Innovation Policies for Inclusiveness – Policy Cases

Ideas for Change

Country: **Colombia**

1. Short Description

Ideas for Change is a Colciencias programme designed to promote the social appropriation of science, technology and innovation (STI). It aims to create the **participatory and collaborative dynamics** needed for **dialogue around knowledge sharing** among Colombian **vulnerable communities** and actors of the national innovation system. The objective is to develop innovative STI solutions able to provide answers to social problems and unmet basic needs in specific social sectors.

This policy profile is part of a policy toolkit on innovation policies for inclusiveness. It is relevant for social inclusiveness.

2. Policy Characteristics

Basic Information

Country and implementing institution(s):	Timeline:
Colombia **Colciencias** (Administrative Department for STI)	2012-2015
Target group	**Size and budget:**
Firms, **universities** and **research institutions** in the **environment** and **energy** sectors	COP 948.6 million PPP (USD 754 200) in 2015
Type of policy instrument(s)	**Inclusiveness focus**
Financial support: investment in STI projects	**Social inclusiveness**

Policy objectives

In a broader sense, "Ideas for Change" aims to incentivise **knowledge appropriation** in Colombian society by promoting innovative ideas that are STI-intensive. It does so by supporting the development of **innovative solutions** to meet basic needs and **social challenges** in **poor and vulnerable communities**. The programme emphasises collaboration and open innovation processes that generate **knowledge dialogue** between **STI actors** and **local communities**.

Rationale

For over four decades, Colciencias has developed programmes and strategies to articulate scientific and technological knowledge within Colombian society. Understanding of the interactions involved has evolved over time. The relationship between innovation and its appropriation was first thought to be vertical (i.e. specific agents – the productive sector, government and academia – produced knowledge that was absorbed by external society). Today's policies embody conceptual and methodological proposals that recognise the importance of **participatory and inclusive dynamics** of STI as a condition for social and economic development.

Accordingly, the appropriation of scientific and technological knowledge by society is not a passive process, but rather involves interpretation and the development of approaches in collaboration with multiple actors. This strategy also represents a commitment to sustainable solutions, as communities are expected to participate actively in the process before, during and after policy implementation.

Policy target recipient and selection mechanism

"Ideas for Change" is aimed primarily at two population cohorts: **vulnerable communities** located in different regions of Colombian territory, and **actors in the national innovation system**, consisting of research groups, technological development centres and universities, as well as research and development units of business and the productive sector. To develop the project, Colciencias forged alliances with other government agencies and multilateral agencies, acting as technical or financial sponsors.

The methodological design for participation and collaborative work is divided into four phases:

- In the first phase, Colciencias and other government entities identify a social problem that hinders a section of the population from attaining higher standards of living. Examples include water quality problems, rural electrical power, food security and climate change damage. This stage also identifies the regions and territories where these communities are located.

- The second phase defines participation parameters and invites the communities to participate through a virtual platform, in order to identify specific needs affecting their quality of life. Registration on the virtual platform is open for a period of 45 days. Once the specific needs are registered on the platform, they are prioritised based on impact criteria and opportunities to locate STI solutions. The aim is to select 15 to 20 needs, depending on available funding resources.

- In the third phase, the selected challenges or needs submitted by the communities are passed on to the STI community. Universities, research groups and technological development centres use the virtual platform to propose solutions that are creative and adaptable to low-cost technologies. Once the tender closes, several solutions are pre-selected in accordance with technical feasibility. Regional committees, which include the participation of the affected communities, then make the final selection.

- In the fourth phase, Colciencias, with the support of financial and technical sponsors, co-ordinates the development of STI solutions through participatory and collaborative processes. The contributions of local communities and STI actors are fundamental, as it is necessary to achieve an atmosphere of trust with respect for different perspectives, in order for social transformation to take place. The programme seeks opportunities to generate agreement between the stakeholders that share the responsibility for developing the solution. All parties contribute to ensure the STI solution is accepted, absorbed and is socially, economically and environmentally sustainable.

Policy instrument(s)

Financial support (grant): Annual **public calls for tender** take place, with resources from the national government and partners. Colciencias also provides beneficiaries access to its network of experts. The technical teams work closely with communities in the planning and implementation of the innovative solution, in order to achieve social appropriation of the underlying idea, which is then converted into a solution.

Policy challenges

The main challenge to programme development relates to difficulties with **mobilising actors from academia, government and society** to devise specific solutions to social problems using STI. Traditionally, such **collaborative relationships are vertical**, however this programme requires more symmetrical relationships, which can lead to obstacles in the various interest groups to building inclusive and collaborative processes. The ways in which actors are involved strongly determines the success of the inclusive innovation process necessary to generate new knowledge or develop new technologies. Inclusive practices not only solve social problems, but can also generate new dynamics of knowledge articulation. This could add value to social innovation and policies scaled around STI that promote trust, associative environments and social cohesion.

Actions undertaken to address challenges

The following strategies are being developed:

- Colciencias is implementing the **National Strategy for Social Appropriation of STI**, structured along four lines of action:

    - citizen participation in STI
    - supporting the science communication process
    - promoting stakeholder dialogue around knowledge sharing
    - managing knowledge about processes for the social appropriation of STI.

- Colciencias and the National Planning Department (*Departamento Nacional de Planeación, DNP*) are leading the design of a **National Strategy on STI for 2016-2025**. The strategy includes a chapter dedicated to promoting a culture that appreciates science and technology in the Colombian society, both as a way of life and as a means to create opportunities for solutions to economic and social development challenges.

Evaluation and outcomes of the scheme

In 2012, the "Ideas for Change" programme opened its first call for tender around the theme of **water and poverty**. The programme focused on the departments (sub-national regions) of La Guajira, Risaralda and Putumayo. Based on the needs articulated by the poor and vulnerable communities that inhabit these departments and lack access to drinking water, the scientific and innovative community proposed 59 solutions. Colciencias selected 11 of the most innovative with the highest potential to respond to community needs.

In the same year, these 11 projects received funding of COP 948.6 million (USD 754 200), distributed across the departments of La Guajira, Putumayo and Risaralda. Implementation of these solutions **benefited approximately 500 families** directly. **Replication** of these solutions is planned for other communities with similar problems, to enable more people to participate and benefit from this round of the programme.

The second edition of "Ideas for Change" centred on **clean and renewable energy**, and the call for tender opened in 2013. The first phase targeted communities living in non-interconnected areas of the departments of Chocó, Valle, Cauca and Nariño. There were 117 submitted needs of which Colciencias prioritised the most pressing 20. These needs were considered to be the most appropriate for STI solutions with the potential to improve the quality of life in these departments. Prioritised proposals were characterised by the use of **clean, low-cost and renewable innovative energy sources**. Another criterion was the use of methodologies conducive to active involvement of the affected community, to ensure the solution is appropriate and sustainable over time.

In 2013, "Ideas for Change" obtained an **e-governance excellence award** from the Organisation of American States, in the category "open government". The award acknowledged the programme as a comprehensive virtual experience that aims to create a more inclusive, transparent public sector. It also recognised its efforts to improve the provision of services with the collaboration of third parties through open innovation.

Sources

EC/OECD (2014), *International Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP) Survey and Database*, edition 2014, www.innovationpolicyplatform.org/sti-policy-database.

Background

*This document is part of a repository of examples of **innovation policies that have for explicit aim to contribute to territorial, industrial and social inclusiveness**. The repository is part of an innovation policy toolkit developed for the **Innovation for Inclusive Growth** project and gathers national innovation policy programmes that:*

A. *Explicitly target **lagging and less innovative regions** (outside of regions that are highly innovative) or by design are more likely to support these lagging / less innovative regions.*

B. *Explicitly aim to include in innovation activities **individuals and groups that are not usually participating** in those activities and in support of broadening the group of innovators.*

C. *Explicitly aim to foster innovation activities in non-innovative firms, in particular by targeting **non-innovative sectors and non-innovative Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs).***

Policies are searchable by inclusiveness type, objective and implementation challenge on:
https://innovationpolicyplatform.org/inclusivetoolkit