



Artisanal Gold Mining Program, “Oro Legal”

Photo: BioREDD+ Program



USAID’s “Oro Legal” Program is a bold response to the growing social conflict, environmental impact and governance challenges arising from the ever growing gold mining boom in Colombia. Uncontrolled artisanal gold mining is a source of both illegality and wide-scale environmental degradation. The large numbers of artisanal mine operators are also vulnerable to extortion by the illegal armed groups that are also heavily involved in the illegal gold trade. The resulting lack of rule of law in vast areas of rural Colombia threatens Colombia’s peace-building efforts.

OBJECTIVES & APPROACHES

The Program seeks to harness the growing awareness and action at all levels of government, as well as increasingly by large mining operations, to create a shared agenda for sustainable change in this economically important, yet much maligned, sector of the economy. The Program acts as a neutral stakeholder, neither expanding nor reducing mining activity *per se*; rather supporting responsible mining where it is technically, financially and legally feasible to do so. In all cases, the Program works in concert with Colombian government entities, aligning itself with and supporting the implementation of current and emerging government policy.

The Program works in Antioquia and Chocó and has two main objectives. The first is to build effective governance capacity for gold mining activities via: (i) strengthening the Colombian government to enforce gold mining legislation; (ii) enhancing the participation of artisanal gold mining associations and Afro Colombian and indigenous communities in mining formalization programs, and (iii) providing training and technical assistance to artisanal miners. The second is to increase the capacity of Colombian government entities, communities and the private sector to address the environmental impact caused by illegal mining through: (i) reforestation of degraded areas; (ii) generating alternative livelihoods for communities that cannot or should not be involved in gold mining; and (iii) improve drinking water quality in mining areas.

EXPECTED RESULTS

- Legalize/formalize 220 artisanal mining operations.
- Rehabilitate 11,500 hectares of degraded land.
- Support the production of 8 tons of legal gold.
- Eliminate 55 tons of mercury from the production process.
- Reduce airborne mercury contamination by 30%.
- Train 3,500 miners in responsible mining techniques.