

4.2

Promoting sustainable livelihoods

Key recommendations

- Decades of experience in promoting alternative development show that reducing the cultivation of coca and opium poppy crops is a long-term problem that needs a long-term solution, involving broader nation-building and development goals. Government strategies need to be based on promoting economic growth and providing basic services; democratic institution building and the rule of law; respect for human rights; and improved security in the impoverished rural areas where coca and poppy cultivation flourishes
- Forced eradication of crops deviated to illicit markets should be replaced by alternative livelihoods efforts, which should be mainstreamed into local, regional and national development plans and carried out in close collaboration with the intended beneficiaries
- The cultivation of crops destined for the illicit drug market should not be criminalised; and farmers should be involved as partners in promoting rural development
- Local communities should be involved in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development efforts. This includes community leadership, and the involvement of local organisations such as producer groups and the farmers themselves. Government officials can play a key role in mobilising, coordinating and supporting community participation
- Governments should advance towards regulatory models for coca, opium poppy and cannabis cultivation, respecting traditional and licit uses of such crops and allowing for small-scale and industrialised transformation into products for licit use
- Governments should protect biological, cultural and intellectual property rights with regards to the plants, seeds and other derivatives of the communities where these crops are traditionally cultivated and used
- Results should not be measured in terms of hectares of crops eradicated. Rather, alternative livelihoods programmes should be evaluated using human development and socio-economic indicators that measure the well-being of society.²⁴

Introduction

The Latin American countries of Colombia, Peru and Bolivia are the primary source of coca, the raw material for cocaine.²⁵ From 2002-2010, Colombia led the region in coca cultivation, though in recent years, Peru has emerged as the global leader in hectares of coca under cultivation. In 2013, the most recent year for which there is reliable data, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported that Colombia had 48,000 hectares to Peru's 49,800. Bolivia, meanwhile, has seen consistent reductions in recent years, dropping from 30,900 hectares in 2009 to 20,400 in 2014, likely due to its innovative

'social control' model, which prioritises cooperative coca reduction and sustainable development over forced eradication. The country has set a target of 20,000 hectares under cultivation to leave a supply of coca leaf for traditional and other licit uses.

Cultivation of the opium poppy, the raw material for opium and heroin, has shifted over time. The Golden Triangle of Thailand, Lao People's Democratic Republic, and Myanmar once produced more than 70% of the world's opium, most of which was refined into heroin. Since 1998, dramatic decreases in opium cultivation have taken place in the Golden Triangle; cultivation is now concentrated in what is



Opium poppy field in Afghanistan

known as the Golden Crescent, the poppy-growing areas in and around Afghanistan. According to the UNODC,²⁶ in 2014 Afghanistan had 224,000 hectares of poppy under cultivation, followed by Myanmar with 57,600. As Afghanistan increased cultivation by over 100% since 1999, alternative livelihoods programmes in South East Asia contributed to important gains. Thailand has effectively eliminated its small poppy crops, and Lao People's Democratic Republic has seen considerable reductions as well, with 6,200 hectares in 2014. Myanmar saw marked reductions from a peak of 128,642 hectares in 2000 to 24,000 in 2006, but has recently seen a rise in cultivation.

Supply reduction efforts have typically been measured according to the areas of crops cultivated, the amounts of cocaine and opium produced, and the number of hectares eradicated. These figures, however, are not without controversy. While the UN data on cultivation tends to be the most accurate, the US Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) also publishes its own annual cultivation estimates.²⁷ The ONDCP figures are far more opaque, and are published without any explanation of methodology. Their findings are particularly questionable in their divergence from the UNODC figures in Bolivia, where the ONDCP has retroactively changed estimates from years prior.²⁸ Some of their post-facto adjustments include changing potential cocaine production estimates, again without any explanation for methodology. In Colombia, the ONDCP brought forward its regular release date for coca cultivation estimates to point to an increase in cultivation, at a time when the country debated ending the harmful practice of aerial spraying.²⁹ It is also important to point out that as crop yields and pro-

duction techniques have improved, less cultivation is needed, rendering eradication indicators increasingly irrelevant.

Efforts to reduce the cultivation of crops destined for the illicit drug market have been a cornerstone of the supply-side approach to drug control and are closely aligned with national and public security objectives. They have mainly consisted of forced crop eradication campaigns, which rely on manual eradication or aerial spraying and are conducted without the consent of the growers.

Decades of evidence show that, while this approach may achieve short-term reductions in cultivation of crops such as coca or opium poppy, in the medium- to long-term farmers, lacking other viable sources of cash income, are forced to replant. As a result, cultivation can be spread to new areas. In addition, crop eradication campaigns are associated with violence, conflict, and displacement, as well as a number of health, environmental and socio-economic harms.³⁰

In short, forced eradication has pushed some of the world's poorest people deeper into poverty and is counter-productive. Even when conducted hand-in-hand with alternative development programmes, eradication campaigns undermine cooperation with the local community, which in turn compromises the effectiveness of the development agenda. In other words, it causes distrust between donors, state agencies and recipient communities, and undermines the very development efforts needed to wean subsistence farmers off the cultivation of crops destined for the illicit drug market. The criminalisation of cultivation and hence of small farmers is tantamount to the criminalisation of poverty.

Legislative/policy issues involved

The cultivation of crops that are used to produce internationally controlled substances tends to take place in very remote and extremely poor regions of the world where there is often little or no effective state presence. It also tends to be in areas where conflict and violence are rampant. The fundamental drivers of such cultivation are poverty and insecurity: farmers living in extreme poverty see cultivation of opium poppy, coca or cannabis as a means of providing some income to complement subsistence-level agriculture. Simply put, it is a way for basic needs to be met. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) points out that: 'Conditions of scarcity, displacement, state neglect, economic and geographic isolation and livelihoods insecurity, including in situations of conflict, increase the vulnerability of peasants and poor farmers to engaging in drug crop production.'³¹

In recognition of this, several decades ago policy makers began incorporating 'crop substitution' programmes into drug control efforts, usually carried out hand-in-hand with forced eradication. However, little attention was paid to the problems that led farmers to resort to cultivation in the first place, such as lack of roads and transportation infrastructure, lack of access to credit and markets, etc. This led to the development of the concept of 'alternative development', a more integrated approach. That, in turn, subsequently evolved towards the principle of 'alternative livelihoods', which focuses on improving the overall quality of life in these rural areas. Today these efforts

are referred to by many terms such as 'development in a drugs environment', 'development-oriented drug control' or even 'food security'. These efforts seek to promote equitable economic development in the rural areas used for illicit crop cultivation.

This approach recognises that farmers will only be able to reduce their dependence on income from coca and poppy crops if they are provided with alternative livelihoods through long-term multi-sectorial development. It is designed to improve the overall quality of life of farmers, including: ensuring food security and access to land; improved access to healthcare, education and housing; the development of infrastructure and other public services; and both on-farm and off-farm income generation.³² Such programmes are no longer purely focused on reducing the production of crops destined for the illicit drug market, but are incorporated, or mainstreamed, into comprehensive strategies for rural development and economic growth. Specifically, they call for embedding strategies for reducing coca and opium poppy crops in local, regional and national development initiatives.

Implementation issues involved

This broader concept of alternative development is now widely recognised and is enshrined in the UN International principles on alternative development.³³ However, not all countries implement these policies in the same way; indeed, many, such as Peru and Colombia, continue to prioritise forced



Field of coca crops fumigated in Guaviare, Colombia

Credit: Adam Schaffer, WOLA

eradication. In a major setback for small-scale farmers, in 2015 the Peruvian government implemented a legal reform that criminalises growers who replant following forced eradication with three to eight years in prison.

The following reforms should be put into place to ensure that alternative development achieves its desired outcomes of reducing cultivation of such crops while improving the livelihoods of vulnerable farmers.

Decriminalising crop cultivation

The criminalisation of subsistence farmers involved in the cultivation of crops destined for the illicit drug market has caused significant harm, often impacting on entire communities. Although some claim that the decriminalisation of these farmers is contrary to the international drug control treaties, their continued punishment constitutes a breach of international human rights law and a significant barrier to development. In 2012, the Colombian parliament initiated discussions on a bill that aimed to decriminalise the cultivation of crops destined for the illicit drug market.³⁴ Although this bill is on hold, discussions have continued and constitute a key challenge in the peace discussions between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). In the framework of the peace process, cultivators of crops destined for the illicit drug market have proposed the creation of an organisation to support the creation of a mechanism to regulate the cultivation of such crops.³⁵

Ensuring proper sequencing

In order to avoid the replanting described above, viable, sustainable livelihoods must be in place prior to significant crop reductions. Once economic development has taken root and alternative sources of income are in place, governments and international donor agencies can work with local communities to encourage the gradual elimination of crops used to produce internationally controlled substances. Crop reductions should always be voluntary and conducted in collaboration with the local community. Both Thailand (see Box 1) and Bolivia (see Box 3) provide examples of how a focus on economic development and proper sequencing has led to steady reductions in the cultivation of opium poppy and coca crops, respectively.

Including farmers as key partners in development programmes

Alternative livelihoods programmes require that small-scale farmers should no longer be considered as criminals but should instead be viewed as key

Box 1 The Thai alternative livelihoods model³⁶

Beginning in 1969, the Thai government sought to integrate highland communities into national life and therefore carried out sustained economic development activities over a 30-year period. Over time, it became clear that agricultural alternatives alone were insufficient. As a result, increasing emphasis was placed on providing social services such as healthcare services and schools, as well as infrastructure development such as roads, electricity and water supplies. Alternative livelihoods programmes were integrated into local, regional and national development plans. This led to steady improvement in farmers' quality of life, and increased opportunities for off-farm employment. A focus on local community participation emerged over time.

The Thai experience points to the importance of proper sequencing. Efforts for crop reduction only started in 1984, after about 15 years of sustained economic development. While some forced eradication did take place initially, the adoption of proper sequencing allowed farmers to reduce poppy cultivation gradually, as other sources of income developed, avoiding the problem of re-planting that inevitably frustrates crop eradication efforts. Although the entire process took about 30 years, the results of the Thai strategy have proved sustainable; however, on the negative side, there has been an increase in methamphetamine use and production in the region since the 1990s.³⁷

The Thai experience also underscores the importance of local institution building and community involvement in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development efforts. Local know-how became the basis for problem solving, and local leadership was fully integrated into project implementation.

stakeholders in the design and implementation of the development programmes that affect them (see Box 2).³⁸ The involvement of farmers is necessary, both because local farmers have a better knowledge and understanding of the local geographical conditions, and in order to protect the rights and cultural



Nutritionist Maria Eugenia Tenorio displaying her recipes using coca "flour" (finely ground leaves) at the 2004 Coca y Soberania Fair in El Alto, Bolivia

traditions of local communities (see Chapter 4.3). As evident in the Thai experience, community buy-in and involvement is also a key factor in ensuring project success and continuity (see Box 1).

Prioritising small-scale rural development

Decades of neo-liberal and pro-urban economic development models, free-trade agreements and government efforts to promote agro-business have proven to be seriously detrimental to the world's rural poor. Rural development efforts should prioritise promoting sustainable production on small farms, advance land reform, promote crop diversification, and encourage the development of domestic processing industries, and regulate imports and exports in order to protect vulnerable populations and resources.³⁹ They should also respect the rights, customs and farming practices of indigenous peoples.

Promote good governance and the rule of law

Nation building and promoting good governance and the rule of law are also essential components of an alternative livelihoods approach. These are particularly necessary to foster the legitimacy and credibility of the government in areas where state presence is often limited to security and/or eradication forces. A growing body of academic literature now points to the absence of violent conflict as a pre-condition for sustainable development and drug control efforts (see Chapter 4.1 for more details).⁴⁴

Integrating alternative development into local, regional and national development plans

Alternative livelihoods goals should be integrated at all levels and should in particular incorporate those involved in rural development, including multilateral and international development agencies, relevant government ministries, regional and local officials, and community and civil society organisations. Some donor agencies refer to this as

Box 2 Farmers' involvement in decision making processes

The participation of subsistence farmers in the elaboration and implementation of drug policies and development programmes in illicit crop cultivation areas remains a major challenge, as in most areas of the world this group remains heavily criminalised. However, attempts have been made across the world to improve farmers' participation in the decision making processes that affect them.

In Bolivia, for example, subsistence farmers are now involved as key strategic partners by the government in coca reduction strategies, as part of an approach based on social control (see Box 3).⁴⁰ Similarly, in Colombia coca farmers have been heavily engaged in the peace talks between the Colombian government and the FARC, and a bill is currently being discussed to decriminalise the cultivation of crops destined for the illicit drug market.⁴¹

In South Asia, community participation has been a major factor of success for the Thai alternative development programme (see Box 1). In Myanmar, however, opium farmers continue to be excluded, criminalised and harassed by the police and military. In September 2015, opium farmers and representatives from the Kayah State, Shan State, Kachin State and Chin State, came together in Upper Myanmar to adopt a statement highlighting the issues they face and calling for reform.⁴²

At global level, the International Forum of Producers of Crops Declared Illicit (FMPCDI in Spanish) adopted a political declaration calling for farmers to be able to 'take part in debates, decision making at all levels, with their own governments, donors and the UN'.⁴³

'mainstreaming counternarcotics into development programs'.⁴⁷

Using human development indicators

To date, most crop eradication and alternative development projects have primarily evaluated their success by reductions in the cultivation of crops destined for the illicit drug market. However, in an evaluation report to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) in 2008, the UNODC stated that, 'there is little proof that the eradications reduce illicit cultivation

Box 3 The Bolivian economic development model⁴⁵

Upon taking office in 2006, President Evo Morales extended a cooperative coca reduction programme, which had been in place since October 2004. The policy allows each registered coca grower to cultivate one *cato* of coca, which is 1,600 square meters or about one-third the size of a football field. Any coca grown beyond that is subject to elimination. The government has put into place a sophisticated coca monitoring system that includes land titling, a biometric registry of growers authorised to grow the *cato*, periodic measurements of coca fields, and implementation of a sophisticated database, SIS-COCA. Local coca grower unions work with government officials to ensure compliance with the *cato* agreement, a policy known as ‘cooperative coca reduction’.

Allowing limited coca cultivation – and thereby ensuring a steady flow of cash income – has allowed farmers to risk investing in other economic income generating activities. At the same time, the Morales administration has invested

in transportation infrastructure (including an international airport), education and health-care, improving the overall quality of life of local residents. The government is also investing in productive enterprises, such as fisheries and agricultural products such as pineapples.

To date, this approach has produced positive results and the possibility of long-term reductions in coca cultivation, while virtually eliminating the violence and social conflict associated with the forced coca eradication campaigns pursued by previous governments. For the fourth consecutive year, the UNODC reported a decline in coca cultivation in Bolivia; the country has achieved a 34% net reduction in coca cultivation between 2010 and 2014.⁴⁶ Bolivia now lags far behind Peru and Colombia in its supply of the coca leaf.

The Bolivia model shows that it is possible to regulate cultivation, improve people’s living standards, and promote traditional and licit uses of the coca leaf, while seeking to prevent the deviation of coca to the illicit market.



Credit: Caroline S. Conzelmann

Aymara women collectively harvest the coca leaf in Bolivia’s Nor Yungas province

in the long term as the crops move somewhere else', adding that, 'alternative development must be evaluated through indicators of development and not technically as a function of illicit production statistics'.⁴⁸ Improved indicators include measuring improvements in education, health, employment, income generation and the like (see Chapter 4.1 for more details on development indicators).

Key resources

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