

Kurihara (right) interviews a coffee farmer who has returned home about the situation and problems in Cundinamarca Department, Colombia.



## Overcoming Conflict to Build True Peace Again

In 2016, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos received the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to end the country's civil war, which had lasted for more than 50 years. While the country is making great strides in its peace-building efforts, enormous negative impacts from the civil war linger across the country. One of the challenges the nation faces is rebuilding the lives of people who were forcibly displaced from their homeland by conflicts and violence.

### JAPAN CONTINUES ITS SUPPORT FOR THE WORLD'S LARGEST INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

November 30, 2016, became a historic day for Colombia. On that day, the world watched as the government of Colombia and the leftwing guerrilla group Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) signed a peace agreement to end the 50-year-long civil war.

While Colombia is about to launch a full-scale effort to rebuild the nation, the country faces several challenges, and rehabilitation of its internally displaced persons is one of them, says Eri Komukai, JICA's Senior Advisor. "In Colombia, the number of internally displaced persons who lost their homes due to violence by the paramilitaries is said to surpass 6 million," she says. "Many of them fled into urban areas and live in houses illegally built on lands unfit for human habitation, such as hillsides." Komukai says it is necessary to build institution and a safe environment in order for people to get back to their normal lives.

During the 1960s, leftwing guerrilla groups including FARC emerged, seeking to correct social inequality. The ongoing civil war left a population of civilians in a perpetual state of internal displacement. In response, in 1997, the government of Colombia required local governments to formulate plans to improve the lives of those displaced. In 2009, Colombia partnered with Japan to start participatory develop-

ment projects that bolster local governments' capacity to cater to the needs of the displaced.

In 2011, Colombia formulated an official designation for "victims of civil war" and enacted a groundbreaking law that stipulated restitution of despoiled lands to the rightful owners. The Special Administrative Unit for Management of Despoiled and Abandoned Lands Restitution was established within the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and the unit launched a project to develop a land information management system. However, the system requires those who request restitution to register their personal data and information about how their land was seized. If the information leaked, it could endanger their lives. Japan decided to provide technical assistance to strengthen the unit's capacity for information security management.

Yoichi Kogure, an expert who took part in this assistance project, says, "We held seminars for engineers in charge of system development and also for workers in charge of operation and management of the system. We invited them to a seminar in Japan to teach them how Japanese government institutions handle land management."

It also occurred to Kogure that the displaced Colombians returning to land in need of rehabilitation had things in common with the Japanese who had lost their land in the Great East Japan Earthquake. He decided to invite a group of these Colombians to a training program in tsunami-hit Iwaki City in Fukushima Prefecture.

The twelve Colombian participants learned about land rehabilitation programs run by the Japanese government. They also observed activities in the private sector such as helping farmers who had been forced to abandon vegetable farming due to reputational damage switch to organic cotton farming, as well as encouraging citizen participation in the use of renewable energy. "The participants learned the importance of cooperation among citizens, not just of assistance provided by the government," says Yukiyo Yamada, an expert who accompanied the participants throughout the training. "They seemed to have gained some ideas about helping displaced people return home and earn a new livelihood."

### "DEVIL WEAPONS", OR LANDMINES STILL THREATEN LIVES

Toshiaki Kurihara, a rural development expert, has been dispatched to Colombia to work for livelihood improvement of those who have returned to their homeland. He works with residents of the restituted lands and helps them rebuild their villages. Furthermore, in twelve regions of Colombia, a project called "One Village, One Product" is building up unity within communities and strengthening their economic independence. Rural development know-how gained in these regions is expected to contribute to the improvement of returnees' lives. "The civil war started because there was social inequality to begin with," Komukai says. "Colombia must develop an environment in which those who have returned home can earn a proper livelihood. Failure to do so may cause people to flow back to urban areas, or may even become a new source of conflict," she stresses.

Another problem looms. Full-scale removal of



A training program held in Iwaki city, Fukushima prefecture, in 2015. Participants visited an organic cotton field.



Kogure (right) teaches system developers in charge of land information management how to ensure information security.

landmines, which are still causing many casualties, is yet to begin. To solve this problem, the Colombian government is especially interested in the expertise of the Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC). Japan has been supporting CMAC since 1999. In February and March of 2017, CMAC members and related JICA officials visited minefields and training centers in Colombia to seek ways to build an assistance program through a "south-south cooperation" approach between Cambodia and Colombia. Komukai says, "We still don't have a complete map of landmine fields in Colombia. We must work fast to ensure the safety of the land so that the internally displaced persons can go back to their homeland."

Supporting the displaced requires a long-term perspective. To tackle these diverse challenges, it is important for Japan to apply the lessons learned over the years of development work as effectively as possible.



CMAC and JICA visited minefields in Colombia in February and March of 2017. Landmines laid during the civil war prevent internally displaced persons from returning home.



Farmers who have returned home. Although many displaced people have requested land restitution, only 50% of total requests have been processed so far because the Ministry of National Defense has been unable to confirm the security of the land in many cases.