



## COUNTRY PROFILE



A square in Old Havana; USAID's Cuba strengthens civil society in Cuba.

### OVERVIEW

Fifty years after the revolution, Cuba today remains one of the most politically repressed countries in the world. Current Cuban law and practice prevent the right to assemble without the permission of the state, criminalize dissemination of information contrary to the official line, and provide a state monopoly over mass media. The Castro regime currently holds more than 200 political prisoners. Cuba is the only non-democratically-elected government in the Western Hemisphere.



Cuba's independent civil society movement is becoming increasingly vibrant and vocal. A recent survey on the island found that 63 percent of Cubans want freedom of expression and the ability to choose their leaders. More than 86 percent want the right to own their own property and businesses. Yet civil society groups in Cuba often lack the institutional capacity and access to relevant information to achieve their goals. Most citizens have a limited understanding of democracy and free-market economics.

### PROGRAMS

#### Governing Justly and Democratically

The primary goal of U.S. foreign policy towards Cuba is to promote a free and democratic society in which the government respects the human rights of its citizens. To that end, U.S. foreign assistance empowers those in Cuba who are working towards positive change to advocate for fundamental freedoms and free market-oriented solutions to meet the needs of Cuban citizens. USAID's Cuba Program focuses on increasing the ability of Cubans to participate in civic affairs and improve human rights conditions on the island. Specifically, USAID programs:

- Provide humanitarian assistance to the families of prisoners of conscience to meet their basic needs for nutrients and medicine.
- Increase Cubans' awareness of human rights and fundamental freedoms through training and discussion groups.
- Strengthen civil society networks and social capital through capacity building and material support to local organizations.
- Support efforts by Cuban organizations to promote democratic reforms, including to increase the participation of Cuban citizens in non-violent civic action movements.
- Increase the free flow of uncensored information to, from, and within the island through the provision of informational materials

#### CUBA SNAPSHOT

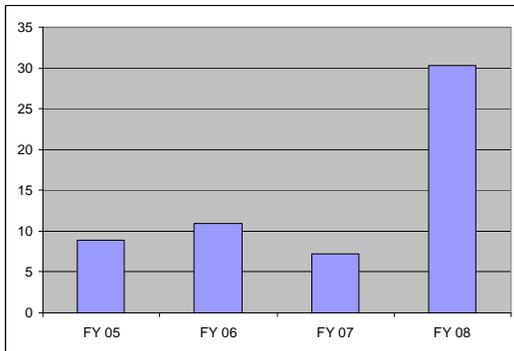
Date of independence: 1902  
Population: 11.451 million  
GDP (PPP): \$108.2 billion  
GDP per capita (PPP): \$9,500

Source: CIA, *The World Factbook*



## COUNTRY PROFILE CONTINUED

**USAID Assistance to the Cuba Program  
(Dollars in Millions)\***



\*Does not include Economic Support Funds implemented by the State Department

and internet access, as well as building the capacity of Cuban independent media.

- Increase grassroots participation in community development by providing information about free markets and building the capacity of communities to identify and respond to local challenges.

Since 1996, Cuban civil society has evolved in the following ways with USAID support:

- **Humanitarian assistance to prisoners of conscience.** In cooperation with local groups, the Agency has played a major role in publicizing the plight of prisoners of conscience around the world. Hundreds of thousands of pounds of much-needed food and medicine continues to be provided to their families.
- **Support human rights and pro-democracy groups.** The Agency has helped to nurture the trend of civic action movements working together to achieve common objectives.
- **Develop and strengthen independent civil society.** The Cuba Program has played a major role in strengthening and sustaining independent libraries on the island, which have grown in number from just a few to nearly 200 since the late 1990s. With a half million books, magazines, and DVDs provided, the libraries have become gathering spaces for the exchange of ideas and a safe haven for debate and discussion. In 2002, Human Rights Watch recognized these libraries by awarding the Hellman-Hammett Prize to the director of an independent library.
- **Voice for independent journalists.** Since 1996, 420 Cuban journalists have been able to improve their professional skills and found outlets for thousands of their independent articles. In recent years, independent journalists and bloggers are writing more about realities on the island and the demand for USAID courses has grown. According to a long-standing partner, 18 percent of its website readership enters the site from Cuba.
- **Increase the free flow of uncensored information to and within the island.** More Cubans have unfiltered access to information as a result of the Cuba Program. The USAID Cuba Program has taken advantage of technology such as short wave radios, cell phones, Internet, and flash drives to help Cuban groups to share information and communicate with each other in a country where many of these technologies remain prohibitively expensive.

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