

Colombia's Plan de Consolidación Integral de la Macarena

An Assessment

A Report of the CSIS Americas Program

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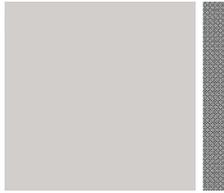
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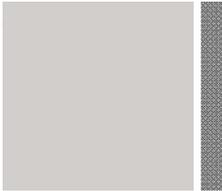
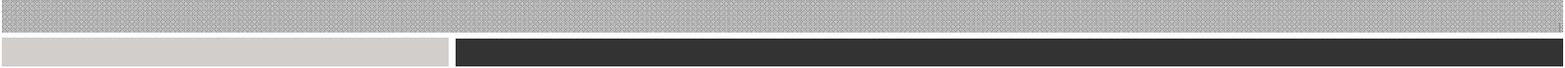
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COLOMBIA'S PLAN DE CONSOLIDACIÓN INTEGRAL DE LA MACARENA: AN ASSESSMENT

Peter DeShazo, Phillip McLean, and Johanna Mendelson Forman

The Project

This report is an assessment by the Americas Program of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) of the Plan de Consolidación Integral de la Macarena (PCIM), a project that the government of Colombia is implementing in six municipalities of the department of Meta through its Center for Coordination of Integrated Action (CCAI), an office of the presidency of Colombia, and implemented through *Acción Social*, the authority under which PCIM operates. The PCIM project is supported with funds from the government of Colombia and from international donors, specifically the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Office of Transition Initiatives of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

First organized in August 2007, the PCIM is now a year-and-a-half old, although it was not fully implemented until late that year. The Plan arises from the lessons learned from previous, though not fully successful, efforts by the government of Colombia to consolidate legitimate state authority in areas formerly controlled by illegal armed groups, including by:

- creating a permanent state security presence in retaken zones;
- developing a visible and robust civilian response alongside security operations in these areas;
- timing and coordinating the work of the various actors in consolidating security, building a sustained state presence, and promoting economic development; and
- disrupting narcotics trafficking, which contributes to the strength of illegal groups in the zone.

The PCIM envisages a sequenced approach to consolidation, starting with securing municipal urban centers by the Colombian military and followed by the establishment of a police presence, freeing the military for further security consolidation in outlying rural areas. Once a sufficient degree of security is established, the eradication of coca production, either voluntarily or forced, takes place, facilitating the expansion of state presence and the rise of a legal economy. This approach requires greater civil-military cooperation than has prevailed in the past. A “fusion center,” established at a location within the Macarena region, is intended to facilitate coordination of the work of different government entities.

Beyond the consolidation of security and coca eradication, PCIM activities are concentrated in five areas: institutional development, citizenship, and governability; property rights and territorial order; infrastructure and connectivity; access to public goods and social services; and economic/business development. Since its launching, PCIM is undertaking projects in all six municipalities of the Macarena region. The goal is to demonstrate state presence beyond the military, police, and narcotics eradication at the earliest possible moment through an injection of timely resources, even if on a modest scale. These quick impact projects are supplemented by two other nationwide government programs: *Familias en Acción* and *Familias Guardabosques*, both of which are designed to provide conditional cash transfers to least advantaged groups. The first is designed to promote childhood health and education; the second to encourage local cooperation with drug eradication.

The choice of the Macarena region was not coincidental in the development of the PCIM. The region, historically the central operations area of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and a major coca cultivation and cocaine production and trafficking zone, has long eluded meaningful state control. Only in the past few years has the Colombian military made significant inroads in wresting control of the Macarena from the FARC. Today, there is a strong military presence in much of the region. This has opened the door to a growing police presence and to progress in coca eradication. With PCIM, a civilian presence is following in the wake of military advances. While a transition from FARC to state control is not assured given the Macarena region’s history, the end result could lead to the kind of agricultural development that is already occurring in the central and northern parts of the Meta Department.

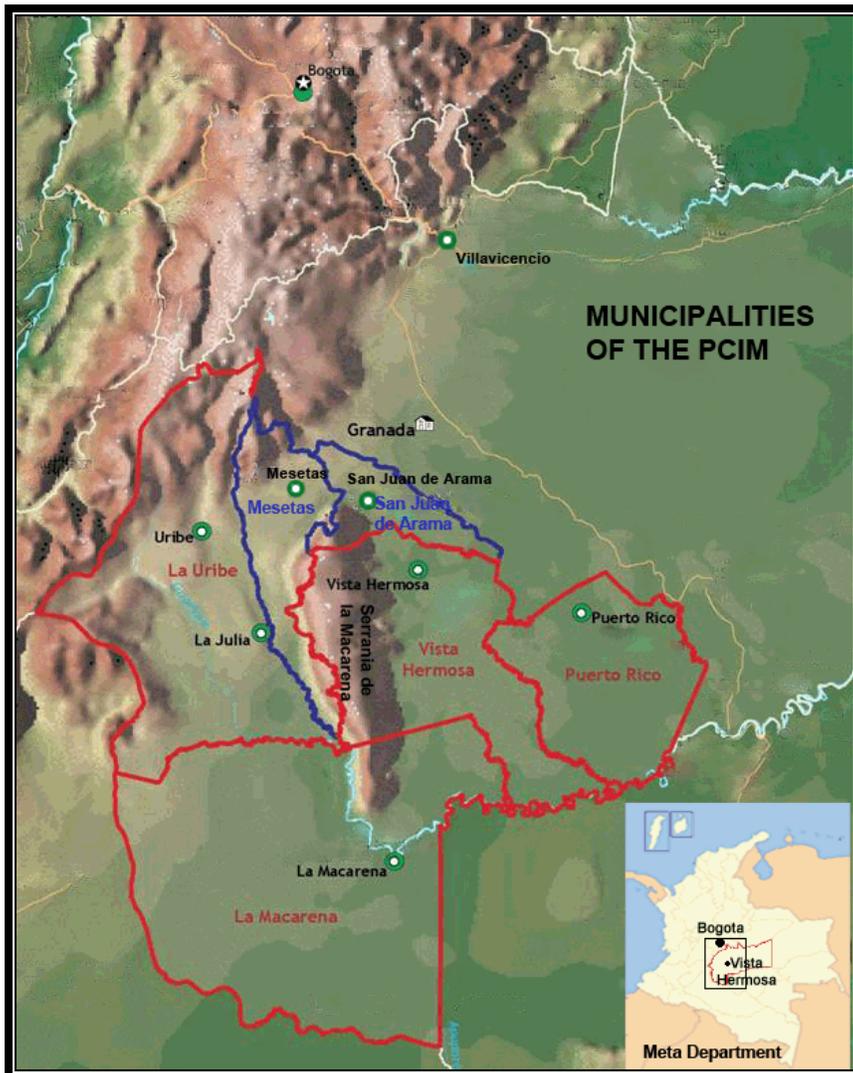
The Assessment

CSIS was asked to conduct an assessment of the progress to date of the PCIM program, recognizing that it has been in operation for only about a year and a half. The CSIS team understood that it would be analyzing the importance of the PCIM program as a means for the government of Colombia to fill a gap in one of the most vexing problems of the internal conflict that still persists in that nation—the need to provide a visible state presence and control in a region once dominated by a outlaw adversary. The team was conscious that this attempt to combine security with development and governance is designed for much closer coordination of multiple Colombian government and private agencies as well as international donors than ever

before. It is under review as a model for use elsewhere in the country. Finally, the team was asked to look at the potential for transition programming supported by the U.S. government in Colombia as an important component of a U.S. foreign assistance toolkit that seeks a comprehensive approach to state consolidation and socioeconomic reconstruction.

The CSIS Americas Program offers its conclusions and recommendations based on the considerable Colombia-specific and post-conflict experience of its team members, on the on-site consultations carried out by the team in Bogota, Villavicencio, and the Macarena region in March 2009, and on interviews and research prior to that visit. Although the PCIM plan is currently in midstream, the CSIS team is confident that an assessment at this time is useful in identifying key strengths and weaknesses that may assist policymakers in both Colombia and the United States as they develop further initiatives.

The Macarena Region



The PCIM area of operation encompasses 6 of the 29 municipalities of the department of Meta: Macarena, Mesetas, Puerto Rico, San Juan de Arama, La Uribe, and Vista Hermosa. The area takes its name from the *serranía de la Macarena*, a mountain range about 120 km long and 30 km at its widest point that extends southeast from the eastern cordillera of the Andes. Except for the *serranía* itself and the large piedmont and eastern slope of the cordillera to its west, most of the Macarena area is comprised of tropical lowland. Three national parks (La Macarena, Los Picachos, and Tinigua) encompass a substantial portion of the PCIM region. The PCIM municipalities have a total extension of some 34,000 sq km and a population of around 100,000. Approximately 25 percent of the population resides in the six “urban centers” in each municipality, the town of Vista Hermosa with some 6,300 being the largest, with the bulk of the population either residing in very small towns or in rural areas.

For nearly all of its history, the Macarena region has had little or no Colombian state presence. Colonizers from other departments entered the area to exploit local products (rubber, quinine, wood, animal skins), but there was no long-term occupation until the 1950s. By that time, illegally armed groups related to Colombia’s internal conflict, “La Violencia,” were active in this isolated area. The Marxist insurgent FARC turned the Macarena region into its central base of operation in Colombia since its founding in 1964, constituting for decades a virtual state within a state. Paramilitary presence in the Macarena region was limited to the northern and eastern extremities. The town of Vista Hermosa was briefly occupied by paramilitaries from eastern Meta before being expelled by the FARC in 1998.

FARC control over the Macarena was consolidated that year when President Andrés Pastrana approved the establishment of a 42,000 sq km demilitarized zone (*zona de despeje*) in the Meta and Caquetá Departments that encompassed all of Meta’s municipalities of Vista Hermosa, Mesetas, La Uribe, and Macarena. The FARC used the *despeje* as a key command and control center and hub of economic activity.

Colombian troops began moving into the Macarena area following the dissolution of the *despeje* in February 2002, but it remained a strongpoint of the FARC for several more years. Once the government of Colombia broke the FARC’s strength in Bogota and its surrounding countryside under *Plan Patriota* in 2003, it turned its attention to the Meta and Caquetá Departments using Joint Task Force Omega to roll back the FARC from the territory it had held the longest. Over time, the Colombian military has pushed the FARC farther away from the urban centers in the PCIM region, reducing the once-powerful FARC 27th Front located in the *serranía de la Macarena* to a small force, still dangerous but capable only of squad-level operations. Large areas within the Macarena are now largely under Colombia government control, with others “in transition,” meaning that FARC fighters have been expelled, but security is not yet fully consolidated. Still other areas, mainly in the south and northwest of the area—below Vista Hermosa and west of Uribe and La Julia—are considered to be unsafe. The Macarena region had a very heavy concentration of FARC support network personnel—the *milicias*, many of whom are still in place but are largely powerless because they are cut off from FARC protection.

The economy of the Macarena region is in an early transition from coca and cocaine production to legitimate activity. During the *despeje*, small farmers were lured into the PCIM region to provide the FARC with profitable narcotics to export and food to support its fighters. As the government became aware of the heavy coca plantings, it experimented with aerial eradication, including one field in the Macarena national park. Environmentalists in Colombia and abroad protested, and the director of national parks threatened to resign. The park is considered at once one of the richest in specie and most fragile tropical reserves. Thereafter, beginning in 2006, only manual eradication has been used in the PCIM area. While the size of the coca crop has been greatly reduced since its heyday during the *despeje*, a minimum of 3,000 to 6,000 hectares of coca remain in the area, according to different sources. The trend continues to be positive, however, with limited replanting and lower levels of overall cocaine production and drug trafficking.

The future of the Macarena region is largely tied to agriculture—although in some distant, more peaceful time ecotourism may offer possibilities. Relatively near but over the high cordillera, Bogota offers a mega-market for food products. Judging by the rapid expansion of agriculture in other parts of the department of Meta, soil and climatic conditions appear promising, though the assessment team was told that detailed studies need to be done. Major obstacles stand in the way of this potential, however, including poor road and communication infrastructure, lack of credit for regional farmers, and little land titling. Rights to the land are a core concern and cause of much of the historical conflict in Colombia's eastern regions. Titled land can be a source of tax revenues that local governments need to support public services and infrastructure development. For the farmer, titles can help secure credit and improve land values. The issue of land titling in the Macarena region does not seem to have been yet resolved, however.

How PCIM Operates

The Plan de Consolidación Integral de la Macarena was conceived to address closely related efforts (security, counter-drug, development) that had previously been carried out along separate tracks. Earlier experience in the Macarena region and in other areas of the country—the Putumayo Department is a frequently mentioned example—highlighted the need for a coordinated and sequenced effort by military, police, and civilian authorities to convince citizens in the affected areas that the transition to legitimate state presence was permanent. Determined to push the FARC out of its area of highest strategic and symbolic importance, the army moved into the Macarena, but with little follow-up by civilian agencies. Aerial fumigation in the region came under strong criticism, mainly focused on environmental concerns stemming from the extensive national park area in the Macarena. The Colombian government subsequently moved to manual eradication, a more dangerous approach that has resulted in the deaths of dozens of eradicators, but it appears to be more effective in the case of the Macarena.

The coordinating body of PCIM is the Center for Coordinated Integral Action (CCAI), an interagency group established in 2004 under the authority of the Office of the Presidency of Colombia. CCAI brings together 15 government of Colombia ministries and other agencies for

the purpose of coordinating government efforts to introduce state presence to priority areas of the country where it had not existed or was weak. CCAI has no legal standing and is a coordinating, not an implementing, agency with no funding of its own. Its coordinator is a senior presidential adviser who is also a delegate of the presidential Agency for Social Action and International Cooperation (*Acción Social*), the Colombian entity charged with coordinating a broad array of social development programs, the manual eradication of coca crops, and international cooperation for government programs. Key PCIM civilian initiatives come under the supervision of *Acción Social*.

The Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) of USAID Colombia provided early assistance to *Acción Social* and to CCAI for the PCIM. An OTI grant was used to hire the civilian coordinator for PCIM in August 2007, and OTI integrated the activities of its Colombia Responde (for municipal and community development, education, health, infrastructure, and technical training) and Progreso (agricultural development) projects into PCIM, as well as providing logistics and transport support for PCIM staff. In FY2008, OTI's support to PCIM totaled \$8.6 million, with the figure for FY09 still to be finalized. The government of the Netherlands has also contributed or pledged upward of \$3.3 million in economic development and transition projects related to PCIM in 2008 and 2009, the year their support ends. Total government of Colombia levels of spending for PCIM-related projects are difficult to calculate because resources are spread among many ministries and agencies, but total amounts are many times the level of international support.

From the beginning, those who conceived of PCIM saw it as a new approach to the consolidation of state presence in Colombia. Aside from the intergovernmental orientation to planning and coordination of activities, PCIM moves the locus of activity away from Bogota and even the capital of Meta, Villavicencio, to the region itself. Under PCIM, civilian employees enter areas as soon as they are considered safe enough for preliminary contact with local populations for rounds of discussions (*consultas*) on the kinds of projects and activities most needed in each community. Programs carried out by Colombia Responde and Progreso require the signing of letter of reference agreements with local communities, cosigned by municipal mayors and representatives of *Acción Social*, that outline the scope of projects and local resources (often labor) to be dedicated to them. The aim is to obtain “local buy-in” to projects. Several rounds of consultations with local communities are often needed before agreement can be reached and project funding commenced. A key architect of PCIM within the Colombian government described the goal as being “to spend small and fast” in order to build confidence and provide rural people in areas where coca cultivation previously dominated with a “ladder” with which to climb out of the illegal economy. Parallel to PCIM projects, *Acción Social* carries out its own social spending programs in the region, such as *Familias en Acción* and *Familias Guardabosque*. The assessment team was told the latter is used in the region to provide incentives to encourage people to move from national parks to bordering areas rather than voluntary eradication of coca and forest preservation as the program was initially designed.

The establishment of a “fusion center” in the urban area of Vista Hermosa is intended for on-site coordination of PCIM activities. The assessment team was told that the fusion center has both symbolic and practical value and that since it was established early in 2009, it has been the site of several meetings, one with 40 participants. The fusion center itself is a modest collection of prefabricated structures, housing offices, a work space equipped with personal computers, and barracks to serve as temporary sleeping quarters. The one large PCIM coordinating meeting the assessment team observed took place in the departmental capital of Villavicencio.

Program Assessment

Security

In a real sense, PCIM is not a post-conflict program. It is as the “integral” part of its name suggests, a combination of activities designed to bring an end to an ongoing conflict. The six Macarena municipalities are provided security by Joint Task Force Omega, headquartered at the Larandia base in Caquetá. The Fourth Division based in Villavicencio gives support. The Colombian 12th Mobile Brigade attached to Omega is currently stationed in Vista Hermosa.

Omega has been in operation for five years, but its key gains have come in the past two. Once home to the 27th and 43rd FARC fronts, among the most numerous and best armed in Colombia, large areas of the Macarena region are now free from the threat of incursion by large FARC units. PCIM coordinators divide the region into three categories according to levels of security consolidation: “secure,” “in transition,” and “not secure.” Five of the six municipal urban centers are secure. The town of Macarena is transitional. Moreover, there has been considerable progress extending the secure zone to outlying rural areas. Transition areas are concentrated to the east of Mesetas and to the south of Vista Hermosa municipality. The towns of Uribe and La Julia, once FARC strongpoints, are now considered transition zones. Nonsecure zones are concentrated in the northwest corner of the PCIM zone toward the eastern cordillera and in the south-southeast of the region. Areas in transition are known to contain sizeable numbers of so-called FARC *milicias*, or noncombatant supporters, who are now largely cut off from the armed FARC units. The Colombian armed forces have opted to leave these elements alone, judging them not to be a threat to security.

According to senior Omega officers and Ministry of Defense officials, the FARC presence in the Macarena region should continue to wane under pressure from Task Force Omega. Morale in the FARC ranks is low, desertions have increased, and the economic base of the FARC, predicated on drugs, has sharply deteriorated. FARC units are on the defensive and have increasingly come to rely on the use of landmines and booby traps to defend their turf. Morale on the Colombian military side is by all reports high, and the Omega force is said to enjoy considerable support from citizens in the Macarena zone. The military, however, sees its mission as departing secured zones as soon as possible by turning security control over to the police. The Colombian military, from the Ministry of Defense down, appears to be giving strong support to the PCIM concept, saying they understand the value of establishing a government presence “that does not wear a uniform.”

Police presence in the Macarena region is growing. Police detachments are present in the principal urban areas, including strategic towns, such as La Julia and, most recently, Uribe—both areas in transition. New police stations are due to be established in other small towns in the area in 2009. *Carabiniero* units (police light infantry rural units) are assigned to towns in transition help to patrol rural areas.

According to several sources, however, Colombian police stationed in the Macarena area are not as well regarded by local citizenry as the military. This may be due in part to their relatively recent arrival, which has not allowed them to gain the confidence of people unaccustomed to their presence. Some local sources accused them of corruption, a frequent popular Colombian reaction to the police. Others said the police must break out of a “garrison mentality” and suggested a “community policing” approach. The police, of course, are more lightly armed than the military, and their work requires them to be more involved with the local populace in places where they have little backup from judicial institutions.

Counternarcotics

The dismantling of the coca economy and its replacement by licit activity will be an essential factor in the consolidation of state control in the Macarena region, and as such is a key step in the PCIM sequence. Parts of the PCIM region, especially the municipalities of Vista Hermosa and Puerto Rico, were the site of some of the FARC’s most significant coca-growing areas. Rural towns in the region overflowed with drug money. The assessment team visited two small villages south of Vista Hermosa where it seemed clear that bars and houses of prostitution had until recently proliferated. Significantly, neither of these population centers existed before the creation of the *despeje* and the FARC’s promotion of coca cultivation.

According to UN estimates, Vista Hermosa and Puerto Rico were the municipalities with the fourth- and seventh-largest coca crops, respectively, in Colombia in 2007. In 2008, according to various estimates, some 10,000-14,000 hectares of coca remained in the PCIM area, with an addition 6,000-8,000 hectares manually eradicated that year, leaving an estimated 2,000-6,000 (or more) hectares still planted. Replanting levels appear to be down, but authorities declined to estimate by how much. There are said to be few HCL labs capable of processing cocaine due to the larger military presence and the weakening of the FARC in the region, though most coca cultivators continue to reduce coca leaf to paste, the first stage in drug processing.

Estimating coca and narcotics production is always difficult, and the direct impact of PCIM cannot be measured with any precision. Authorities are confident from aerial observation and evidence in the towns that the FARC’s income from coca grown in the region has been disrupted. Coca has been pushed out of many of the remote villages where it had boomed before. This in turn has resulted in the out-migration of much of the floating population, including the *raspachines* (day laborers) who had come to harvest the coca crops. There has been a notable drop in the population of many of the small towns. It is logical that once local residents realize that coca will not return, the chances of transiting to legitimate crops and licit economic activity will improve. This, the assessment team was assured by multiple sources, is beginning to occur.

Agriculture

With improved security, large areas of the Macarena region (outside of the boundaries of the national parks) are likely to become zones for significant agricultural development. The assessment team was told that soil and climate will likely permit cultivation of sugar cane, yucca, tropical fruits, bananas, African palm, rubber, cacao, rice, and vegetables, as well as cattle raising and milk production. Already, land around the town of Vista Hermosa is now worth 10 times what it was five years ago. Bogota is just 210 km from there, though over a high mountain pass. The connection will be over entirely paved road once the small stretch from San Juan de Arama to Vista Hermosa is paved. The problem, however, is getting crops from outlying parts of the municipio to the town itself.

Private large-scale investment in the Macarena region seems feasible, judging by the large-scale planting of African palm and other cash crops around the growing town of Granada to the northeast of San Juan de Arama. Yet in the short term, which encompasses the timing of PCIM project goals, the challenge is to advance the empowerment and welfare of the small farmers in the region and those likely to come soon. The presence of PCIM-related agricultural projects has highlighted both the potential for and key bottlenecks to agricultural development in the region. In the latter category, four key problems stand out: 1) the need for tertiary roads to get cash crops into the market economy; 2) access to farm machinery (tractors, plows, harvesters) at affordable prices—even small farms in the region are much larger than in most other areas of Colombia and require machinery to work; 3) access to credit—a problem exacerbated by the fact that only a small percentage of farmers in the region have title to their lands to use as a loan guarantee; and 4) more technical assistance. PCIM projects can work around these bottlenecks only to a limited degree. They are long-term obstacles to developing the agricultural potential of the region. Most of the cash crops under cultivation such as cacao will take at least three years to deliver returns on investment. In the meantime, however, other types of plantings of food crops will continue to be essential to support the communities and market the excess.

The land-titling issue, historically controversial across all regions of Colombia, is exacerbated in the Macarena by the presence of large extensions of national park and special use zones in the region that strictly limit or prohibit agricultural production or private land holding. For years, the government of Colombia has been struggling to reach consensus agreement on a new regime to provide for land titling. The Ministry of Agriculture, which is assigned a role of promoting commercial rather than small-scale agriculture, appears to have been an obstacle to consensus. The parks and the environment were just one dimension of the debate, but they are important because of Colombia's international obligations (i.e., the 1994 UN Convention on Biodiversity) and its strong domestic environmental lobby. The Colombian Congress finally came up with a new law, but it was recently struck down by the constitutional court. Failure to resolve land titling jeopardizes the sustainability of any long-term program to use stable land tenure as encouragements to peace and poverty alleviation.

Infrastructure

The need for tertiary roads is an impediment to development of rural areas of the Macarena region across the board. Where roads exist, they are incapable of transit by large trucks and are impassible for extended periods during the region's eight-month rainy season. PCIM programs help local populations to maintain or repair tertiary roads—a useful and job-creating activity—and the Colombian military has built tertiary roads in the region under the PCIM umbrella. However, the construction of tertiary roads is normally the responsibility of municipalities in Colombia—an impossibility for the impoverished communities of the Macarena. Departments are responsible for secondary roads, of which there is also a scarcity in the region. PCIM efforts appear to be an effective lobby with the department of Meta for greater funding for roadways. The assessment team was told that more support is needed (for example, to upgrade to secondary status of the roads from Piñalito and Santo Domingo to Vista Hermosa), and PCIM says it will seek funding from a Ministry of Transportation fund for rural road development.

Five of the six municipal population centers (la Macarena excluded) have electricity, but many of the rural areas are not connected to the grid. Several PCIM projects are oriented toward rural electricity, but many more to improving water and sewage service in the zone. In general, rural areas are vastly underserved by utilities.

There was much discussion of major long-term infrastructure construction. One that seems to have high priority is a road to connect San Juan de Arama through Uribe over the cordillera to Huila. One high-level official said the road will be completed in 18 months. A project is under consideration to construct a dam in the Rio Güejar between Vista Hermosa and San Juan de Arama to generate 20 megawatts of hydro power that would allow electricity to be extended from Vista Hermosa to Piñalito and Macarena. Some mentioned the possible deepening of the Guavire River. All these projects face not just funding and engineering challenges but environmental as well. National parks and reserves—through which legally no road or electrical pylon right-of-way should pass—stretch from one side of the Macarena region to the other.

Human Development

An array of PCIM initiatives are intended to provide short-term economic and social support to populations in the Macarena region ahead of the establishment of more permanent public institutions. In some transitional areas where basic security control has only recently been established and where eradication of coca fields is ongoing, PCIM projects provide food assistance and cash subsidies for the neediest women and children, coupled with “family orchard” projects to raise fruit trees and plant gardens for additional food supply. Food assistance under PCIM is intended to last four to six months until longer-term projects kick in. The scope of this assistance remains very limited, however. *Familias en Acción*, the nationwide program of conditional cash subsidies, comes into play when families can show they are fulfilling the children's health and educational criteria of the program, but that requires access to the kind of facilities existing elsewhere in the country.

Medical care in the Macarena region is rudimentary. “Level-one” hospitals (limited to preventative care and basic services—but with doctors) are located in Puerto Rico and Mesetas, with “health centers” staffed by nurses in all six municipal centers. Outlying towns may have small health clinics, but they are not staffed. PCIM has few health-related projects, as health is an area that is the responsibility of the central government of Colombia.

Education is better developed in the Macarena in terms of coverage. All six municipal urban cores provide public education through secondary school, and most of the small towns have public schools. A large number of PCIM projects are aimed at enlarging, reconditioning, and equipping these schools. The quality of education provided is reportedly very modest, but some PCIM projects are aimed at teacher training.

PCIM, working with the National Training Service (SENA) of Colombia, carries out projects in Macarena to provide technical training in a number of useful areas, including agriculture, fish farming, formation of cooperatives, information technology, and clothing manufacture. Projects teaching computer skills have been especially popular. SENA has donated tool kits, sewing machines, and computers to help this effort. The departmental director of SENA and her counterpart at Progreso have a productive working relationship.

Governance

All six municipalities in the region have elected mayors, in itself an accomplishment given the region’s long history outside state control. Municipal government is in very incipient stages, however, with little effective presence outside of the urban core. Municipalities in the Macarena have almost no tax base, few resources to apply to local needs, and scant human capital with experience in managing government at any level. Several PCIM projects are aimed at improving professional capability of municipal governments, especially in helping them leverage support from other Colombian government entities. Other PCIM programs support local civil society—community and neighborhood organizations.

The access of local citizens to Colombia’s judicial system is very poor. The instruments of justice of the Colombian state in the Macarena region barely exist. Each municipality has a *juez promiscuo municipal*, the lowest-ranking authority in the national judicial system, but these officials cannot handle any criminal or complex cases and are confined to basic dispute resolution. State prosecutors (*fiscales*) are only occasionally present in the region. There is no jail in the Macarena area. Police sources say they feel cut off from their usual connection to the country’s justice system.

Local Voices on PCIM

The CSIS team met with community leaders in the municipality of Vista Hermosa—Vista Hermosa itself, a secure area, and the small towns of La Cooperativa and Santo Domingo, both “transition” zones in terms of security. These meetings revealed some common themes that jibed with other observations.

Most individuals the team spoke with expressed satisfaction that plans to develop the region are under way, and there was praise for those projects already initiated. They also acknowledged improvements in security, although the situation in the town of Vista Hermosa was clearly more advanced than in the other two. When asked about specific needs for economic development, local residents agreed on a number of key points:

- Lack of tertiary roads for access to larger towns and to get agricultural products to market is a disincentive to local agricultural development.
- Untitled lands create the dual problem of agriculturalists not being able to get credit for their farming needs.
- Access to higher-quality farm machinery is a major impediment to agriculture. The limited machinery available to date was either inadequate or inappropriate for the specific needs of the community. Local farms are too large to work effectively by hand.
- Delayed delivery of seed prevented planting and missed market opportunities.
- Lack of access to health facilities or the absence of a nurse practitioner was a concern in the more remote areas.
- Gender-specific programming was also lacking according to women interviewed in the course of the visit.

Conclusions

There are moments in transitional periods between conflict and peace when a window of opportunity is opened in which specific actions and programs can change the course of events. In the case of Colombia, the transitional process in the Macarena region may present such a moment, and the Plan de Consolidación Integral de la Macarena has the potential to be the needed agent of change. PCIM embodies what appears to be an important shift in the government of Colombia’s hitherto not fully coordinated approach to establishing effective state presence in areas formerly controlled by illegal armed groups. As a strategy for consolidation of sustained state authority, PCIM’s emphasis on rapid and sequenced action coordinated on an interagency

basis has much potential for success not only in the Macarena but as a pilot project for use in other areas of Colombia.

How long the transition window of opportunity in the Macarena region will remain open, however, is unclear, and that uncertainty drives the need for urgency in moving the PCIM forward. With the PCIM slated to end October 2010, it is essential that these transitional efforts be handed off to the government of Colombia and that progress achieved by PCIM be enhanced by considerably higher levels of government investment. In this regard, the next 18 months may prove critical to the sustainability and ultimate success of the transition process in the Macarena region. This appears to be an exceptional opportunity whose fulfillment, from what the assessment team observed, will depend on considerably more commitment from civilian agencies and senior levels of the government. In this regard, the presidential directive signed by President Álvaro Uribe on March 20, 2009, instructing Colombia government entities to fully cooperate in carrying out transitional efforts in key areas of the country is a positive step.

From what the assessment team was able to observe, the PCIM program is managed by a strong team with a civilian coordinator with the right professional experience. There are representatives in each of the six municipalities in the region and five thematic coordinators. These positions are financed by the Colombian, Dutch, and U.S. governments. Added to these are officials seconded from other programs, such as the very impressive teams of development specialists from Colombia Responde and Progreso. Beyond these team members, a host of government entities as well as the government of Meta are represented in PCIM through seconded employees. Periodic interagency coordination meetings chaired by the PCIM civilian coordinator have 40 or more participants represented. These meetings take place on a frequent basis in Villavicencio or in the field.

PCIM has a hands-on, field-oriented feel. Employees not assigned to the municipalities spend considerable time there, traveling by road or by a helicopter assigned to PCIM and operated by the 4th Division of the Colombian Army in Villavicencio. PCIM representatives work closely with community organizations in the urban centers, small towns, and rural areas in secure and transition areas. They are well known to local populations and—by all appearances—are welcomed by them. PCIM does not promote itself as a separate entity but as a manifestation of *Acción Social*.

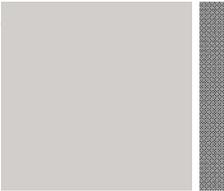
To date, PCIM has made progress in consolidating security over large areas of the Macarena region and a transition from a military presence to security provided by police is beginning in the urban centers of the region. Antinarcotics efforts have produced some positive results, but the team observed problems in the sequencing of eradication and economic support measures. PCIM productive programs are welcome, timely, and effective. They are also relatively small-scale projects, appropriate at the earliest stages of the transition when speed of delivery is essential and where local capacity to absorb funds may be limited. Early on in the process, however, larger-scale investments from the Colombian government in higher-cost areas such as infrastructure, agriculture, health, and access to credit will be required. There are perceived differences of

commitment levels among the various civilian entities in PCIM, ranging from enthusiastic to reluctant.

Recommendations

- PCIM needs stronger civilian leadership, demonstrated both by highly visible support by the country's top political leaders and by day-to-day evidence that civilian ministries give it high priority. PCIM began as part of a Colombian government strategy to win back the crucial center of the country. It has had strong Ministry of Defense backing. If the Macarena is geographically and symbolically important, the PCIM deserves a more convincing sign of political commitment and a commensurate injection of resources.
- One way of accomplishing this goal would be for the government of Colombia to give oversight of PCIM and other similar consolidation projects to a presidential high commissioner or to expand the duties of the current high commissioner for peace. This individual should be given a dedicated budget as well as the authority to further leverage funding from other government ministries and agencies.
- That high official should look at other peacemaking and post-conflict efforts going on around the country to see if a common template might be designed along the PCIM model, linking elements of the Ministry of Defense with quick reaction civilian public and private complementary, practical responses.
- Institutionalizing the model would, it is to be hoped, lead to a more realistic timeline for PCIM, which is due to expire in 18 months. The region needs to know that the government's enhanced presence will not disappear before the effects have had a chance to take hold.
- Particular emphasis should be placed on the transition between military- and police-provided security in Macarena. This will necessitate the timely transfer of police units to the region and efforts to win public confidence in the police force through the doctrine and practice of community policing.
- Efforts to eradicate coca cultivation in the Macarena region should be accompanied by short-term food aid and cash subsidies and longer-term development inputs provided by the Colombian government. To a degree, this is happening, but such efforts should be broadened and incorporated into a strategic plan for post-eradication support that will be applied outside Macarena in other transitional areas. The sequencing of eradication and government economic support needs improvement.
- A careful baseline study of coca cultivation should be carried out in the Macarena and in other areas where transitional projects are planned in order to measure the effectiveness of eradication and antinarcotics efforts.

- The justice system in the Macarena should be strengthened immediately. The region will not remain free of guerrilla or even more likely organized crime influence unless an expanding police presence is joined with the investigative skills of the Department of Administrative Security (DAS) and the attorney general's technical corps, plus minor courts to resolve civil and petty criminal cases.
- Education and health facilities must be strengthened. Direct subsidy programs can lead to simple dependency unless tied to the life improvement coming from schools, training opportunities (e.g., SENA), hospitals, and other care-giving techniques, such as visiting physicians and nurses and the availability of access to medical call centers. Women and children's health must have special importance.
- Continued emphasis on agricultural development and extension services for the region is essential to take advantage of the potential that exists. However, unless the government of Colombia invests in adequate infrastructure to bring products to market, investments in this sector will not be sustainable.
- Land titling is fundamental to the resolution of what ails Macarena—not to mention much of Colombia. A national consensus on that key national issue is beyond the scope and length of the PCIM project, but PCIM teams should push to advance titling as much as possible under current law.



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