

EVALUATION BRIEFS

IN-DEPTH EVALUATION

STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITIES OF INSTITUTIONS TO ADDRESS ILLEGAL DEFORESTATION IN COLOMBIA (COLAB7)

Country: Colombia
Duration: 01/11/2019 to 31/12/2026
Donors: Norway, United Kingdom.
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Full report:
https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/evaluation/reports_year_2024.html

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

With over half of its territory covered by forests, Colombia plays a vital role in combating deforestation, which contributes annually to 11% of greenhouse gas emissions globally. Driven by multiple factors, such as illegal logging, illicit mining extraction, land grabbing, and illicit crop production, deforestation especially affects rural and Indigenous communities, especially women, as they rely on forests for vital resources like water, food, and firewood, and the destruction of these resources significantly impacts their daily lives. To address such challenges, the COLAB7 project aims to strengthen Colombia's capacity to prevent, investigate, and prosecute deforestation-related crimes. Launched in 2019/2020 with UK's and Norway's support, the project includes institutional training, technological tools, public engagement, and policy development to address deforestation while fostering community involvement and peacebuilding in conflict-affected areas.

MAIN FINDINGS

Relevance: COLAB7 has been highly relevant to the strengthening of the prevention, investigation, and sanctioning of environmental crimes in Colombia since 2019. The project contributes to the reduction of deforestation through actions oriented towards the fight against environmental crime, especially by strengthening capacities to prevent, investigate, prosecute effectively, and sanction cases of deforestation. **Coherence:** The project aligns with Colombia's climate and biodiversity policies and is consistent with Colombian legislation efforts to combat deforestation. It is also aligned with international agreements and conventions on climate change and deforestation, and contributes to the fulfillment of SDGs 13, 15, and 16. **Efficiency:** The project demonstrated significant resource mobilization and adaptive management capacity, including the flexibility to adapt to evolving priorities and leverage over USD 35 million funding by Norway and UK. Resources were managed with particular attention to ensuring transparency and value for money of project activities and products. Although there was high satisfaction with the products delivered, the delivery of certain products (i.e. technology support and tools) was delayed due to the worldwide suspension of production of some technological tools due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recruitment of some mentors and professionals was delayed by late donor contributions, affecting the project's ability to quickly respond to partner institutions' needs. **Effectiveness:** The COLAB7 project has strengthened inter-institutional cooperation in Colombia, providing tools and equipment to investigate and sanction deforestation-related crimes. It enhanced coordination to combat environmental crime, with partners noting its critical role. The project also contributed to closing legal gaps and improving administrative processes to prevent and address deforestation. One major achievement of the project was its provision of technical assistance to National Parks and technological equipment to the National Police for the identification of a criminal structure behind deforestation, which resulted in the legal prosecution of illegal road



Source: COLAB7 project

construction within four national parks and subsequent convictions and arrests of those involved. **Impact:** COLAB7 is likely to have a positive impact in terms of contributing to strengthening the capacity of partner institutions to combat environmental crimes related to deforestation. **Sustainability:** The project strongly depends on external support and funding to maintain results and expand its achievements. The COLAB7 team aims to develop an exit strategy in phase III of the project to ensure a smooth transition and long-term sustainability after the project. **Gender and human rights:** The Project supported vulnerable Indigenous communities and leaders affected by deforestation by elaborating a “Protocol for the Protection of Leaders” to mitigate risks related with deforestation. COLAB67 also promoted human rights and addressed gender-related challenges, though participation and data collection efforts need further improvement.

LESSONS LEARNED

Importance of tailoring communication and knowledge management to stakeholder needs and administrative processes. The combination of rigid procurement and contracting processes with multiple donor requirements and changing demands can lead to bottlenecks in the delivery of products and support to partner institutions. Managing expectations and improving knowledge management and communication, both with internal and external stakeholders can mitigate the impact of such factors on the timely delivery of products.

GOOD PRACTICES

COLAB7 successfully coordinated Colombian central government institutions, autonomous agencies, and regional governments to address environmental crimes affecting deforestation in a complex institutional context. Its success in capacity development was driven by combining effective institutional arrangements with highly skilled technical experts, resulting in valuable improvements to partner institutions' capabilities. Technological tools like geographic systems, drones, and GPS are useful to combat environmental crimes by mapping illegal logging, analyzing forest and soil loss, and capturing images of deforested areas.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation utilized a mixed methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data, which was deemed the most suitable for exploring diverse perspectives and uncovering relationships between the evaluation questions presented in the evaluation. Data collection comprised desk review of 134 documents, 77 semi-structured interviews (38 female; 39 male), 7 focus groups (totalling 28 participants: 13 female; 15 male), and 9 online targeted surveys (480 surveys sent out, with an overall response rate of 63%). Triangulation validated the findings, which were further refined through a participatory way through various meetings with the Project team, follow-up interviews with selected key informants, and feedback from Core Learning Partners (CLPs).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Seize opportunities for further collaboration on deforestation control and sustainable forest management by carrying out a stakeholder analysis.
2. Develop a trainer of trainer's modality of capacity development support to partner institutions.
3. Implement new technologies to improve the investigation, control, and punishment of environmental crime.
4. Increase cooperation with Regional Autonomous Corporations to further develop their capacity to enforce administrative sanctions.
5. Support the development of cross-border cooperation agreements to improve effectiveness in combating environmental crime in Amazonia.
6. Develop knowledge management and communication strategies to increase effectiveness and sustainability.
7. Strengthen RBM and the gender and human rights focus of the project through logical framework revision and theory of change development.
8. Seek efficiency gains in planning, reporting, procurement, and in the selection and recruitment of consultants.



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INDEPENDENT EVALUATION SECTION

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