



SUCCESS STORY

After Forced Displacement, Sweet Victory

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“For 15 years we have been trying to bring the village back to life, and these rulings really give us hope.”

—Jairo Barreto López



Telling Our Story

U.S. Agency for International Development
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More than six million Colombians were displaced from their homes over the course of the country’s 50-year civil war. On January 17, 2001, the violence hit Chengue, a village in the coastal region of Montes de María. Residents were forced to flee their village, leaving behind their land, homes, and—in some cases—family members.

“We managed to escape after they set our house on fire with us inside it. We ran to the hills to save our lives,” said 33 year-old Jairo Barreto López, who lost three uncles and two cousins in the massacre.

Fifteen years after the massacre, victims had still not been compensated or returned to their land. Today, thanks to the support of the USAID Land and Rural Development Program (LRDP), their situation is improving. In 2014, LRDP brought together restitution judges and a range of land-related agencies to examine the difficult restitution case of Chengue claimants, identify barriers preventing the processing of their claim, and implement solutions.

In April 2016, due in part to LRDP’s support in preparing the case, a judge ruled that Chengue residents must be returned to their land and have their property formalized. Thirty-seven families will be provided secure land tenure through this ruling. LRDP is working with Colombian agencies to ensure that these families receive a wide range of government services, including legal assistance, productive projects, housing, and property tax debt relief.

Megan Peluffo Meriño, who was displaced from Chengue, said, “This ruling is a big, big advance for us. Ever since I was a little girl, I kept hearing that help was on its way, but it never came. It is a means of providing us with a better future, the chance to start over and to invest in our lands, which were abandoned.”

With this ruling in hand, Chengue will again become the agricultural breadbasket and peaceful village it once was.

