

# How is coca crop substitution progressing in Colombia?

## Implementation, lags and pending tasks<sup>1</sup>

In its fourth monitoring and analysis report, Fundación Ideas para la Paz (FIP) warns that delays in the crop substitution program lead to serious doubts about the state's capacity to fulfill what was agreed upon in the November 2016 peace agreement.

With three months left in President Juan Manuel Santos' term, the National Integrated Program for the Substitution of Illegal Crops (PNIS, given its Spanish acronym) is confronting significant delays that compromise the sustainability of the illicit crop substitution process. The possibility of reaching the identified goal of 50,000 hectares is remote, but the root problem remains the slow progress in generating propitious conditions so that families who depend on illegal crops can transition to the licit economy. At the local level, the desire of peasants who seek to abandon illegal cultivation activity stands in sharp contrast to their uncertainty about the state's ability and willingness to fulfill its promises.

In this report, FIP proposes to monitor progress made in the program, but does not intend to formally evaluate it. We will analyze expected results for the first year of the program's implementation based on available quantitative information and data collected during fieldwork. The PNIS program has developed differently across different regions; as such, it is crucial to move beyond national trends, to examine villages in which PNIS has seen partial progress and others in which implementation is only just emerging.

The components with the greatest level of advancement include engagement of families and delivery of funding allocations in exchange for voluntary eradication of crops. As of March 31st, 62,182 families across 43 municipalities were registered in the PNIS, and 51% of them had received at least a first payment. Within the framework of implementation of the peace agreement, the program has arrived to coca-producing zones where previously the only state response had been military intervention, with notable deficits in the provision of goods and services.

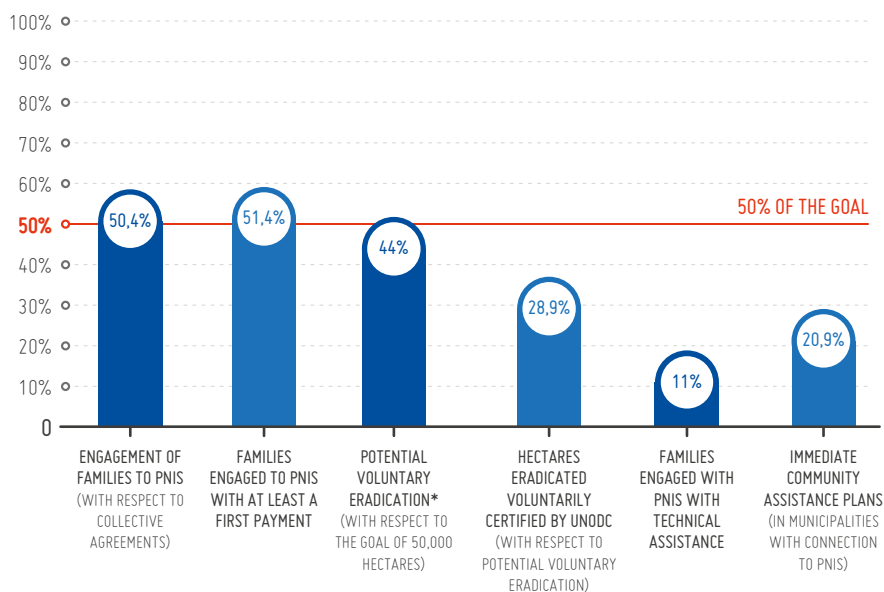
**The National Integrated Program for the Substitution of Illegal Crops (PNIS, given its Spanish acronym) is confronting significant delays that compromise the sustainability of the illicit crop substitution process**

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<sup>1</sup> This document is based on Fundación Ideas para la Paz (FIP)'s Forth Quarterly Report "¿En qué va la sustitución? Implementación, Rezagos y Tareas Pendiente" ("How is coca crop substitution progressing in Colombia? Implementation, lags and pending tasks") (January - March 2018). FIP is a Colombian think tank directed by María Victoria Llorente. The report was the responsibility of associate researcher Juan Carlos Garzón-Vergara and Juan David Gélvez, and. The authors thank Michael Weintraub for his comments on this document.

FIGURE 1

HECTARES EXAMINED BY UNODC IN FAMILY LOTS LINKED TO PNIS



Source: Created by FIP based on information from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the National Integrated Program for the Substitution of Illegal Crops (PNIS)

In the first year of the Peace Agreement implementation, in response to growing concerns about the coca boom, President Juan Manuel Santos, announced plan to eradicate 100.000 hectares, 50% through forced eradication and 50% from voluntary substitution. Regarding this last goal, among those hectares examined by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), based on registration of families, the number rises to 22,025 hectares (representing 20% of the total of coca crops registered in Colombia in 2016<sup>1</sup>), of which 6,281 (28.9%) have been certified as eradicated.

Taking into account that eradication is just the first step in the transition to the licit economy, FIP believes that one of the central components of PNIS is technical assistance, necessary to advance with productive projects that might sustainably support the goals of the program. Unfortunately, this is where the greatest delays can be found: as of March 31st, only 11% of families engaged in the program had received assistance, a figure that could rise to 35% when



<sup>2</sup> Integrated Illegal Crop Monitoring System, United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and Colombian Government (2017), Monitoring of regions affected by illegal crops 2016.

local organizations that were recently selected by the program begin to operate. With respect to the Immediate Community Assistance Plan, through which an immediate institutional offering is provided, this work is being developed in nine of 43 municipalities, which means that its execution remains pending.

Similarly, we analyzed the intervention of the Land Renewal Agency (ART) and the National Land Agency (“*Formalization for Substitution*” program) in areas in which substitution is being carried out. In 65% of municipalities with connections to PNIS, the 50/51 Plan is being developed to improve tertiary transportation networks, and in 17% of PNIS villages there are small infrastructure projects that have begun<sup>3</sup> In addition, 22% of the municipalities and 15.2% of the villages where families engaged in the PNIS reside have land formalization processes. These figures show fragmented state implementation, budget limitations, and difficulties in advancing in the provision of public goods, a fundamental factor in the transformation of the regions.

With respect to security, the rising trend of homicides continues. While threats have ceased in some municipalities, in others they have become more intense. FARC dissidents, remaining ELN fronts, and criminal factions of a different type put the continuity of the program at risk, with confrontations and violence against communities the order of the day. Ongoing violence of this sort and territorial disputes continues to be the Achilles heel of crop substitution.

Delays in the program and difficulties in implementation should be understood in the broad framework of implementation of the peace agreement. Even if responsibility for the substitution process falls upon PNIS, progress depends on interventions undertaken by multiple state institutions, a long-term task that will require political will from both the center and from local governments.

In this report, we identify ten factors that could contribute to explain this delay, putting at risk the sustainability of substitution. FIP has warned about many of these dangers throughout the process, principally through quarterly monitoring reports.

1. The absence of a rapid response plan.
2. Tensions between the anti-narcotics agenda and the regional transformation agenda.
3. Slow progress in the implementation of other key components of substitution, particularly integral rural reform.

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<sup>3</sup> Investments for improvement of public goods and services, which aim to favor community implementation.

4. Emphasis on short-term results without a clear long-term perspective.
5. A focus based on families as opposed to regions.
6. Uncertainty about resources and limited capacity within the institutional architecture around PNIS.
7. Subsidies that generate undesirable effects, such as an expansion of the area devoted to coca crop cultivation and an increase in the population of those dedicated to such activities.
8. The deterioration in security conditions in areas where crop cultivation continues.
9. Institutional coordination problems.
10. Multiple coordination processes that generated tension and led to early delays in implementation of diverse components of the program.

The majority of these factors are not new or exclusive to PNIS. On the contrary, they reflect profound problems of the Colombian state that should be resolved if a sustainable response to illegal crops is to be found. The application of the peace agreement with the FARC opened a window of opportunity that has focused on the most reasonable substitution strategy – one that has at its center a community-led approach– but one that could be truncated by the absence of an integrated regional intervention.

The state bears a great responsibility for families that have expressed their willingness to abandon coca crops, and to form part of the substitution process. In areas in which PNIS began implementation, there has been engagement between the population and the state. Yet the lack of fulfillment of crucial points of the agreement not only has implications for the trust and credibility of state institutions, but also generates a risk of re-planting of crops, leading to a possible increase in the total number of hectares of coca cultivated. FIP hopes that this balance will contribute to an informed discussion about the substitution process, recognizing the steps taken and the multiple tasks that remain pending.

Even if public policies are always assessed as either successes or failures, the truth usually lies somewhere in between. It is therefore necessary to identify ways forward and to capitalize on opportunities that allow for progress to be made based on gradual results that can ultimately be consolidated over time.