



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

COLOMBIA

SUCCESS STORY

Roasting Her Way to Success

USAID mentoring program helps displaced Colombians succeed



Photo: FUPAD Colombia

A beneficiary of the USAID program that provides training in agricultural production and business development.

“Thanks to the USAID mentoring program, I found myself. Now I am helping many families in difficult situations,” said Maria, a displaced Colombian.

Telling Our Story
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Maria, (not her real name) a 48-year-old single mother of three and a grandmother, has lived the same tragedy as many displaced families in Colombia. With tears in her eyes she recalls the story of her village, El Rosario in Cauca, where she was a teacher. “I still shiver when I think about the group of armed men who killed several people in front of a bus, just to show that they could,” she said.

Together with 36 other families, Maria managed to escape, fleeing her home without anything but memories. She moved from place to place, relocating 23 times in five years. She sought protection from the cold but often had no money for rent. In spite of the adversity she faced, Maria never stopped hoping, and one day an opportunity opened to her.

Maria found out about a USAID mentoring program that was serving about 13,000 displaced and vulnerable families in the region. The program provided training in agricultural production and business development, as well as the necessary equipment to start a business.

Through the program, Maria received machinery for roasting, grinding and packing coffee, and started a business with several other women. They processed the coffee grown by other farmers who belonged to their association. Later, they started a second project: diversifying their production to produce an organic drink with coffee and *guandules* - a bean native to Colombia. They called the product Cafedul.

Thanks to this creative initiative, Agroinnova, a private business incubator in the department of Cauca, is planning to commercialize Cafedul produced by Maria and her partners.

Since becoming a part of the mentorship program, Maria’s life has changed dramatically, and she is still eager to learn, share, and develop new paths to success. Together with other women from the association Maria is travelling to Bogotá to display her products and attend trade fairs. She traveled to Costa Rica in 2008, and shared experiences with the women who work with coffee there, telling them her story of hope, strength and success.