



WAVES
Country Brief
Colombia
May 2015



Country Brief: Colombia

Region: Latin America

Context: Colombia ranks second in the world for biodiversity as a whole and top for the number of bird species. It signed up to international environmental legislation following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (1992).

After a major transformation in recent years, Colombia is now a middle-income country. But the challenges of developing sustainably demand a profound commitment from government, private companies, academia and society to protect the nation's most important national asset – its natural resources.

How will WAVES help?

WAVES is supporting Colombia by strengthening and building capacity within government institutions to use natural capital accounting as a tool to assess the economic value of natural resources. The development of pilot projects and a national forest account have been opportunities to determine the cross-institutional potential of

WAVES in Colombia

Colombia was one of the first countries worldwide to show interest in joining the WAVES partnership and implementing the natural capital accounting approach. Local work began in 2011 aimed at strengthening the country's ability to value its natural capital, generating data that could contribute to policies connecting the environment and the economy.

Knowing the value of natural resources in Colombia is crucial for sustainable development. The country's vast stock of natural resources accounts for approximately 11 per cent of the country's GDP and underpins many important drivers of the economy such as mining, tourism and agriculture.

Preliminary findings compiled by the WAVES Steering Committee clearly demonstrate the validity of natural capital accounting. Primary projects have allowed the construction of national accounts for water, forest and land, broadening the value of the accounts by incorporating environmental and economic elements. Government,

environmental institutions and the academic community have welcomed the potential of the data for informing development policies.

Natural capital accounting and green growth

In September 2014 the WAVES Steering Committee ratified the use of indicators derived from environmental accounts to measure green growth as part of the country's commitment to a green growth development strategy and its bid to gain access to the OECD. The internationally-recognized UN System of Environmental and Economic Accounting – used to prepare natural capital accounts – provided the required consistent and objective framework for measurement. At the same time, DNP shared its vision of green growth as a pillar of the National Development Plan 2014-18 focusing on agriculture, transport and energy.

“For the first time in history, the environment is a key factor within the National Development Plan and an element linking the Santos government's second term goals



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Wealth Accounting and the
Valuation of Ecosystem Services

constructing natural capital accounts.

Accounts being developed:

Regional water and forest:

- Water in Tota
- Water and forests in Chinchiná
- Forest in Suárez

National accounts for forest, water and land

WAVES Country Steering Committee and partner institutions:

- Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (MADS)
- National Planning Department (DNP)
- National Statistics Office (DANE)
- Institute of Hydrology, Meteorology and Environmental Studies (IDEAM)
- National Comptroller's Office (CGR)

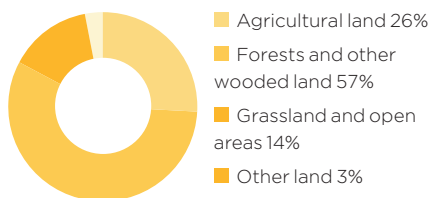
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Figure 1. Land cover distribution 2009*



*Analysis of satellite images taken between 2005 and 2009

of peace, equity and education. The common element is our green growth", said Colombian Minister of Environment, Gabriel Vallejo in February 2015. He went on to set out the vision and highlight the importance of proper management of natural resources for Colombia's development.

National land account: key findings

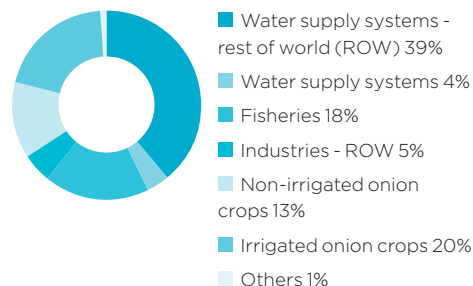
The land account describes the change in the country's land cover during the 2000–2009 period. It is worth highlighting that 57 per cent of the land area in 2009 corresponded to forest and other wooded land while identifying that a quarter of the total land area in Colombia is under agricultural classification. (Figure 1)

Lake Tota account: key findings

In 2014 a technical committee under the leadership of the WAVES Steering Committee, initiated fieldwork, investigation, data compilation and analysis with the following preliminary results:

- Water use in Tota Lake Watershed for 2012 was 36 Mm³. The main users were from outside the watershed, followed by areas under irrigation and fisheries.

Figure 2: Tota Lake Watershed water use by sector 2012



The water supplies approximately 140,000 people with drinking water and economic activities generate more than US\$250,000 annually.

- 83 per cent of the water used in the basin is extracted from the lake (17 per cent comes from rivers and streams of the basin).
- The agriculture sector – mainly spring onions - is the highest producer within the watershed (around US\$15,000 / year) and one of the main water users (12.48 Mm³/year). (Figure 2)

Next steps

At national level, WAVES is supporting cross-institutional work on national water, land and forest accounts. At the regional level, the WAVES team, in partnership with the environmental regional authorities, is developing water, forest and ecosystem accounts at a major basin and two strategic watersheds – Alto Suárez and Chinchiná.

This systematic collection of data has proven timely and spurred the creation of a National Environmental Accounts Committee, which will promote NCA use in sustainable development policymaking, including the National Development Plan.

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