

UNITING FOR LAND RIGHTS IN

COLOMBIA

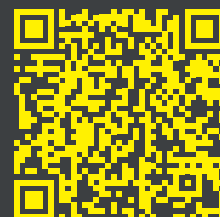
COUNTRY CONTEXT

The land reform context in Colombia is extremely challenging and complex. *It is estimated that more than half of all land is controlled by 1% of the population while around 60% of the rural population lacks any land title at all.* Highly concentrated land ownership is both a cause and consequence of decades of armed conflict and has resulted in deep mistrust between government and civil society actors.

Since 2013, Colombia's NES Platform, supported by the International Land Coalition, has contributed to connecting and strengthening civil society capacity and improving the political representation of the peasantry in its engagement with state actors.



HOW OUR MEMBERS ARE CONTRIBUTING TO CHANGE IN COLOMBIA



The signing of Peace Agreements in 2016 was a national turning point and opened opportunities for comprehensive rural reform. NES Colombia is playing a key role in the implementation of these reforms despite limited resources, the complex political context and impact of the pandemic.

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RECOGNITION OF THE CAMPESINADO

Colombia's rural peasantry (the *campesinado*) have long sought recognition as a distinct political, social and cultural group that is entitled to protection under the Constitution. While ethnic minorities including indigenous peoples can rely on the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent to establish bottom-up consultation processes in relation to land, this principle is not explicitly guaranteed for Colombia's peasantry who are legally defined as 'agrarian workers'.

Advocates including NES Colombia argue that lack of recognition of their rights as a defined social group has impeded the peasantry's access to institutional channels, participation in public debate or having their demands recognised in policies and programs.

Violence and conflict have further marginalised the campesinado, limiting their ability to respond to government policy changes. It also leaves them more vulnerable to private sector land acquisitions that tend to favour large-scale agrarian and mining operations.

NES Colombia has worked alongside peasant organisations to strengthen peasants' rights in a number of processes, both national and international. These include the Peace Agreements (see below) and efforts to achieve Constitutional recognition, through reform of Article 64. Although in 2016 a Congressional Commission discussed the recognition of peasants' rights through a Constitutional Amendment, the process failed to gather sufficient interest or support to be realised.

NES Colombia remains committed to the empowerment of the peasantry and is pursuing the issue in regional fora as well as promoting the participation of women and young people in the debate.

Half of all land in Colombia is controlled by 1% of the population.



IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PEACE AGREEMENTS

Extreme land inequality is both a cause and consequence of Colombia's long armed conflict between government forces and the FARC – a Marxist guerilla group founded in the 1960s.

After decades of fighting and years of negotiation, the parties signed the 2016 Peace Agreements which included a comprehensive rural reform agenda.

However, lack of trust between government and civil society, bred from years of fighting, meant there was very little communication between them, and little participation by civil society groups in land-related decision making or policy implementation.

Since 2016, NES Colombia has focused on supporting the peace implementation process by building the capacity of civil society, encouraging coordinated communication and improving political representation of the peasantry with state institutions.

NES Colombia has also sought to utilise existing consultation mechanisms such as PDET and PATR which are part of the Peace Agreements. PATRs (Action Plans for Regional Transformation) are implemented in specific regions under PDETs (Programas de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial) are participatory mechanisms that have been positively received by many rural populations.

NES Colombia is playing a key role in the PDET areas of Montes de María, Sur de Córdoba and Sierra Nevada Perijá supporting indigenous, peasant and Afro-descendant communities to identify proposals based on their historical agendas and engage in policy dialogue.

NES Colombia is also assuming the technical secretariat of the PDET Mesa (Table) and organising regional spaces and exchanges, despite limited resources and the pandemic. To date only one PDET process has been finalised, out of 16 zones.

LOOKING FORWARD

NES members are committed to working to support peasant, indigenous and Afro-descendant communities to exercise their rights to land

NES Colombia's initial members were Facultad de Estudios Ambientales y Rurales de la Universidad Javeriana through the Observatorio de Territorios Étnicos y Campesinos (OTEC); Corporación Desarrollo Solidario (CDS); Organizaciones de Población Desplazada de Montes de María; la Red Nacional de Agricultura Familiar (RENAF); y el Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular/Programa por la Paz (CINEP/PPP).

In 2019 NES Colombia welcomed the Organisations of the Displaced Population, Ethnic and Peasant Organisations of the Montes de Maria subregion, the National Network of Family Farming (RENAF), and the Red de Mujeres del Norte de Bolívar .

Looking forward, NES members are committed to working to support peasant, indigenous and Afro-descendant communities to exercise their rights to land and territory and to be guaranteed the right to participate in public policy formulation on land, rural development, environment and in the implementation of the Comprehensive Rural Reforms of the Peace Agreements.

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