

Colombia Opportunity Zone: A Holistic Approach Yields Results

Your Program Impact Report—Fall 2023

2023–2025 OPPORTUNITY COLOMBIA STRATEGIC GOALS

With support from generous donors, impact the lives of an additional **170,454 people**, providing **six programs** in collaboration with **16 partners**, and releasing **\$10.4M** in capital

OUR GRATITUDE

Because of violence in her hometown, Luciana and her five children fled to Cartagena, Colombia, where they knew no one and had nothing—no money, no food, no roof over their heads. Through the kindness of strangers and her own perseverance and faith, she connected with several organizations that helped her find stability. Thanks to Opportunity International’s Graduation program, she has a business and family plan; she is building up her business of making brooms and mops and she dreams of having a home of her own one day.

Thank you for enabling Luciana, her children, and other families in Colombia to make a life for themselves.



THE NEED

Opportunity International launched our work in Colombia in 1971 and we continue to walk hand in hand with the people of Colombia today, as we co-create opportunities for sustainable livelihoods and healthy families. With more than eight million displaced persons and refugees, Colombia is a country with great need and even greater potential.

THE SOLUTIONS

Opportunity launched an **Opportunity Zone** in the Atlantico-Bolivar region of Colombia, intentionally bringing together our flagship programs—starting with **education** and **microbanking**, and eventually adding **agriculture**—into an area with large population of people living in extreme poverty. Our proven three-pronged interventions of **tailored training, financial resources, and support** increase incomes, create and sustain jobs, and provide affordable quality education for children and youth.

COLOMBIA ZONE RESULTS	FY2022 Results	FY2023 YTD (June)	FY2023 Goals	% to Goal
Households Impacted	6,455	9,103	9,355	97%
Lives Impacted	25,818	36,912	37,420	99%
New Financial/Non-Financial Partners	6	4	3	133%
% Households living under \$2.15/day	31%	21%	13%	162%
Total Capital Released (\$M)*	\$2.8M	\$8.9M	\$6.2M	143%

*Value of loans disbursed by financial partners

PROGRESS ON OUR WORK

Savings Groups

The savings group program has proven to be one of the most successful interventions for communities living in extreme poverty. It targets the lowest-income communities—in Colombia, known as strata zero, one, and two. With your support, we have completed two cycles of eight months each; results include:

- Creation and strengthening of savings habits
- Creation of strong community networks
- Increased resiliency
- Improved financial literacy (savings and loans)
- Training in other topics as identified by each group (e.g., conflict resolution, leadership)

During the current fiscal year 2023, to date we have achieved the following against our goals:

- 265 new savings groups (70% progress)
- 3,734 clients (66% progress)
- 75% women, 25% men
- 18% migrants

“The training impacted me. It awakened hope in me, that spark that had been extinguished when I left behind everything I had achieved in Venezuela. Now, I think that, if I managed to prosper before, I can also do it here in this country.”

- Rusmery,
Colombia

Colombia’s Savings Group Training Shows Powerful Results

After the training, more clients:

- Felt a greater sense of self-worth (39% → 61%)
- Practiced hope and improved their wellbeing (50% → 69%)
- Felt greater ability to push forward amidst challenges (23% → 33%)
- Set goals and took steps to reach their goals (66% → 82%)
- Felt worthy, hopeful, and resilient (24% → 61%)
- Felt able to construct healthy relationships in their families (29% → 39%)
- Divided household work between men/women in family (53% → 70%)
- Managed emotions, contributing to peace in family (66% → 81%)
- Faced and resolved problems together as a family (47% → 57%)
- Felt their families were becoming strong and healthy (46% → 66%)

The success of this savings group program led to a new partnership with USAID/Venezuela Response and Integration—an organization designed to work with the Colombian government, private sector, and migrant communities to co-create inclusive prosperity. Two hundred new savings groups with migrants on the north coast of Colombia will be established during the next 14 months.

Bertha is another success story: Bertha first worked as a seamstress. She and her husband joined a savings group to set aside money and receive loans to build their business. Then, she joined the local staff, starting as a savings group advisor, then supervisor. Today, Bertha coordinates Opportunity’s savings groups and Pathways to Wellbeing training. Bertha shares, “I’ve learned to thank God—both when I have little and when I have abundance. I’ve learned to value the small details and understand the needs of the people, teaching them to fish instead of only giving them the fish.”



Bertha, Coordinator,
Pathways to Wellbeing

Graduation Program

Focusing on people living in ultra-poverty (less than \$1.25/day), the Graduation program is rooted in a financial resource with accompanying training and support: a market-viable asset (for instance, shop inventory) or marketable skill (like carpentry) is

transferred to a client, along with a larger package of comprehensive services such as crisis relief; training in life skills and financial literacy; access to health and education; introduction financial services.



Graduation is designed to empower families living in extreme poverty to build economic and social self-sufficiency. Two staff members are assigned to each family: a livelihood facilitator focused on economic education and a psychological facilitator supporting social work, plus a local community liaison to support the socialization and integration of the program. Clients meet with staff twice a month. Graduation participants complete 34 training modules, 24 of which are from **Opportunity's Shalom/Pathway to Wellbeing holistic training program**. Regular feedback, measurement, and evaluation allow the program to be both responsive and resilient.



Participating family studying Pathways to Wellbeing

In 2022, in partnership with government and non-governmental partners, Opportunity staff identified 650 families that met the eligibility guidelines for the inaugural Graduation program; 250 families were chosen based on criteria such as food insecurity, female-head of households, homes with inadequate materials, and few/no productive assets. Those families started their Graduation journey—in Colombia, called **“Pathways of Opportunities”**—in early 2023, and will complete the 18-month program in fall 2024.

To date, the following milestones have been achieved:

- 16 savings groups have been formed with all the program participants.
- Each family has received three lump sums to help them meet daily food and shelter needs while they focus on the program learnings.
- 200 clients have finished business plans and pitched them to their business coach and other staff.
- All participants started technical training in their planned businesses (such as cooking, etc.).

Education Finance and Education Quality

Our EduFinance Consultant and EduQuality Specialist are focused on developing partnerships with financial institutions and facilitating learning activities with the schools that are part of the EduQuality program. To date, we have:

- 4 financial partners signed, and technical assistance completed: Crezcamos, Finanfuturo, Actuar Famiempresas, El Alcaravan
- 34 schools in the EduQuality program
- 6,800 children impacted

Colombia is experiencing political and economic turmoil which has especially impacted the roll out of Opportunity's EduFinance program. The risk to financial institution partners has increased, so they are

moving at a slower pace. We anticipate initial disbursements of EduFinance loans between September – December 2023, and will better understand if there is an impact on schools or parents.



Above and right: EduQuality school and learners with EduQuality Specialist and Colombia native Andrea Camacho, who works with affordable, non-state schools to improve the quality of teaching and learning conditions. In Colombia, all EduQuality schools serve children living in extreme poverty.

Microbanking

Crezcamos is our current financial partner, and we recently signed an MOU with Bancamia, one of the top three microfinance-specialized banks in Colombia. We are working with Crezcamos to subsidize a crop insurance premium so smallholder farmer women can access loans. FY2023 results to date include:

- 7,236 loans (100% goal completed)
- \$8.9M Unlocked capital (100% goal completed)
- 4,300 loans disbursed to smallholder women farmers via Crezcamos/UPS microbanking partnership (86% goal completed)



Entrepreneur and businesswoman

Conversations with Davivienda, the third largest bank in Colombia, keep progressing; we continue to explore potential programmatic scaling with the national government’s program, “Banca de las Oportunidades.”

We are humbled by the sheer force of will, depth of faith, and extraordinary commitment of the people of Colombia—our clients who show us every day what it means to embrace opportunity with vigor, heart, and grace. Thank you for making our work possible; thank you for investing your faith and treasure in truly life-changing work.

Continuing to Steward Your Gifts: What excites us the most right now?

- ▶ **Graduation program:** 250 families are at the halfway point of an 18-month program that will give them the tools, training, and support to build sustainable livelihoods.
- ▶ **Savings groups:** Group members are holding each other accountable as they learn how to save even a small amount each week, changing behaviors in ways that have long-term, positive impact.
- ▶ **Education Finance:** Four financial institution partners are committed to helping parents keep their children in school and school leaders to improve their facilities and staff.
- ▶ **Entrepreneurship:** We held the largest entrepreneurial training in our history—1,050 families—in Cartagena.
- ▶ **AGAPE,** Opportunity’s partner on the ground in Colombia, is now part of the public contracting system of Colombia, opening the door to additional funding sources.