

CASE STUDY

USAID strengthens oral advocacy

USAID and DOJ transform the Colombian judicial process with the Oral Trial Skills Competition for law students



Photo: JRM/MP

“Participation in the competition was very enriching. On a personal level it helped me develop abilities I didn’t know I had and put them into practice during the simulated trial process,” said Hernando Bendek (second from the left), winner of the region IV competition in Santa Marta.

CHALLENGE - With the implementation of the new accusatory system in Colombia, students, practicing attorneys, law professors, and other professionals involved in the justice system needed to develop new skills and abilities that would help them perform effectively in the various stages of oral proceedings. In most instances, their lack of knowledge and experience would prevent them from adequately carrying out their functions and ably representing their clients.

INITIATIVE - To solve this problem, USAID and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) conducted a national competition for law students that would encourage the participation of universities from throughout Colombia to help adjust their academic programs and better prepare their students to carry out their responsibilities under the new accusatory system.

Using actual judges in some instances, the mock trial competition replicates situations practitioners will routinely encounter in Colombia’s courts: the examination of witnesses, the introduction of documents, and adherence to the rules of evidence, among others.

RESULTS - To date, students and faculty from 52 law schools located in 17 departments have participated in five regional competitions. More than 1,300 students have benefited directly from the USAID/DOJ program and thousands more will benefit in the future as many participating law schools have now incorporated trial advocacy skills training into their curriculum.

Telling Our Story

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