



# FACT SHEET

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

March 17, 2011

Fact Sheet No: FS-03-11 (E)

Press Office: +1 202 712-4320

Public Information: +1 202 712-4810

Email: [usaid-panamainfo@usaid.gov](mailto:usaid-panamainfo@usaid.gov)

<http://www.usaid.gov>

## THE DARIEN INITIATIVE

The Darien province, on the Panama-Colombia border, is a lush natural habitat that is home to a rich ecosystem, and vibrant cultural mix of indigenous, Afro-Darien and mestizo cultures. The Darien has long been a quiet backwater region, due largely to the lack of efficient communications, low population density, and remoteness from the rest of Panama. Unfortunately, these same elements have recently made it an attractive area for drug traffickers and illegal armed groups from Colombia's internal conflicts. Strongly rejected by most of the local population and the government of Panama, these groups have nevertheless succeeded in carving out areas of influence from which they engage in illegal activities that threaten Panama's security.

In light of this, the U.S. government is working closely with the government of Panama to reverse this trend through a three-pronged strategy:

- Helping to improve government services in remote areas and harmonize the work of public and private organizations;
- Improving quality of life in vulnerable communities to prevent and deter recruitment of young people into illicit groups; and
- Supporting the government of Panama's efforts to increase law enforcement presence in the region.

To advance towards the first two goals, USAID developed the Darien Initiative, which aims to strengthen the effectiveness and cooperation of national, local and traditional government bodies and community-based organizations and increase youth economic and education opportunities and community participation. The Initiative launched in mid-2010 and has helped to strengthen the government's ability to coordinate with different entities in the region so that together they can improve the quality of life of people in the most vulnerable parts of the Darien. In addition, the Darien Initiative provides job training, small community grants and technical assistance directed at improving the effectiveness of government services and expanding opportunities for Darien's vulnerable youth and their communities.

### Highlights

- Formal agreement signed with local Embera Wounaan indigenous authorities to coordinate and implement activities for community development and citizen security;
- Facilitated increased communications between local indigenous authorities and communities and the national government;
- Helped organize a conference on the Darien by a major business organization;
- Worked with indigenous communities and government entities to organize a major job training program in the region;
- Helped establish a public-private partnership between the Ministry of Education and a private school to increase educational opportunities in major vulnerable communities on the Pacific Coast.