



USAID
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“People are empowered by efficiency”

Since 2014, the USAID Land and Rural Development Program has partnered with Cesar’s government to deliver more effective responses to institutional challenges that stymie effective land administration and development in a region that has more than 500,000 displaced citizens and 1 of every 3 lots are informally owned. In his own words, Cesar’s Secretary of Agriculture, Carlos Eduardo Campo Cuello, highlights the various ways the government’s work has improved thanks to USAID.



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You have led Cesar’s Secretariat of Agriculture for less than a year. What was it like when you arrived?

Historically, the secretariat has suffered from some key organizational weaknesses. The division of labor was unclear, people didn’t know how to make themselves fit in workwise, there was no clear organizational structure, and we didn’t have teams or work groups. The office always worked in an independent way, as opposed to a cross-cutting one.

This has been a key focus of USAID’s support, hasn’t it?

Definitely. We now have many possibilities before us. USAID has been helping us with the secretariat’s institutional strengthening and with planning around structural organization. Over this past year, we’ve accomplished more than just a planning document—we’ve raised awareness among all employees regarding post-conflict concepts.

How have the secretariat’s roles changed in the post-conflict context?

Based on our work with USAID, we understand that we need to be more than a Secretariat of Agriculture and move toward a Secretariat of Rural Development with integrated components related to education, health, tourism, economy, and productive projects. This is the metamorphosis we are promoting through restructuring and organizational planning, and that we are putting into practice.

What other changes have occurred as a result of your joint effort with USAID?

Another very relevant aspect for us is the digital archive that we’ve worked on with USAID. Having all the documents from 2001 and 2015 digitally classified has improved not just the ease of and access to documentation but also the organizational and work climate. To complement that, we’re implementing a new information system that allows us to track and follow up on the various projects that we’re implementing. Today, that software has been installed on the government’s platform and is undergoing a final testing stage.

How did the secretariat used to manage information?

We used to store our documents in boxes, which were scattered all over the office. We didn’t even know what we had. The only way to locate a document was by relying on the institutional memory of a single staff member who has worked here for 15 years—if that person were to leave, we wouldn’t have been able to find documents or to track any processes. Today, we’re trying to make it so that those processes don’t belong to individuals but rather are part of a system that allows anyone who starts working here to do their job—ending these issues of dependency.

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How is the adoption of those changes coming along?

It's one of the biggest challenges we face with staff. Before, people felt empowered by owning the physical information. Today, we have to take that information and put it into an open system, removing that power. We now see them empowered through efficiency and effectiveness in their work. That's the secretariat we want to become.

How will the various productive sectors of Cesar benefit from this support?

I think the most important things are agility, effectiveness, and efficiency in results—to be able to quickly attend to a request or respond to a claim. And not just in response times, but also quality. To the extent that we can better manage more information, we're able to find it more quickly and also to find the most relevant information. With those changes, we're going to triple our rate of service provision and will improve the quality of our services.

Does it mean that the secretariat has a closer relationship with other entities?

Yes. For example, the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace needs the Secretariat of Agriculture to support victims of the conflict. We will be able to give more agile responses to those processes, to see which processes can be applied, to rely on statistics that we never used to have and which we are now putting together through our new information system.

What are other things worth highlighting with regard to the collaboration between the secretariat and USAID?

We have worked with USAID on the practical components of rural development, such as value chain alliances and the formulation of productive projects. This year, we're working on an irrigation plan and on the department's productive and social organizational plan for rural property, both of which are important tasks. USAID has offered technical support and has worked diligently while we finance and learn. In this sense, we have a very committed Governor. Of the 12 projects that we designed with USAID, 11 are now being financed and rolled out. We're also going to receive 15 more and will do similar things with those. Our agreement is that what the secretariat and USAID plan together, we will provide the capital—or locate funding from another source if need be.

Tell us about your irrigation efforts with USAID. Why did you choose to pursue that issue?

Water is a big challenge in Cesar, and the rehabilitation of the mini irrigation districts will allow us to secure early victories and be able to show the public that we're executing resources. Having the designs and profiles for these projects has made us agile. Today, we're moving forward in five mini districts, and USAID is doing the studies and designs for eight more.

And what about your formalization efforts?

Formalization, of course, is a very relevant topic. It is unbelievable we cannot invest in a school unless it has a property title. With USAID, we're moving forward in securing 200 land titles in nine municipalities. And at the same time, we secured a departmental ordinance that exempts small landowners from paying property registration fees. That's an incentive to formalize.

What does the secretariat expect to achieve with these new tools developed with USAID's support?

I hope they contribute to building an honorable secretariat, to resolving the problem of post-conflict, to resolving the problems with production in Cesar today, to opening new markets, to ensuring that our services reach more citizens.

