I feel I'm important and can make my dreams come true." Jeni