

Colombia – Case Study 13

Background

The National Strategy Information Center (NSIC) is a Washington, DC-based nonprofit educational organization. Through the Culture of Lawfulness (COL) Project, it is developing and implementing programs around the world to increase societal support for the rule of law.¹ To accomplish this, the COL Project works with a variety of actors, such as school systems, law enforcement, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the United Nations, and the Organization of American States.

COL defines a “culture of lawfulness” as “a society in which the overwhelming majority of members are convinced that the rule of law offers the best long-term chance of securing their rights and attaining their goals. They believe that this is achievable and are committed to upholding it.” COL uses a framework that builds upon past successful initiatives such as those in Sicily and Hong Kong in the 1980s. Within this framework, COL collaborates with key sectors in a country—including public servants, law enforcement, mass media, school-based education, and centers of moral authority (respected individuals, religious institutions, etc.)—to develop and implement rule of law education within and among their institutions. When these different sectors work together synergistically, they create a unified, overarching effort toward strengthening a culture of lawfulness throughout their society.

Since early 2008, COL has been using this framework for a three-year initiative with local government and civil society leaders to combat corruption and promote the rule of law in the Colombian city of Pereira. When COL first began its work in Pereira, some existing national efforts helped it get started. For example, a formal education program aimed at enhancing integrity and the rule of law had already been instituted by the National Colombian Police in police academies across the country. A 60-hour culture of lawfulness course for ninth graders was also being taught in

22 municipalities. Furthermore, Bogota, under the leadership of mayor Antanas Mockus in the mid-1990s, saw a drastic improvement in legal reasoning and responsible behavior, proving that such change on a large scale was possible in Colombia.

COL had three broad goals in Pereira over its three-year period:

1. To consolidate a group of public and private local authorities to become leaders in fostering a culture of lawfulness
2. To promote knowledge and the transformation of attitudes directed at recognizing the benefits of a culture of lawfulness, with special attention to honesty and transparency in everyday actions
3. To institutionalize education about the rule of law in synergistic programs across sectors, including schools, NGOs, local government, and the private sector

Objectives/Strategies for Action

COL has worked with Pereira governmental and nongovernmental leaders to institute a series of programs aimed at promoting respect for the rule of law among the people of Pereira. Though not all of their specific tactics are aimed at combating corruption exclusively, promoting this broader issue in many areas of daily life can ultimately create a culture that is intolerant of corruption, as respecting the rule of law becomes a norm for everyone in society. COL explains this approach as follows: “By marginalizing lawless behavior, a culture of lawfulness helps protect societies against major threats to democracy: organized crime, corruption, extremism, political violence, authoritarianism, and public fatalism.”

Centers of Moral Authority

One major objective in Pereira is to consolidate a group of community leaders from both the public sector and civil society to advocate for broad

societal support for the rule of law. These leaders include the mayor, City Council members, leaders of NGOs and churches, Pereira's Transit Institute, and the city's secretaries of education and health.

COL supports initiatives undertaken by faith-based organizations to promote transparency and fight corruption. The Catholic Diocese of Pereira, for example, has begun using its monthly magazine, *Pregon Catolico*, to issue calls for transparency to big businesses and the public sector, as well as to inform about the personal and collective consequences of bribes. Likewise, Council of Evangelical and Protestant Churches of Colombia (CEDECOL) pastors in Pereira are joining together to advocate against corruption and to become involved in community projects. With technical assistance from COL, CEDECOL has developed a guide for pastors, advising them how to encourage their congregants and all people to reject crime and corruption and to make responsible individual decisions.

Public Servants/Law Enforcement

The police are a major focus not only of COL's work in Pereira but of other regional and nationwide initiatives. When law enforcement officials promote the rule of law in their professional and personal lives, citizen confidence increases. This ultimately allows police to become more effective at improving security. Fifteen police lieutenants are currently working with community members on action plans to diminish specific security challenges in Pereira, such as piracy, the sale of stolen goods, the violation of traffic laws, the falsification of documents, and street theft.

Police are also encouraging the population to take a stance in the crime-fighting process by reporting crimes they witness, a practice that increases the police's likelihood of solving crimes.

The police also are working to increase their visibility to and rapport with the population via mass media strategies. The police have created *Parche Legal*, a weekly radio talk show featuring

students who have learned about the importance of culture of lawfulness in school. Students play music that appeals to Colombian youth and engage in frank discussions about how to fight corruption on their own level, such as in school elections. The program provides an outlet for youth to openly discuss the crime and corruption they face in their neighborhoods and allows them to develop possible solutions with law enforcement authorities.

Mass Media—Daily Efforts to Educate Readers and Viewers

The mass media are also playing an important role in fostering a culture of lawfulness. In addition to regular coverage of COL initiatives in press, radio, and television news sections, entertainment radio and television programs are generating community support for the rule of law. For example, *Voxpopuli*, a weekly news talk show, interviews well-known regional leaders about what the culture of lawfulness means to them and how they are promoting it. Band members performing live on *Vitrola* radio music program discuss the consequences for the music industry of purchasing pirated goods. A local community radio station sponsors a talk program, *Legalismo*, designed to educate listeners on how to defend themselves from unfair legal proceedings.

School-Based Education

A curriculum aimed at teaching students about the benefits of the rule of law and how it applies to their lives in and outside the classroom has been instituted in many of Pereira's schools. The ninth grade Culture of Lawfulness curriculum has been introduced in 56 of Pereira's 64 middle schools. Likewise, several other educational initiatives aimed at children, such as the aforementioned *Parche Legal*, work to instill a respect for the rule of law in people at a young age.

It is hoped that educational programs targeted at children will have an impact that reaches beyond children alone—for example, sending positive messages to parents when children bring home homework from the COL curriculum.

The above is just a sampling of how COL collaborates with local partners in its four framework areas. It also supports a variety of local organizations in combating corruption. One such organization is *Vida y Futuro*, a microlending nonprofit in Pereira that is actively participating in culture of lawfulness education. Recipients of microloans have in the past been known to engage in unlawful practices such as tax evasion, not applying for permits, hiring underage workers, purchasing and reselling contraband products, and not abiding by food and health regulations. *Vida y Futuro* saw an opportunity to create a fairer and a more equitable community of small entrepreneurs. In addition to developing workshops about the role of businesses in the promotion of the rule of law, *Vida y Futuro* created a culture of lawfulness certificate for loan recipients. The certificate allows recipients to commit to specific lawful behaviors of their choice. Examples include paying their taxes on time, abiding by labor laws, formalizing their business through the Chamber of Commerce, or reporting any public official who tries to offer them bribes.

At the base of many of the culture of lawfulness activities developed in Pereira is the idea of becoming a part of daily life. One major way this is achieved is the renovation and recuperation of public spaces. For example, a task force composed of both government, law enforcement, and civil society institutions is currently working to clean and reclaim *Parque la Libertad*—a local park where crime and underage prostitution are rampant.

Likewise, a major area of COL's work in Pereira focuses on transportation safety. COL learned that a major cause of traffic accidents in Pereira was ignorance of traffic laws. With the partnership of the police, Megabus (the city's metrorail system), the secretary of education, the Institute of Transportation, CEDECOL, motorcycle repair shops, and City Hall, an initiative was launched to educate Pereirans about traffic safety and decrease the number of accidents involving motorcyclists and pedestrians. One initiative included giving "*prueba de vida*" cards to cyclists. These cards

contain a short (three-question) quiz about simple traffic laws, then ask cyclists to sign a safety pledge and hand them in. More than 4,000 pedestrians and motorcyclists have signed and returned these life pledges. In addition, several main thoroughfares in Pereira have been updated with traffic lights and new lane markings, and more than 200 citations have been issued to cyclists and motorcyclists for law infractions, with emphasis on equal application of the law regardless of political or socioeconomic status.

Another important initiative has been the city's public communication campaign, undertaken with the support of Megabus, the Catholic Church, the secretary of planning, the mayor's communication office, public advertising, and other independent groups. This four-phase campaign includes public service announcements on billboards, Megabus, trains and in buses, as well as partnerships with newspapers and radio stations, in which a select group of citizens are recognized as "*Heroes de Legalidad*"—individuals who make significant contributions toward protecting and promoting the rule of law in their daily lives.

Though some of these initiatives start small and initially may reach only a fraction of the population—such as cyclists or microloan recipients—COL's programs are all intended to be part of a larger whole, working together to promote a culture of lawfulness. It is important to note that many of the programs listed above under each of COL's four framework parts really extend across framework lines. The public communication "Heroes of Lawfulness" campaign is both a mass media campaign and a centers of moral authority initiative.

Outcomes/Impact of the Interventions

The COL program has not yet conducted a formal assessment of its effects (such an assessment is due in January 2011). Yet results can already be seen on an anecdotal level. As one police sub-lieutenant

explained, the program allows him to have more of a relationship with the citizens he protects: "By way of this program, one enjoys a closer proximity with the community. ... It improves my work as a police officer since it is founded on the leadership and commitment that the police should have with the community."

A Pereiran teacher agreed, saying that the curriculum she teaches also changed her own attitudes toward lawfulness: "With respect to myself as a teacher of the program, it has allowed me to reflect and reevaluate my mindset toward certain acts that seemed very 'normal,' but at the heart of the matter were illegal. ... For example, my perspective toward buying pirated CDs, books, and photocopied material without respecting the author's rights have changed, making me a citizen with greater respect for the laws of my country."

One other clear result can be seen in the projects that have arisen purely out of citizen excitement over lawfulness programs. The mayor's office and Megabus, for example, were so impressed with the efforts of *Vida y Futuro* that they are featuring one of the microloan recipients on a billboard to recognize their efforts to make a living in an honest manner. The billboard will consist of a gigantic portrait of a microloan beneficiary with the following text: "As a food vendor, I earn my living in an honest way to make my children proud. And YOU? What are YOU going to do for a culture of lawfulness?" This is part of the mayor's office and Megabus's citywide "*Heroes de Legalidad*" program.

Results can also be seen in the number of people who take part in COL activities. Perhaps the most prominent was the first annual Culture of Lawfulness Week in June 2009. This event comprised 22 large-scale cultural, athletic, and community events, and drew more than 20,000 participants.

Lessons Learned

- **Learn from and build on other successes.** COL has learned from approaches that generate positive results elsewhere. For example,

some of Pereira's traffic and public space education campaigns are based on programs instituted in the late 1990s by then-Bogota mayor Antanas Mockus.

- **Concrete and simple programs are easier to implement.** Start small, and help people to engage in rule of law principles on a personal level, as with the microloan or bicycle pledge programs or through art and theatre contests. Make programs simple, doable, and engaging for the target audience.
- **Get into people's daily lives.** This is a corollary to the above lesson. COL's programs tend to fall into two basic categories: (1) Those with specific and measurable objectives, such as decreasing the number of traffic accidents through targeted strategies; (2) those that promote attitudes of respect for the law, like public education campaigns. These two approaches work together to give people regular opportunities to change their attitudes of apathy, fear, and indifference to positive actions that help build the rule of law.
- **Balancing public image.** Because Pereira's mayor so readily embraced culture of lawfulness education, the media first saw the Culture of Lawfulness programs as exclusively an administration effort. It is important to identify respected private sector leaders who can talk publicly about the efforts to promote the rule of law by civil society.
- **Addressing local needs:** Understanding local voices and needs is necessary when designing culture of lawfulness programming. Though advances in *Parque de Libertad* are making headway, progress would have been faster if government and civil society leaders had consulted with those who frequent the park before designing the educational program. Local neighborhood groups and civic organizations whose members live near the park are now partnering with municipal government and civil society leaders.

Prepared by Danielle Kurtzleben

Endnotes

1. For educational purposes, the rule of law is described as having three main principals: (1) the law applies

to all equally and is uniformly enforced, (2) laws are created with citizen participation, and(3) the law protects individual and collective rights.