



2009 SEED Winner Oro Verde

Colombia: Oro Verde® (2009)

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Overview

Oro Verde® reverses environmental degradation caused by uncontrolled mining in Colombia's Chocó Bioregion by developing certified responsible mining practices. The partnership, consisting of a national NGO, a local NGO and two grassroots organisations, has created the basis for the world's first local certification scheme for precious metals and has propelled a worldwide fair-trade movement around responsible small-scale mining. The artisanal miners who extract the gold and platinum comply with strict ecological standards. They preserve the Chocó Bioregion, one of the world's biodiversity reservoirs, by fostering sustainable use of natural resources between the mining communities. Both the miners and the tropical rainforest are protected from contamination produced by the use of mercury or cyanide in normal commercial mining practices. The responsibly extracted gold and platinum is then sold under the Oro Verde brand name and Fairtrade and Fairmined label to ethical jewellers in green and fair (trade) markets mainly in Europe and North America¹. In 2009, Oro Verde was the winner of the SEED Initiative Gold Award.

Origins

The Oro Verde mining initiative was conceived in 1999 as a result of alliances among AM-ICHOCÓ, a NGO based in the city of Medellín², the local community councils of Condoto and Tadó, and FUNDAMOJARRAS, another NGO of professionals of Chocó interested in the ethnic and territorial rights protection of the communities in this region. The objective of these alliances was to validate and deepen a model of Artisanal Small-Scale Mining (ASM), a model dedicated to minimising and controlling negative impacts of mining on the environment, society or culture (see box on the following page). In 2004, Oro Verde joined forces with other organisations to create the Alliance for Responsible Mining³. The business was started with seed money in a revolving fund of US\$40.000 donated by the Tiffany Foundation, in a project carried out between 2006 and 2007.

¹ <http://www.seedinit.org/en/awards/winners-database/2009%20Awards/oro-verde-.html>

² AMICHOCÓ's raison d'être is to maintain, protect and recover the Chocó's ecosystems and biodiversity.

³ http://www.greengold-oroverde.org/loved_gold/

Credibility and sustainable mining practices have been assured by Oro Verde through the development of a certification for “Oro Verde”. The Corporation has established an own list of ten principles to ensure environmentally and socially responsible production which underlie the certification scheme. These are:

- i. There is no ecological disruption that will not allow the possibility of recovery. No irreparable damage can be done to an ecosystem.
- ii. No toxic chemicals such as mercury and cyanide are used in the extraction process.
- iii. The mined areas must regain ecological stability within three years.
- iv. Topsoil removed from the site during the exploitation process is replaced.
- v. Tailings and pooling do not exceed the local ecosystem capacity for rehabilitation.
- vi. The silt load into stream, river or lake systems is controlled in quantity and frequency, such that the native aquatic ecosystem is not disrupted.
- vii. Mining operations are conducted with the agreement of the local Community Councils.
- viii. The origin of gold and platinum (for royalty purposes) is declared in favour of the corresponding municipality.
- ix. In forested areas mining activities do not exceed 10% per hectare in rotation periods of two years.
- x. Local, regional and national regulations are followed.

Over time, new criteria have been added through working with the Alliance for Responsible Mining (ARM)⁴ which integrates other mining organisations in Latin America, small scale international mining experts and members of the industry, and through the development of the Fairtrade and Fairmined international standard. Some of those most entrenched by the community are:

- i. No child labour as a form of exploitation
- ii. Gender equality in employment opportunities.
- iii. The gold and platinum is sold exclusively to the **Oro Verde** Corporation through Biodiversa, its marketing and sales branch.

Main Characteristics of Oro Verde’s Artisanal Small-Scale Mining (ASM) model

In this model there is no large land-moving with heavy machinery that requires large amounts of gasoline and other fuels; thus, the generation of CO₂ is very low. Rather, gold panning mechanisms like “bateo” or “mazamorreo” are used. These involve using a wooden pan-shaped handmade tool called a “batea”. The batea is filled with soil and large amounts of water are taken from the mine and then moved in repeated circles. Stones and heavy mud are thrown aside (see picture at right), while tiny bits of gold remain at the bottom of the pan; there is no harm to nature as a result. Further, the whole family works in the mine, helping to maintain the family unit and transferring traditional mining techniques from one generation to another. Mining is not the only productive activity in this model. The families are also farmers, and grow crops such as banana, cassava and beans. They also raise pigs, cattle, poultry and farm fish in order to ensure food security.

Under the Oro Verde initiative, the Community Councils are responsible for strengthening the social and cultural aspects of the model and the integral perspective of the community life, in which mining is the principal livelihood. The household members that make up these councils are the metal producers. The family members who are producers form units called

⁴ www.communitymining.org

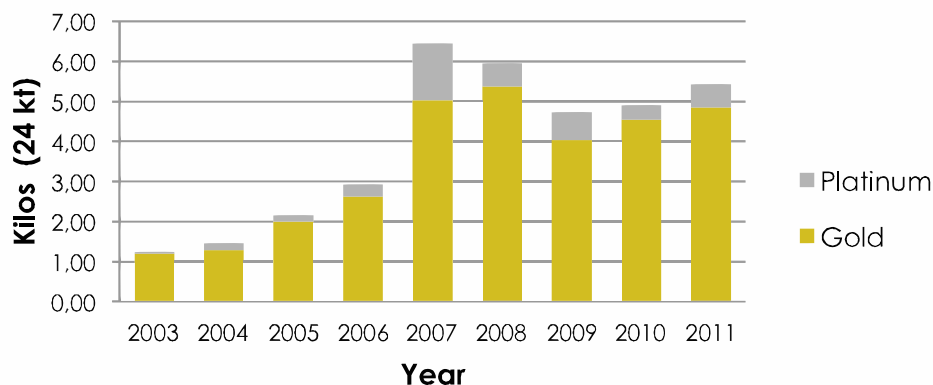
Producing Households (UFP). The union of several UFPs creates a Producer Group. Such Producer Groups develop their own rules and regulations and are certified by the international sustainable mining standards.

Growth/current status/future prospects

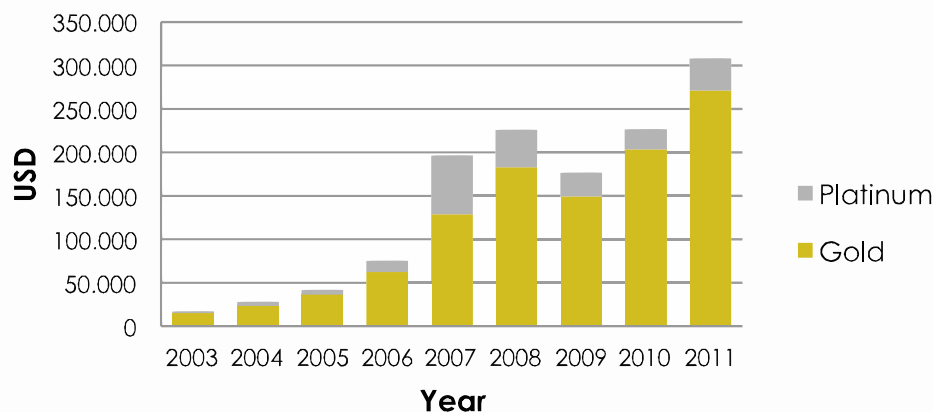
Essentially, Oro Verde has successfully supported and repositioned traditional mining practices that have been employed for over 200 years in Chocó, and in the process, inspired the creation of an international alliance of responsible mining, helped to develop responsible mining certification schemes, and achieved national and international recognition.

From 2003 to 2011, the Oro Verde Corporation enjoyed a five-fold growth in sales and a more than ten-fold increase in terms of the number of kilos extracted per year of Oro Verde gold and platinum (see charts below). Oro Verde currently has 114 Producing Households (UFP) associated in two Groups of Production. These consist of 377 miners and 1,885 bene-

SALES (Kilos - 24 kt)



SALES (USD)



ficiaries who operate a protected biologically diverse area of 4,500 hectares. Together, the UFPs sell approximately 6 kilos of gold and platinum per year under the brand Oro Verde. It has also increased its initial revolving fund of USD40,000 to USD200,000.

The funding for the costs of certification, promotion, international positioning, marketing, communications and public relations carried out by AMICHOCÓ have been raised through national and international cooperation. The main partners of Oro Verde have been OXFAM Novib, Stichting DOËN, USAID through the Pan American Foundation for Development (PAFD), and Solidaridad. The first two organisations accompanied the process of the Oro Verde model creation in Tadó and Condoto, and funded activities for three phases, each of three years. In 2009, the last three-year plan ended and Oro Verde began to receive resources from the USAID through the PAFD and Solidaridad, in what was called the consolidation phase.

Over these years, the corporation Oro Verde has also received several nominations and awards, beginning in 2003 as a *Ventures* winner. Then, in 2004 Catalina Cock, founder of AMICHOCÓ, became an *Ashoka fellow*, and in 2007, was awarded the *Young Global Leader Prize* at the World Economic Forum. In 2008 Oro Verde was a World Challenge, finalist and in November, 2009 Oro Verde was awarded the SEED Gold Award. SEED's USD25,000 prize helped the corporation to improve its business plan, and to increase the supply of gold through the implementation of a communications strategy between the mining families and the Community Councils. The SEED Award also helped to raise awareness about the initiative through a high-level award event and by sending a group of journalists to the region to produce media reports. After winning the SEED Gold Award, international recognition of Oro Verde has continued to grow. In 2010, the corporation won the BBC World Challenge's *Down to Business*, and in 2011 it was awarded *New Ventures Enterprise* as well as *Sustainable Luxury Best Performance Prize* in Latin America for the conservation of biodiversity and the traditional mining traditions of the Afro-Colombians in Chocó.

The influx of visitors has increased positively following the Oro Verde success and raised its international reputation. Journalists, documentary makers and jewellers are now common guests coming to learn more about the famous green gold. A community farm was established in the village of Manungará in order to create an accommodation and food service area for community meetings and to receive visitors. The farm also contains a nursery of native species for restocking and reforesting the mining areas where families have worked. It houses products aimed at improving the food security of the mining families, including from aquaculture, poultry and egg production, and a pigs. Since being established, the farm has tripled its initial capacity and the community leaders have increased their managerial skills to make this a profitable business.

Over the past two years, the programme has focused on:

- strengthening the organisational capacity of the Producer Groups and the Community Councils;
- establishing the Internal Control System;
- improving the productivity of the UFPs; and
- implementing action plans to respond to nonconformities identified by FLO-CERT auditors during visits in order to maintain the fair trade international gold certification "Fairtrade & Fairmined".

The Community Council of Condoto and Iró River was the first miners' organisation to certify their gold as Fairtrade and Fairmined Ecological Gold in February 2011, while ASOCASÁN, the Community Council of Tadó, obtained their Ecological Gold certification in January 2012⁵.

Today, Oro Verde metals are sold in Colombia, and in Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands, United States, and the United Kingdom, among other countries. Worldwide replication is already being carried out through the creation of the Alliance for Responsible Mining⁶. Although Oro Verde has not yet been able to achieve self-sufficiency in all its areas of business, it expects to become fully profitable in the next phase of development through the establishment of its marketing and sales branch, Biodiversa.

5 <http://www.communitymining.org/index.php/en/colombia/oro-verde-green-gold>

6 http://www.entrepreneurstoolkit.org/index.php?title=The_Oro_Verde_Programme_in_the_Colombian_Choc%C3%B3_Bioregion

Social, environmental and economic impacts

The Oro Verde ASM programme has been established in order to ensure social, environmental and economic impacts, as follows:

- a. **Social impact:** The programme empowers communities by helping them to use, protect and gain control over their territory, so far directly benefitting 114 households including 377 miners and 1,885 other community members. Compliance with the social, economic, environmental and labour standards of the certification also result in improved working and living conditions.
- b. **Environmental impact:** Oro Verde preserves 4,500 ha of an important biodiversity reservoir by fostering sustainable use of natural resources by mining communities. In contrast to normal commercial mining practices, Oro Verde uses neither mercury nor cyanide, so miners and the tropical rainforest are protected.
- c. **Economic impact:** Oro Verde provides communities with employment to diversify their income and with complementary benefits such as training to improve managerial skills⁷. The miners receive a premium price from the market for reinvesting in their own priorities.

Mapping Oro Verde's stakeholders

The four original core partners of Oro Verde, and their corresponding roles are:

- AMICHOCÓ coordinates the programme; manages marketing and international relations; works toward stimulating demand and a market niche for Oro Verde; and has enabled the gold to be certified in order to give the miners an added value to their outputs.
- The Community Councils (ASOCASAN and COCOMACOIRO, of Tadó and Condoto respectively) are the organisations that gather together and represent the miners² and farmers² families. The Community Council is responsible for the local programme coordination; in charge of the internal control system and the traceability of the metals; of ensuring the miners participation in decision making; and of guaranteeing the application of the Fairtrade and Fairmined standard criteria.
- FUNDAMOJARRAS is a local NGO that has pioneered the social and organisational processes of the community at a local level. It has been the legitimising body of the community mining process and their alliance with AMICHOCÓ. FUNDAMOJARRAS includes professionals with knowledge about traditional mining who provide technical input to the producers, guaranteeing the green gold quality in order to acquire certification.

The Oro Verde partnership now also includes Biodiversa - an independent legal entity directed by AMICHOCÓ and created to serve the Oro Verde initiative as well as seeking to bring forward a whole biodiverse economic-social-cultural model that includes other products. It leads the marketing plan and receives the revenue generated from the sale of the gold which is transferred to the miners in recognition of the Fairtrade criteria established in the agreements between the Community Councils and Biodiversa. For example, Oro Verde's business model based on international certification allows the miners to charge a premium of 15% on the established international price of gold. It has been agreed by all partners that this percentage be returned to the communities.

Each of the Oro Verde Corporation members have contributed to the different components of this programme, and through their coordinated teamwork they have managed to penetrate beyond local and national boundaries, reaching exclusive European and North American markets and distinguished international awards and recognition. The following table describes the full range of Oro Verde's stakeholders at all levels, from local to international.

⁷ Social, Environmental and Economic impacts as reported on the Oro Verde Flyer, available on the SEED Initiative Website. http://www.seedinit.org/index.php?option=com_mtree&task=att_download&link_id=70&cf_id=42

Oro Verde's Stakeholders and their roles:

STAKEHOLDER	ROLE
LOCAL	
ASOCASAN; COCOMACOIRO (Community Councils of Tadó and Condoto)	2 core Partners of Oro Verde Corporation. Include the UFPs and the Producer Group; these are the main actors in the enterprise and the principal beneficiaries.
FUNDAMOJARRAS	Local Foundation Las Mojarras a core partner of Oro Verde Corporation
REGIONAL	
AMICHOCÓ	Environmental NGO located in Medellín, lead NGO and core partners of Oro Verde
Pacific Environmental Research Institute, Precious Metals Certification Office	Monitoring and control of clean gold production; training and technical support to the miners as regards artisanal gold production;
Local and regional media	Publicity and dissemination of Oro Verde activities
National	
Presidencia de la República	The current Colombian President has recognised and publicly endorsed Oro Verde as an example of responsible mining.
Mines and Energy, and Environmental Ministries	Recognition and endorsement
National media: TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, etc	Raise the profile of Oro Verde at the national level and awareness of sustainable mining.
International	
New Ventures – Colombia	Supports the strengthening of the environmental enterprises, and links them to funding sources.
International media (e.g. BBC, Miami Herald, AFP)	Raise the profile of the Oro Verde Corporation and bring to international recognition the importance of sustainable mining
ARM – Alliance for Responsible Mining	Promotes ASM projects by setting up value chains around the world. Built up the <i>Zero Standard</i> for clean gold (bedrock of the Fairtrade & Fairmined certification) inspired by Oro Verde principles; ensured its applicability to other places in Latin America.
UNDP	Host of SEED Award ceremony in 2009
ASHOKA	Provides recognition of Oro Verde and has promoted people working in it
Both ENDS – Connecting people for change	Dutch Foundation that supported the capacity building component of the Oro Verde programme.
CI-CEPF – Critical Ecosystem Partnership Foundation	Financial support in 2005 to reduce the negative environmental impacts of mining.
CIIGSA - International Trade and Investment Company of Precious Metals	International trading mining company that shared its expertise in gold trading and supported the first exports made by Biodiversa as part of its CSR policy.
FPAA- Fondo para la Acción Ambiental y la Niñez	Implemented quality management system of sustainable gold extraction, attracting 18 new clients and reforesting 48 hectares of tropical forest.
OXFAM-NOVIB	Financial support
Tiffany & Co. Foundation	Provided grant to Oro Verde to assist productive family units from Tadó and Condoto
Leo Johnson - of PricewaterhouseCoopers	Promotion and networking of Oro Verde in Europe
Greg Valerio – Jeweller and activist	Promotes Oro Verde in the UK and Europe.
FLO-CERT Fairtrade labelling organisation	Clean gold certification.
World Challenge	2008: Oro Verde was a finalist. Has since provided further in-kind Support.
World Challenge Down to Business	2010: offered Oro Verde specialised consultancy.
SEED Initiative	2009: SEED granted a Gold Award to Oro Verde.
Centro de Estudios de Lujo Sustentable	2011: granted a mention award in the category Best Performance in Sustainable Luxury to Oro Verde.
Toby Pomeroy	North American eco-designer and jeweller who promotes Oro Verde.
Solidaridad	Funded the consolidation phase of Oro Verde in Chocó.

USAID through FUPAD Fundación Pan-americana para el Desarrollo (Panamerican Foundation for Development)	Provided financial support for producer groups capacity building
DOEN Foundation	Provided financial support for producer groups capacity building
Conservación Internacional	Supported integration of the Analogue Forestry model to the certification of responsible metals.
Fondo para la Acción Ambiental ⁸ FPAA	Fund used to support Oro Verde in the integration of the Analog Forestry model to the certification of responsible metals.
IDEA WILD	American organisation, gave computers to Oro Verde.
Waterloo Foundation via Fairtrade Foundation	Supported pilot of the certification standard zero under Oro Verde through the Fairtrade Foundation.

Success factors

- **A community organisation with strong leadership and negotiation capabilities:** Leadership has been a strong factor for success, as regards both individual and collective levels. At the individual level, the legal representatives of the Community Councils have played a central role, yet at the same time, they have shared their leadership with other important members of the Councils, for example, those in charge of selling gold and those who provide technical support and training. ASO-CASAN and COCOMACOIRO, in partnership with AMICHOCÓ, have developed a participatory knowledge dialogue that has contributed to the growth in the autonomy and self-management of the mining organisations, contributing to the protection of their territory and sustainable development.
- **A leading NGO with commitment and vision:** AMICHOCÓ was founded for two entrepreneurs who have led sustainable projects with different ambits; its Board is composed of experts in business development, marketing, finance, environment and social development; it is operated by four highly committed young professionals who share a passion for sustainable development, a great sense of loyalty to the cause, and a vision for the business. Key contributions of AMICHOCÓ have been the:
 - i. capacity building and training of the miners and their leaders in management, quality processes for certification, and public relations.
 - ii. positioning of the Oro Verde brand.
 - iii. planning and securing certification under the Fairtrade & Fairmined Gold Standard: “Fair Trade Certified Gold”⁸
- **A partnerships and public relations network:** Oro Verde has been able to create strategic alliances within the territory where the gold is, in the department of Chocó in Colombia, and around the world. Through those alliances Oro Verde has secured funding from international bodies, as well as support, visibility and positioning of its business in markets abroad, especially Europe. Companies such as Greg Valerio and Leo Johnson’s World Challenge Down to Business, has furthered its placement in the international arena. As an artisanal small scale and environmentally-friendly mining initiative, Oro Verde has also received several national and international awards which have helped by strengthening the business model, achieving financing and raising the profile of the initiative.

Challenges and how they have been met

- **The need for more working capital to enhance mining production in the communities:** The biggest challenge of the initiative has been its funding; it was not until 2009

⁸ The standard Fairtrade & Fairmined requires that the gold must be extracted from ASM mining zones by associations belonging to an Organization. The gold must be traceable and marketed by the Organization. Furthermore, this standard imposes the following conditions for the ASM: Strengthened miners organizations; Improved working conditions (mandatory use of protective gear and health and safety training for all miners); Freedom of association and collective bargaining ; Responsible use of chemicals, chemicals have to be reduced to a minimum, and where possible eliminated over an agreed time period.

that the miners could obtain the 15% bonus for their certified gold because of the necessity to fund the initiative before redistributing the profits. The first and most important challenge is to reach the break-even point so the business can become self-sustaining because partners like Biodiversa and AMICHOCÓ are funded through international development cooperation which does not provide long term security and means that their operational resources can be seriously curtailed. The Corporation has been working towards that end, but the first call is to generate more income in the short term to provide better conditions for its associates, including the miners.

- **The lack of access to appropriate technology:** The second challenge is to engage the business in new clean and appropriate technologies in order to make the process more efficient. The goal is to extract more gold by moving the same amount of land, and to reduce the physical effort of the miners. Traditional artisanal mining, as practiced by miners associated with Oro Verde, requires great physical effort because the miners have to remove soil with their hands and discard the stones and excess material, moving across their land and using much water. It would be beneficial to design manual or electrical machines to help in the removal of land with less effort for the miners. The challenge is to stimulate universities to research and develop this type of technology. This is a task that is on Oro Verde's to-do list.
- **The lack of appropriate laws and regulations for the ASM in Colombia:** The mining code in Colombia, dating from 2001, has been directed at regulating large-scale mining by large domestic and foreign companies. However, regulating mining in Colombia has historically been very difficult due to the considerable amount of informal mining, artisanal mining (like Oro Verde), and medium scale mining activities that face barriers to legalisation. The current government of President Juan Manuel Santos has been working on a new mining code which was due to be concluded by late 2011, but unfortunately this code does not recognise or regulate small and medium scale mining, and it has not yet been approved by the Congress. This is a major challenge for artisanal mining initiatives like Oro Verde.

Current needs/types of support the enterprise requires now

- Expert support in marketing.
- Expert support in licensing of the Oro Verde® trademark.
- Funding partners to support scale-up⁹.

These needs require enhanced innovative marketing strategies so Oro Verde can gain increased attention worldwide, allowing Biodiversa not only to be self-sustaining but also a profitable business. The strategies can exploit the sound environmental and social protection associated with Oro Verde products – factors that are likely to become of increasing concern for consumers. Meeting the challenge will require Oro Verde to strengthen its relationships with similar operations in other countries, and not only ASM corporations but also other types of organisations interested in participating in any part of the production and marketing chain. In addition, Oro Verde needs to transform consumer mentalities to increase demand for products from biodiversity-friendly mining.

Lessons Learned from Oro Verde's case study

This case reveals how the Oro Verde sustainable mining initiative has achieved success in terms of scaling out and delivering social and environmental benefits through strong leadership and strategic alliances that started at the local and regional levels. It has also helped to define and expand and spread a sustainable, small-scale artisanal mining model to other locations in Colombia, and in Latin America, and Africa. Oro Verde still needs to increase its working capital and strengthen its presence and action in the national and international fair

⁹ <http://www.seedinit.org/en/awards/winners-database/2009%20Awards/oro-verde-.html>

markets. The Corporation knows that they have significant business opportunities given the excellent reputation of the brand and the rising demand for clean gold; however these still have to be consolidated.

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