

COLOMBIA BRIEFING



Right: Children in Medellín expressing themselves through art activities



TATIANA ROMERO

“After my father was killed on our farm, we fled to the city with my mother. After two years here, I am glad to be able to go to school again and make new friends. I study hard and my teachers are helping me to have new dreams”. Margarita, age 10, Soacha, Colombia*

For over 50 years, internal armed conflict has taken a huge toll on a country with one of the highest levels of income inequality in Latin America. During the last fifteen years, more than three million people, 83 per cent of whom are children and women, have been forced to flee from their homes to safer areas.¹ Approximately 14,000 boys and girls have been recruited by illegal armed groups, further fuelling the conflict. Save the Children has been working with Colombian partner organizations and local and national governments since 1991 to improve access and quality of education for vulnerable children, youth and their families.

* Her name has been changed to protect her identity

The issue

Access: Not enough school places

Almost a quarter of Colombia’s 12 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 are not in school because of poverty, displacement and violence. Between 900,000 to 1,200,000 are children and youth who have been forced to leave their homes because of the ongoing conflict. In 2004 the number of displaced children outside the educational system ranged from 66.7 per cent and 82.3 per cent.²

The solution

Ensuring places for all

- Work with communities to identify children not in school, especially those displaced by the conflict, and support community campaigns for them to get an education.
- Develop appropriate accelerated and distance-learning programmes for children living in marginalized areas and older children, especially those returning from armed groups.

The issue

Quality: Education that lacks relevance

Teachers are often poorly trained and teaching methods tend to be authoritarian. Programmes do not provide the necessary early childhood education to prepare children five years of age and under for primary school. The restrictive costs, lack of relevance and the low quality of education affects the attendance of the 12 to 17 year olds, often leading them to drop out of school. This in turn creates a huge pool of young people vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups and illicit activities.

Protection: Children exposed to danger and violence

Colombia has the fourth highest number of children associated with illegal armed groups. Programmes for their re-integration are insufficient. Children comprise the majority of Colombia's forcibly displaced people.³ Many children suffer from psychosocial problems, sexual abuse, gender-based violence, corporal punishment and the breakdown of social and family support systems.

Finance: The need for increased funding

Current funding levels must be increased in order to guarantee free quality education for all children.⁴ Children who have been forced to leave their homes or who are living in poverty are unable to pay for the costs of an education. Often they are not identified to school administrators or local authorities and so are unable to attend school. As well they may not be able to attend school because local authorities are unaware of the state guarantees (entitlements) to an education without cost. The largest part of the national educational budget is used to pay teachers, with little left for investing in quality education.

The solution

Meaningful education

- Implement training programmes for teachers, school administrators and students for promoting participation, non-discrimination, and peaceful conflict resolution.
- Encourage the development of children's organizations and networks capable of participating in decision-making in schools and with local governments.
- Develop early childhood education initiatives.

Children who are informed and aware

- Provide children with knowledge and awareness to mitigate risks of abuse and violence.
- Involve teachers, parents, and community leaders in monitoring and reporting cases of violations of children's rights.
- Establish schools as zones of peace and spaces of child protection.
- Increase awareness and mobilization for all children's right to an education

Ensuring investment for the future

- Develop indicators to measure the cost per student to obtain a quality education.
- Strengthen the capacity of teachers, parents and youth to monitor public education budgets.
- Work with municipal governments to redistribute funds for education.
- Lobby the national government to ensure the right to free, quality public education.

How Colombia measures up

- Only 24 per cent of teachers meet the required professional standards for teaching
- Only 34.1 per cent of the school-age population receives an education that meets government quality norms
- Government expenditure on education decreased between 2002 and 2004
- 22.6% of boys and girls between 5 and 17 years who should be registered in school did not enter an educational institution

"I dream of a country without conflict"

Pedro, 14 years old

References:

- 1 Reference provided at a UN Meeting in Bogota, 18–26 September 2006.
- 2 Prosecutor General's Office. "El Derecho a la Educación. La Educación en la perspectiva de los derechos humanos" (*The Right to Education. Education from a Perspective of Human Rights*). Pages 168–169. Bogotá, 2006.
- 3 Colombia: Children's Rights and Protection, Country Analysis, CIDA January 2006.
- 4 Report from the Prosecutor General's Office; *The Right to Education: Education from the Perspective of Human Rights*; Bogotá. 2006

JAIRO'S* STORY

“I am going to kill you” screamed six-year old Jairo, swinging a five-foot spiked pole into thin air.

The victim, another six-year old, was long gone up the steep hill. The place is outside a ramshackle school in a settlement of displaced people on the outskirts of Medellín. After their rural community was threatened several months ago by illegal armed forces, Jairo's family fled their home to live in this settlement. Without employment and living in fear of recruitment or death, his father left home.

Alone and without support systems, Jairo's mother turned to making a living through small drug deals. Although Jairo goes to school, the school is ill-equipped to respond to his individual needs. Positive change for Jairo requires more than just attending school. The social and family breakdown that came about as a result of displacement and the violence that surrounds him have left him feeling angry, isolated and frustrated. Save the Children Canada alongside a local partner organization work to address the fears, frustration and anger, that children like Jairo experience when living in conditions of poverty and violence, often without the family support necessary to grow up healthy and happy. Since Save the Children Canada began helping Jairo, he has made tremendous progress in his ability to express his feeling in less violent ways. He is no longer isolated and marginalized. As a result he has improved his self-esteem and is slowly developing healthier and happier relationships with others. With dedicated care and attention, Jairo is slowly turning his life around. In the midst of violence and conflict, Save the Children Canada is reducing the impact of prolonged, cyclical violence in Colombia and helping rewrite the future for children like Jairo.

Right: Jairo, age 6, Medellín

* His name has been changed to protect his identity



Help us rewrite the future of education in Colombia.

COLOMBIA MEETING THE CHALLENGE

We aim to ensure that children who are suffering from the ongoing conflict can have access to and complete a primary education. We will help to improve the quality of education by working with children, teachers, parents and local authorities to improve infrastructure, provide teacher training and materials, promote child and community participation, strengthen the capacity of schools to protect children, and advocate for increased expenditure by governments for quality education in the public school system.

Our target

Save the Children, along with our partners, will support the Colombian government as it works to:

- Provide child-centred teacher training to make education more relevant.
- Increase the number of alternative educational programmes
- Provide a quality education to displaced children

Our direct work with partners and local governments will ensure that more than 2,000 children affected by forced displacement and conflict gain access to basic education, and that more than 600,000 boys and girls will benefit from more relevant education. We will also work with children to inform and educate them about the risks and dangers of abuse and violence so that they can learn to identify when their right to life and freedom from violence are threatened.

Save the Children is committed to raising more than 6.8 million dollars to help children and youth in Colombia. We will regularly monitor our work, tracking enrolment, quality and child protection. We will also monitor the government's spending on education. Donors will receive reports of our progress in October, 2008 and December, 2010.

Help us meet the challenge

Save the Children will work to address the availability and quality of schooling for many of Colombia's children affected by conflict. Our programs will provide:

Access: Ensuring school places for all

- Work with teachers, parents and local authorities to identify and ensure the enrolment of out-of-school children, especially displaced children.
- Create appropriate accelerated and distance-learning programmes.

Quality: Meaningful Education

- Provide training programmes for teachers, school administrators and students
- Encourage child participation in schools to provide alternatives to violence, gangs and illicit activities.
- Introduce educational models to improve self-esteem, cultural identity, and peaceful conflict resolution.
- Develop early childhood education programs.

Protection: Children who are informed and aware

- Provide children with knowledge and awareness to mitigate the risk of abuse and violence
- Help schools create learning environments that are safe and free from abuse
- Guarantee that children and youth who have been displaced from their homes are provided with a quality education.
- We will press the government to take concrete steps to guarantee the right to free quality education.



ELEANOR DOUGLAS

To join our challenge, visit
www.savethechildren.net/rewritethefuture

Left: Children in classroom, Commune 8, Medellín